Abstract Booklet

Political Communication in Israel and in the International Arena

Conference in honor of Prof. Gadi Wolfsfeld, upon his retirement

Conference Chairs

Prof. Tamir Sheafer    Prof. Ifat Maoz    Dr. Eli Avraham

Wednesday, 4 January 2011

Maiersdorf Faculty Club, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

For more information: https://sites.google.com/site/smarthuji/
Day 1, June 6th, 2012 (Givaat Ram, The Center for the Study of Rationality)

Panel 1:

Chair:

Respondent:

Topic:

“The More Who Die, the Less We Care: Psychic Numbing and Genocide”

Prof. Paul Slovic, University of Oregon, Opening Lecture Scholars of Political Communication

Most people are caring and will exert great effort to rescue individual victims whose needy plight comes to their attention. These same good people, however, often become numbly indifferent to the plight of individuals who are “one of many” in a much greater problem. Why does this occur? The answer to this question will help us answer a related question that is the topic of this paper: Why, over the past century, have good people and their governments repeatedly ignored mass murder and genocide? I shall draw from psychological research to show how the statistics of mass murder or genocide, no matter how large the numbers, fail to convey the true meaning of such atrocities. The reported numbers of deaths represent dry statistics, “human beings with the tears dried off,” that fail to spark emotion or feeling and thus fail to motivate action. Recognizing that we cannot rely only upon our moral feelings to motivate proper action against genocide, we must look to moral argument and international law. The 1948 Genocide Convention was supposed to meet this need, but it has not been effective. It is time to examine this failure in light of the psychological deficiencies described here and design legal mechanisms and political institutions that will enforce proper response to genocide and other forms of mass abuses of innocent human beings.

“Carnage and resilience: Israeli television coverage of Palestinian suicide bombings”.

Prof. Scott Althaus, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

This paper presents some findings from a qualitative analysis of Israeli television news coverage of Palestinian suicide bombings between 2001-4. It focuses on two main areas: 1) the discursive performance of nationhood that foregrounds the solidarity of victims and witnesses and the resilience of civil society rather than the actions of the state; 2) the metaphysical tenor of a ‘poetics of carnage’ that dwells philosophically on the mortal threats
lurking beneath the surface of everyday life. The paper claims not only that television is central to audience perceptions of the existence and nature of an ongoing terrorist crisis, but also to the construction of a powerful version of popular ‘civic’ nationhood based on a valorization of everyday civic relationships and heightened existential anxiety – an almost mythic form of nationhood which seems both primal and transcendent.

Panel 2:
Chair:
Respondent:

Topic: Political Communication, conflict and peace.

"Why does partisan selective exposure promote political polarization? Exploring climate of opinion perceptions as a possible mediating mechanism"

PROF. YECHIEL KLAB, TEL-AVIV UNIVERSITY

As a result of changes in the contemporary media environment, the last decade has seen a substantial revival of empirical research and conceptual work focusing on audience selective exposure (SE) to congenial media (e.g., Garrett, 2009). Media scholars have argued that this new media map will increase “partisan bias in consumption”, “narrow rather than widen users’ political horizons”, and the result will be the rise of “a more polarized electorate” (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008, p. 724). Indeed, recent findings suggest that SE to ideologically congruent channels is associated with more extreme and polarized attitudes (Jamieson & Cappella, 2008; Stroud, 2010) But why and how does SE promote polarization? The present study focuses on the effects of ideological media on audience perceptions of the social opinion climate (i.e., perceptions of public opinion) as a mediating mechanism. Preliminary evidence testing these hypotheses on both US and Israeli data will be presented.

"Battling stereotypes of terror and wars: Media strategies for image restoration of Middle Eastern countries"

DR. SIMONE MORAN, BEN GURION UNIVERSITY

The constant media coverage of the Middle East in terms of conflicts, terror attacks and wars affects the public image of countries in this area. By analyzing marketing initiatives, media policy, crisis public relations techniques and the components of advertising campaigns, the goal of the study is to analyze which strategies are used by Middle Eastern marketers to restore a positive image in order to bring back tourism. The study is based on qualitative content analysis of dozens of advertisements, press interviews with ME officials and marketers, national tourism board websites and news reports about marketing initiatives that appeared on global tourism news websites. The study shows that marketers of Middle Eastern countries used three types of strategies--source, message and audience--in order to deal with tourism crises, negative images and stereotypes. Analysis shows that
marketers used great creativity, a mix of marketing initiatives, advertising campaigns and crisis public relations techniques.

"Sensitivity to Moral Threats Increases When Safety Needs are Satisfied: Evidence of hierarchical organization of psychological needs"

**DR. NURIT SHNABEL, TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY**

According to the Needs-Based Model transgressions threaten victims' sense of agency and security and perpetrators' moral image. Consequently, victims are motivated to restore their agency whereas perpetrators are motivated to restore their moral image. Focusing on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in which Israeli-Jews are sometimes victims and sometimes perpetrators, the present research examined which need – to restore agency or moral image - exerts greater influence on Israeli-Jews' pro-social tendencies (aggression or help) toward the Palestinians. Studies 1 and 2 revealed that the need for 'powerful Israel' but not for 'moral Israel' determined participants' pro-social tendencies. However, reaffirming the perceptions of Israel as strong and resilient lead to greater willingness to give up power for the sake of morality, resulting in greater pro-social behavioral tendencies (Study 2). These results suggest hierarchical organization of needs: in contexts where major threats to groups' agency and morality are posed, the more basic need for agency and safety must be satisfied before group members become sensitive to the higher-order need for positive moral-image.

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**Panel 3:**

**Chair:**

**Respondent:**

**Topic:** "Political Communication in Israel and in the international arena- New models and research directions."

"Political communication in comparative perspective"

**PROF. ILANA RITOV, HEBREW UNIVERSITY**

Working in a field that was dominated for decades by national-level analyses and particularly by models conceptualized and tested within the US, it is only recently that political communication scholars have started to conduct empirical multinational comparative analyses. Such analyses are extremely promising and being only in their initial phase, the future of political communication lays in this area of study. Analyses conducted in the last decade have managed to demonstrate the centrality of factors such as political and party systems, media systems and journalistic culture in explaining variations in media coverage of politics, in journalists-politicians relationship, in political discussion, and more.
Following a discussion of these issues I will briefly present a comparative political communication analysis done with Shaul Shenhav, Pazit Ben-Nun Bloom and Elad Segev. Focusing on a 54-nation analysis of attention to foreign countries in a country’s website, we point at two promising directions of comparative analysis in political communication: first, a greater focus on the role of national values. In spite of the fact that values have become the focus of intensive cross-cultural research in related fields, this extremely interesting topic has been largely overlooked in our field. Second, current models assume that the impact of the explanatory variables is universal across countries and cultures. Yet this assumption contradicts the basic premise of comparative analysis. Both our national-level and international-level analyses suggest that different cultures prime different values—that members of different cultures might differ dramatically in their cognitive processes.

"The face of the enemy" - Visual cues, news framing and support for peace in intractable conflict: an experimental approach.

Prof. Ifat Maoz, Director, Smart Family Institute of Communication, Hebrew University

Research in political communication devotes growing attention to the role of visual information relayed through different mediums including the press-media in forming political impressions, attitudes and opinions. At the same time, the use of photo-ops, photo-shopping and image consultants in order to improve the facial images of politicians is becoming increasingly common. Indeed, a growing body of research indicates that facial appearance significantly affects the favorability of attitudes towards politicians as well as affecting actual voting intentions. However, although there exists substantive research on the effect of facial appearance on attitudes towards politicians from ones own state or country we have found no systematic research on the impact of visual information regarding politicians from the opponent side in conflict.

This study uses an experimental approach to examine the effect of visual news coverage regarding the facial features of political leaders from the opponent side in conflict on attitudes towards peace. Jewish-Israeli respondents received a news item containing a proposal for peace agreement accompanied by a photograph described as portraying the Palestinian political leader offering the proposal. The photograph included a digitized facial image that was manipulated to appear as either babyfaced or mature by altering the size of eyes and lips (Keating & Doyle, 2002). In line with our expectations the babyfaced Palestinian politician was judged as more trustworthy than the mature-faced version of the same photograph and the press-reported peace proposal received higher support when offered by the babyfaced Palestinian politician. Also in line with our expectations, respondents' evaluation of opponent-politician trustworthiness mediated the effect of opponent-politicians’ facial features on respondents’ support for the peace proposal.

Do “we” have a stake in this war? A Worldwide test of Huntington’s clash of civilizations hypothesis using open-source intelligence.

Dr. Tehila Kogut, Ben-Gurion University

International relations scholars have long suspected that popular support for war is structured in part by in-group reactions to out-group threats. Huntington’s (1993, 1996) “clash of civilizations” hypothesis is one of the most controversial and under-tested
extensions of this perspective within international relations. Most studies to analyze this hypothesis have examined the outcomes of group conflict, asking whether militarized interstate disputes are more likely across than within civilizations. Our study takes a different approach by examining the patterns of discourse that activate group conflict, focusing on a single militarized interstate dispute: the 2003 invasion of Iraq. For over 70 years, the CIA’s Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) has monitored the world’s press, translating broadcast, print, and internet news content into English from vernacular coverage from almost every country in the world. Our analysis of FBIS data before, during, and after the 2003 invasion of Iraq reveals patterns of ingroup discourse that are mostly inconsistent with Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” hypothesis.

Panel 4:

Chair:

Respondent:

Topic:

Mediated Suffering in a Culture of Distraction: Phatic Morality

DR. PAUL FROSH, HEBREW UNIVERSITY

An unresolved paradox haunts the analysis of media representations of suffering and the moral sentiments of viewers. On the one hand contemporary media-saturated societies are increasingly experienced and theorized as cultures of noise, overload, saturation and distraction. The sheer quantity of intense stimuli, perpetually augmented by new technologies and practices of replication and dissemination, threatens to overwhelm the individual’s ability to interpret, engage with and act upon particular images or texts in any meaningful way. On the other hand, however, much of the work on moral response to mediated suffering is based on an implicit privileging of both audience attention and singular narratives or images, assuming intense viewer engagement with an isolated image or text in an ideal viewing situation – or at the very least positing images so powerful that they are uniquely capable of arresting the viewer’s itinerant gaze. This ‘attentive fallacy’ means that most of our encounters with media – habitual, inattentive, unremarkable - are written off in advance as (at best) obstacles to emotional and cognitive engagement which must be overcome for genuine ethical response to become possible.

This paper challenges the automatic assumption that moral sensibility has a necessary basis in audience attentiveness and intense involvement with the representations of others. While accepting the ethical power of singular images of suffering and the attention they demand, it focuses on the work of ‘phatic morality’, the moral ground of low-intensity habituation to strangers created by long-term, routine, ambient forms of mediated connectivity as well as by the powerful combination of singularity and generalizability that characterizes modern audio-visual media. Focusing on television, it elaborates the features and limitations of phatic morality by exploring frequently denigrated aspects of the medium: the creation of
non-reciprocal communicative relations between viewer and viewed; the transience of those depicted; the substitutability of depicted individuals and the aggregation of their images over time. Modern media, it argues, are a moral force because they act as an everyday, institutionalized social procedure for placing distant strangers within the framework of those whom we can recognize as human like us, for ensuring that specific ‘others’ are always already ‘other people’. This routinized moral ground of connectivity underpins and accompanies more intense ethical responses to the plight of particular individuals that can emerge in the media.

"Media, inequality and incivility in the US and Israel"

**PROF. EVA ILOUZ, HEBREW UNIVERSITY**

Israel and the US are converging in two key respects: increasing economic inequality and heightened incivility driven especially by party factions representing the most religious citizens. The two countries now rank among the highest of OECD members in economic inequality. In each country, policymaking and political processes have become deeply polarized and nearly paralyzed. By way of illustrating new models, including Wolfsfeld’s PMP model, and a changing state of the art in political communication research, the presentation will explore propositions and suggestive data about the media’s impacts on rising inequality and incivility.

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Day 2, June 7th, 2012 (Mount Scopus, Beit Meirsdorf
Faculty Club)

Panel 1:
Chair:
Respondent:

Topic:

“Struggling to remain relevant: On the theoretical and methodological advantages of movement-based media analysis for explaining engagement in political violence.”

PROF. ARIE NADLER, TEL-AVIV UNIVERSITY

who study protest activity tend to rely on either news media discourse or survey to measure the aggrieved public discourse and attitudes. Admittedly, availability of, and access to movement-based media is not always possible. But when it is, it can offer a more valid measurement of how movement leaders and activists collectively construct meaning to the social and political contexts surrounding their struggle and, as a result provide valuable insights into the likelihood of support for, and engagement in political violence. To illustrate these points, I bring evidence from the predominantly nonviolent protest campaign of the Jewish settler against the Gaza Pullout. Findings from a combination of content analysis of movement-based news outlets and in-depth interview data with movement leaders, buttressed by data on contentious events raise important lessons about the limitations of relying on survey data and/or news media discourse to understanding engagement in violent activity.

“Carnage and resilience: Israeli television coverage of Palestinian suicide bombings”.

PROF. YOELA BARBI, BEN GURION UNIVERSITY

This paper presents some findings from a qualitative analysis of Israeli television news coverage of Palestinian suicide bombings between 2001-4. It focuses on two main areas: 1) the discursive performance of nationhood that foregrounds the solidarity of victims and witnesses and the resilience of civil society rather than the actions of the state; 2) the
metaphysical tenor of a ‘poetics of carnage’ that dwells philosophically on the mortal threats lurking beneath the surface of everyday life. The paper claims not only that television is central to audience perceptions of the existence and nature of an ongoing terrorist crisis, but also to the construction of a powerful version of popular ‘civic’ nationhood based on a valorization of everyday civic relationships and heightened existential anxiety – an almost mythic form of nationhood which seems both primal and transcendent.

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DR. RAYA MORAG, HEBREW UNIVERSITY

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DR. AMIT PINCHEVSKY, HEBREW UNIVERSITY

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"Why the Palestinian-Israeli conflict conquers global headlines: A chapter in journalistic geosophy"

DR. NATHAN SNAJDER, TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY

This study is part of an inquiry into the geosophy of journalism: perceptions of place that are situated not simply by physical circumstances, but by ideological, religious, and aesthetic endowment. It employs the “Global Salience Meter”—a novel multilingual news-mining technique—for gauging the relative salience of countries in online news in 10 languages, over the past two and a half years. The present paper focuses on the findings concerning Israel and Palestine. They show that both polities are among the most prominent in the world’s news; in fact, in the “top news” category, Palestine is the most frequently mentioned entity after the US. Existing theory of news value and international coverage fails to account for these findings. The authors propose instead a series of historical, ethical, cognitive, and symbolic contexts that would explain the particular resonance of this conflict, its protagonists, and its venue in the geosophy of news providers and consumers the world over.

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Panel 3:
Chair:
Respondent:

Topic: "Political Communication in Israel and in the international arena- New models and research directions."

"Political communication in comparative perspective"

PROF. DANIEL BAR-TAL, TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY

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"The face of the enemy"- Visual cues, news framing and support for peace in intractable conflict: an experimental approach.
**Prof. Ramzi Sueliman, Haifa University**

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*Do “we” have a stake in this war? A Worldwide test of Huntington’s clash of civilizations hypothesis using open-source intelligence.*

**Prof. Eyal Winter, Hebrew University**

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