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Legitimization and the discursive (re)production of social domination: Case study of British political discourse and the Israeli occupation of Palestine

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Resumen

Esta investigación se centra en los discursos y las estrategias usados por los representantes políticos británicos en la justificación del 'apoyo' continuado al Gobierno israelí en la ocupación de Palestina. Gran Bretaña, como miembro de la usualmente denominada 'alianza occidental', y ante la crítica internacional hacia la ocupación israelí, se ve obligada a justificar sus intereses en la región. Entre los meses de mayo a julio de 2004 se realizaron siete entrevistas a miembros del Parlamento británico y a un representante de un lobby pro-israelí de Londres en relación a los fundamentos de la posición del Gobierno británico sobre las prácticas de ocupación del gobierno israelí. La realización de un análisis crítico del discurso revela los temas ideológicos y discursivos dominantes que conforman los fundamentos de legitimación de la posición e implicaciones británicas en la región. Estos razonamientos son considerados como ideológicamente `necesarios' en la negociación de las contradicciones entre las identificaciones y las prácticas neoliberales. Tomando en consideración las controversias contemporáneas predominantes, la discusión destaca la necesidad de realizar un análisis ideológico y material para estudiar las (re)producciones discursivas occidentales de la dominación social.

Abstract

This research focuses on the discourses and strategies used by British political representatives in justifying continued 'support' for the Israeli occupation government in Palestine. As a member of the liberally identified 'Western' alliance, Britain, must justify its invested interests in the region, given Israel's internationally criticized occupation practices. Between the months of May through July 2004 seven interviews were conducted with Members of British Parliament and the representative of a major London based pro-Israeli lobby organization concerning their rationales for the British government's position towards the Israeli government's occupation practices. A critical discursive analysis highlights key ideological and discursive themes forming the legitimizing rationales for the British position and involvements in the region. These rationales are seen as ideologically 'necessary' in negotiating the contradictory 'gaps' between neoliberalist identifications and practices. Given contemporary hegemonic contestations, the discussion highlights the necessity of an ideological and material analysis in studying Western discursive (re)productions of social domination.

Palabras clave: Discurso político británico, Legitimización, Dominación social, Análisis representacional

Keywords: British political discourse; Legitimization; Social domination; Representational analysis

'Just as the era of normative epistemologies has come to an end, so too has the era of universal discourses.'

Laclau and Mouffe, (1985, pp .3).

Introduction

Contemporary international politics are full with rhetorical debates concerning the definitions and regulations of new constellations of geopolitical boundaries and relations[1]. Of interest to critical social researchers is how these debates and political discourses (re)produce contemporary power relations through their constructions of ideologies, national identities, and historical narratives (Foucault, 1980, Parker, 2003; van Dijk, 1986; Billig, 1995; Wetherell and Potter, 1992). In this sense many of the debates reflect contemporary hegemonic battles to define contemporary political and social landscapes of particular regions or contexts (Samir, 1997). Western governments maintain identifications with egalitarian and democratic ideals while at the same time faced with the systemic inequality "produced by the uneven ways in which wealth and power…become highly concentrated in certain places by virtue of asymmetrical exchange relations"(Harvey, 2003)[2]. These tensions become more 'visible' in extreme cases in which neoliberal Western agenda's merge with geopolitical events in such a manner as to construct and maintain overt forms of social domination[3]. In these cases Western 'interventions' become suspect and the focus of international and internal scrutiny resulting in the necessity for these governments to publicly legitimize their actions. The rationales used by Western countries to justify 'free trade' or government funding for repressive governments historically have for obvious reasons drawn intense critical scrutiny.

One particularly contentious area of ongoing debate concerns the history of Western involvements in regards to the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Western political efforts to create 'peace in the Middle East' have been juxtaposed with their own economic strategies and battles to secure their interests in the area often converging in competing spatial 'logics' of 'territorial', and capitalistic agenda's (Harvey, 2003). Such is the case in the U.S. and British history of interventionism and continued 'support'[4] for what critics often refer to as the Israeli 'occupation' government.

The Israel government has militarily occupied the Palestinian 'Territories' for over thirty years under conditions that have been described by a British investigating committee as 'inhumane' resulting in a

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[1] As exemplified in the expansion of the European Union from 15 to 25 members in May of 2004.

[2] See President George W. Bush's speech in the Rose Garden concerning the need for new leadership in Palestine

[3] Neoliberal in this case is referring specifically to the more active 'roll out' forms of neoliberalization prevalent since the 1990's in which shifts were made from 'deregulation' toward more active form of economic intervention 'associated with a striking coexistence of technocratic economic management and invasive social policies (Peck and Tickell, 2002, pg. 42).

[4]. I use the word 'support' to refer to Western military and economic aid, as well as preferential trade relations with Israel.

Palestinian economy that has 'all but collapsed' from the Israeli military policies including curfews, checkpoints, house demolitions, random military aggréssion, and constant restrictions in movement and trade (IDC Report, 2004)[5]. Since the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza strip in Palestine, the U.S. has provided an unprecedented amount of foreign aid to Israel in what is often referred to as the 'special relationship' between the two countries[6]. Britain also is an active trading partner with Israel as more recently defined in the EU Preferential Trade Agreement[7]. These dynamics raise specific questions concerning how these Western 'liberal' governments legitimize their continued support for the Israeli 'occupation' government[8].

The following paper is a summary of the findings of my master's research conducted in London, England at Goldsmith College, University of London in 2004 focused on the critical analysis of British political discourses in their utilization of legitimizing strategies to justify 'support' for the Israeli occupation government[9]. The more general argument I am making is that the legitimizations used by Western political representatives to support the continued preferential trade status and 'unconditional' aid to the Israeli government are based upon a series of historical and contemporary representations that obscure the more central Western agenda which is to maintain its military, political and economic interests in the area. My particular focus in this study is the analysis of the representational discursive strategies and structures used by British political representatives to justify the largely unconditional ongoing aid and trade relations with Israel. Using specific examples of discourses from interviews with

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[5] There is also international concern for the fear, suffering, and anger of the Israeli people who have been and continue to be victims of violence within this conflict. Criticism of the support to the Israeli government is in no means an attempt to negate this aspect of the conflict.

[6] U.S. funding to Israel is estimated at over 3 billion dollars annually (Clyde, 1991; Zunes, 2004). Since 1967, U.S. annual funding for Israel has averaged over 3 billion dollars resulting in what often is referred to as the 'special relationship' between the U.S. and Israel. Since 1976, Israel has received the largest amount of U.S. foreign assistance on both an annual and cumulative basis (Clyde, 1991) and during the Reagan era aid to Israel began to escalate 'reaching about 5.5 billion annually at present, over one-third of the total U.S. foreign aid (U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, Current Policy; November 20th, 2002).

[7] They also give extensive aid to the Palestinian Authority through the UNWRA to reconstruction projects, many of which have been systematically destroyed by Israeli Defense Forces (IDC report, 2004).

[8] The UN's declared the Israeli 'security' wall illegal according to international law and suggested it should be immediately removed ('U.N. Court Says Israeli Barrier Is Illegal'. Associated Press, NewsMax.com Wires, Friday, July 9, 2004 http://www.newsmax.com/archives/articles/2004/7/9/123614.shtml)

[9] The British government as a member and participant in the EU-Israel Association Agreement entered into force on 1 June, 2000. The EU is Israel's major trading partner and is increasing in importance. In the last 20 years, the share of their exchanges in their total trade has almost doubled. With Israel's share in total EU trade of0.9% for imports and 1.4% for exports, Israel ranks as EU's 20th export market. Trade between Britain and Israel has grown by 20 percent with 34 official trade missions to Israel form the UK since 1997 (Langford, PSC).

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members of British parliament, this study examines the particular strategies and forms of representation used to legitimize continued economic and political support for the Israeli government.

This study does not attempt to address the complicated and conflictual relationship within either Palestinian nor Israeli politics and popular social movements in either country. In discussing Israel and Palestine I attempted to speak to the Western governmental policies surrounding the Israeli government and military occupation of Palestine. As is well known there are wide divisions and resistances in Israel towards its own government policies as represented in various religious and political divisions.

Research aims

The aim of this study was twofold; first to identify and outline discursive strategies utilized by British political representatives in explaining and legitimizing their government's political and economic involvement in 'supporting' the Israeli government's practices. Secondly was to analyze how these discourses were operative within a concrete example of British Parliamentary debate and subsequent policy development. This focus is seen as a part of critical discursive efforts to articulate the relationship between discourse (text) and the (re)production of power relations. In assuming that the discourses of British members of parliament formulate a justification for continued support to the Israeli government (as exhibited in their economic trade relations), this researched raises the question as to how these discursive strategies were being utilized in legitimizing 'support' and thus indirectly (re)producing the domination of the Israeli military over the Palestinian population.

Theoretical and Methodological foundations

Locating a research position

My research began with a number of initial questions concerned with the role of Western governments within the Middle East region and how these interventions was represented in the Western media and political debate. The contradiction of the 'neutral role' often self-ascribed by Western governments and heavy involvement of the U.S. (and to a lesser degree, Britain) in direct funding support to the Israel government seemed indicative of particular regional dynamics. The media and governments representations of the conflict made Western interventions appear as a matter of history or as simply contemporary peacemaking efforts, failing to account for the fact that these governments still have large economic and military investments in the region.

The choice of epistemological definitions and methodological directions for this research reflects not only my research aims, but also the explicit acknowledgement of the partiality and productive act of research practices within political and cultural debates (Haraway, 1991; Stanley and Wise, 1990). As a Western academic researcher I hoped to contribute to postcolonial efforts to reposition the Western 'gaze' back upon itself reflexively asking how 'our' representations of 'others' are more usefully analyzed in relation to self serving agendas, more accurately described as mirrors rather than spectacles (Said,1978; Spivak,1996;Bhabha,1994). This research works to critique the representational and ideological discursive structures which form the underpinnings of legitimizations of particular policies and practices. Identifying 'contingent' discursive structures and reconfiguring them in material terms in relation to larger geopolitical policy and practice aims to make their

ideological 'workings' more transparent and open to direct debates, in this case referring to contemporary Western policies and practices.

Power, ideology, and critical discourse

Power relations have been theorized in critical analysis as historical based discursive forms of representation regulated through the complexities of both internalized and externalized social relations. Michel Foucault's defined 'power' as a historically constructed and relational process which is maintained and regulated through historical *discursive formations* which 'refer to the same object, share the same style and …support a strategy….a common institutional, administrative or political drift and pattern' (Hall, 2001; pg 73). Foucault's critique de-emphasized economic and class factors rooted in Marxist theories of ideology and class struggle and instead discussed the genealogies of discourse formations. In terms of locating 'power', Foucault emphasized that 'right' should be viewed "not in terms of a legitimacy to be established, but in terms of the methods of subjugation that it instigates" (Foucault,1980;pg.96). Foucault recommended an ascending analysis starting with everyday interaction and practice, and the moving upward in relation to 'how these mechanisms of power have been – and continue to be invested, colonized, utilized, involuted, transformed, displaced, extended by ever more general mechanisms and by forms of global domination" (Foucault, 1988; pg.99).

In political discourse, ideology has been suggested as operative in constructing identifications used to 'normalize' and (re)produce contemporary forms of social domination (Zizek, 1994; Parker, 2003). Micheal Billig (1995) identifies the power of ideology in its 'hidden' quality, which implicitly organizes the boundaries and definitions of the text working through what is 'assumed' as normal and 'common sense' (Billig, 1987). Critical discursive analysts have worked at identifying and mapping patterns of legitimizing discourses which appear operative in forms of persistent social domination and exploitation (Wetherell and Potter, 1992; Parker and Burman, 2003; van Dijk, 1993). A particular challenge and dilemma of critical discursive analysis lies in the question of how to outline and address the historically constructive and performative uses of language, while accounting for the political realities of specific incidents and material configurations of social domination. Methodological questions are raised as to how to account for discourses in relation to macro level dynamics and larger hegemonic struggles, otherwise, a micro-discursive analysis of power may be implicated in its 'normalization' of dominant ideology by making larger power structures and agents invisible or simply accepted as 'the way things are'.

Wetherell and Potter (1992) analysis of historically located power relations in the ideological interpretation of racist discourses in New Zealand provided a useful format and methodological approach for this study. They outlined three stages in the analysis of ideology: the description of the social field, the "systematic linguistic analysis of the pattern of discourse; and finally the interpretation of how the first two stages relate (1992; pp.105). In contrast to more linguistic discursive analysis, they approached the study of legitimization with the goal of accessing 'some of the wide range of different sorts of arguing and thinking that the participants would have produced outside the interviews". In this the interviewer's were "much more straightforwardly argumentative than would be appropriate in an orthodox research interview: offering counter examples, questioning assumptions and so on" (1992; pg. 99). This approach was designed to better elucidate the argumentative strategies and representational identifications used by interviewees to justify particular viewpoints and actions.

The study

Interviews

The focus of the interviews was to analyze the discursive representations used by the interviewees to explain the position of the British government in relation to economic support given to the Israeli government. The primary source of data used was transcripts taken from interviews I conducted in the spring of 2004 with members of British Parliament and a representative of a Jewish lobby organization in London, England. The interviewees were challenged at times on their positions to elicit how they justified and legitimized the government's policies in light of common public criticisms and a recently released committee's report which was highly critical of the effects of the Israeli 'occupation' practices (ICD, 2004). I used the findings and recommendations of this report to question the interviewees about the need for a more conditional trade program with the Israelis. All the participants had been involved in recent debates over the issue of the British financial aid and trade relations with Israel and Palestine. Two of the participants were members of the committee that had recently released the report which was highly critical of the Israeli occupation practices, the other two were members of a foreign affairs committee that advised and developed international policy including foreign aid, international security, and the funding of British development projects overseas. I did not interview any representatives that were in direct opposition to supportive relations with Israel as my focus was to identify how the 'support' for Israel was legitimized.

A semi-structured qualitative interview format was used and all interviews took place either in the representative's office or in a convenient lobby nearby. All of the interviews were audio taped and two interviews which were conducted outside of the Parliament building were video taped. I designed the interview questions and conducted and transcribed all the interviews myself, which lasted from 15-60 minutes.

I structured the interviews with four objectives in mind; the first to establish how the interviewee's positioned themselves in relation to British policy toward the Israeli occupation practices; secondly, how they addressed some of the common international criticisms of the Israeli practices; thirdly, on the issue of how they felt Britain should position themselves in the future in relation to the U.S. and EU involvement in the region; and lastly I inquired as to their position concerning the recent Parliamentary committee report mentioned above (The report had recommended that Britain consider conditions being put on the EU preferential trade agreement with Israel until the Israeli government reduced restrictions on Palestinians movement in the occupied territories[10]). As a European Union preferential trade partner with Israel, and a close ally of the United States, my discussions with these representatives centred on how they viewed the contradiction between British support in trade with Israel and the documented 'inhumane' conditions imposed on the Palestinians through the Israeli occupation (IDC report, 2004; Twair, 2003). In this approach I hypothesized that the interviewees

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[10] The International Development Committees recent report issued in November/December of 2003 made two recommendations to the British government: first, to create a UN envoy to monitor the occupation practices of both parties, and secondly to consider modifying the EU preferential trade agreement with Israel until they complied with international standards and the responsibilities of an occupying force in accordance to UN charters (ICD, 2004).

would express rationales that would help me understand how this 'support' was legitimized and in turn was contributing to the (re)production of the conditions of social domination. By focusing on the IDC report and the eventual government's response and debate, I wanted to understand also how the discourses were being articulated within actual policy decisions to assess some measure of their material effects.

Transcript analyses

After completing the interviews I extracted segments of the texts and placed them within specific categories of representations, narratives, and rationales. These formed the basis for my analysis as to how the legitimizing discourses were articulated British Parliamentary debate and policy formation as well as on the ideological 'workings' of the texts.

Analysis

Discursive themes

History and the Israeli occupation: the problem is …. then…..now?

Political representatives construct varying historical accounts and positions which appear at times contradictory and even in opposition. In the analysis of power relations and domination a central question is how these narratives are productive as 'histor(ies) of the present' and in asking "…not what, but 'how' as a process did the present come to be what it is today' (Blackman, 1994). Historical narratives in geopolitical are used rhetorically to establish rights, territorial claims, and define responsibility and blame for perceived violations of assumed codes and principles. British parliamentary debates concerning Palestine and Israel rely heavily on historical depictions of the 'origins' of the conflict, who is at fault, and who is responsible for the current impasses. Various positions and narrations forward particular 'documentary' narratives, borrowing certain events, time frames, agents, and inferring motives into the constructed positions which make out the 'realties on the ground'. Unraveling 'legitimization' in these verbal texts involves outlining the representative and ideological structures of 'discourses' which are used to justify particular positions and actions in relation to some assumed standards of practice. History in this sense is used to promote and (re)produce particular hierarchies of power along with ideological 'principles' that legitimize particular actions.

Example 1

I6*: I don't doubt the Colonial administration of the day thought it would be a great idea to sort of mingle the Arab…with the Jews who were all the more educated, economically a positive force and we could play one off against the other which of course we did in India with the Muslims and Hindus and did in Cyprus with the Greeks and the Turks and the whole British empire was based to some extent on 'divide tempora', and some of the hatreds and bitterness that have ensued from those days continued to poison different parts of the globe including inside individual states like Nigeria and so forth, so it's a big thing we have to be conscious of that legacy. From there on a sort of tragedy, a sort of Greek tragedy unfolded in the sense that it was not so much the player's faults that anything*

happened, but outside events… it was almost an inevitable consequence of dynamics of this historic tragedy.

What is particular about this description is its 'self' reflective perspective in accounting for British involvement in the 'tragedy' of Palestine. In a kind of 'national confession', Britain is described as 'playing one (group) off against the other' in a manipulative and destructive part of its colonial intervention strategies. Then the Palestinian and Israeli conflict is described as a 'Greek' tragedy occurring from the unintended and unfortunate forces of 'outside events'. This leaves the British themselves as somehow part of the origin of the problem, but then at some point, also 'observers' of events out of their control. These 'outside forces' that sweep away history as a 'Greek tragedy' go unnamed and resulting in the future construction of the region (as the Israeli state and 'occupied' Palestine), negating the large effect that U.S. and to some extent international bodies have played in actively supporting the development of a economic and militarily powerful Israeli state.

Example 2

I2: Yes, but they don't talk about how the occupation came about; about the attacks on Israel, and the attempts to wipe it out. What happened in 1948, 1967 as to why these territories were occupied.

Again, in the brevity of this statement, most of what is said here is assumed (Billig, 2001). The events of these periods are debated and written about extensively in literature from Israeli, Palestinian, and Western points of view[11]. There is widely accepted criticism of both the occupation of Palestine and the Western support for such practices. This type of historical accounting renders the West invisible in the conflict or as neutral or detached observers, while the continued goals of the West remain hidden.

Peace Rhetoric

The rhetoric of peace has been addressed by Durrheim (1991) who studied 'peace' discourses surrounding post-apartheid South Africa stating that what becomes 'normalized' in terms of 'peace' in post colonial discourses are the terms of the dominant group in their efforts to secure and legitimize their battle for 'hegemony'. In speaking about post-apartheid South Africa he states"…the proliferation of violence in the country is related to the proliferation of peace. To the degree that the gradient of meaning between peace (utopia) and violence (despair) magnifies, and 'peace' becomes hegemonic, resistance to 'peace' intensifies (1991, pp.41). In this way 'peace agreements' and 'peace' itself is equated as the absence of resistance by the subjugated group. Peace rhetoric can be used to polarize conflictual dynamics in the efforts of one group to marginalize the position of the other, thereby increasing resistance. The following extract focuses on what the factors have made 'peace accords' difficult.

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[11] For a useful summary of the history and development of the region see Bennis (2002). There is a wide and diverse body of literature on the historical accounts and critiques of the region including from authors such as Benny Morris, Avi Shlaim, Edward Said, Bejamin Netenyahu,.

Example

I6: ...It seems to me also irrefutable that Arafat walked away from a good faith, very good faith negotiating offer by Barak at the Camp David conference…Either he was incredibly stupid or he overreached himself and thought the Israeli's would come up with even a better offer which is absurd because the offer was already very, very difficult for the Israeli's to make. And he was playing games of that kind, or else actually again, he didn't want peace, or he was incapable of delivering it.

I6… so it is not a symmetrical thing here, .now it is one party which has maintained this conflict. And it is the Palestinians and it has to be said… the Palestinians will lose out, events are being created which will be difficult to reverse…the Palestinians have allowed that to happen, tragically…

In this rendition, history turns from a 'tragedy' of Greek proportions to a narrative in which one party; the Palestinians and Arafat are now the ones at fault. There has been much written about the breakdown of talks at Oslo and this is used repeatedly to position the Palestinians and particularly Arafat as 'walking away' from the generous offer made by the Israeli's. 'Arafat' embodies a 'figurehead', a character 'unlike us' who does not want peace and is out to destroy what 'we' represent in the democratic West (Bennis, 2002). In these accounts the British representatives speak as authorities on the area proclaiming the Israelis as the party 'willing to negotiate, reasonable, rational', and 'fair', thus positioning the Palestinians in opposition. The comment that the Israeli's made a very 'good faith offer', legitimizes the Israeli state as legal and rightful with the giving up settlements or parts of the Holy city as a great sacrifice in contrast to broader perspectives which might include a return of lands previously occupied by both Jews and Palestinians. The Israeli invasion of Palestine of 1948 is normalized as 'history', won fairly, legitimized and thus not in question in these discourses. In the end it is the Palestinians who are positioned as 'have allowed that (the occupation) to happen, tragically'.

In these constructions we must also ask who is defining the parameters of 'peace'. Who defines the terms, the facts, the access to debate, and the choice of participants? How does a subjugated population whose 'leader' is confined to restricted quarters (in 2004) gain access to the political and media resources to advocate and promote their version of what might be considered 'peace in the region?' How does the U.S., with enormous annual financial investments in Israel, become a 'fair mediator' that the Palestinians are to trust and feel fairly represented by within 'road maps' which they were not invited to participate in constructing?

The Palestinian 'terrorist' and Western constructions of violence

One of the most common representational themes in relation to the British justification for the Israeli occupation strategies lies in the construction of 'terrorism' as a faction of the Palestinian population. In relation to changing world events, 'terrorism' is inscribed within contemporary post September 11, 2001 Western discourses as the global 'enemy'. The interviewees describe the 'terrorist' as a 'being' who is "unintelligent, unbalanced, kills innocent civilians, corrupt, ruthless, an enemy of peace, is out

to destroy Israel and anti-Western."[12]. These racist connotations reinvest colonial types of western projections in new forms of 'Muslim' and 'Arab' as locations for the origins of this globalized 'evil'[13]. These symbolic associations evoke mythic liberal narratives in which 'democracy' must now defend itself against this new tyranny of 'evil'.

Example 1

I5: Obviously the Al Queda is based on that kind of activity (terrorism), and that kind of activity is something which is quite different from conventional warfare that we've been used to. And it's much harder to deal with because it does not have a negotiating position that can be negotiated on. . I think it's about destroying rather than creating something that most of us would not accept: Islamic states imposed on other societies. The objective is the overthrow of Western democracies. … It's a very potent threat that means a loss of life and destruction of the things that matter to us here…Muslim states would have never accepted a Jewish state in the middle of what they saw as a Muslim…I have resisted such thoughts in the past, but I wonder if they just never would have accepted it and still don't want to. Is this why there is still a problem?

 'Terrorism' is differentiated from' conventional warfare' and inscribed as 'not having a negotiating position' inferring a destructive and totalitarian agenda. The 'terrorists' are interested in the 'overthrow of Western democracy' constructing an aggressive 'vigilante' entity that's basic intention is destructive and therefore has to be coercively 'isolated' or targeted militarily as the only means of defense. In this the West can see itself as merely defending itself against their potential annihilation in the defense of 'democracy'.

Example 2

I6: …you can not expect the Israeli government to open up their borders and let people come into work within Israel when some of them may be carrying suicide bombs… the Israeli government didn't start that,… the Israeli government I am sure have killed a lot of innocent civilians, but they didn't set out to kill innocent civilians. I don't even believe the worst fanatics in the Israeli defense forces said 'let's go kill a few Palestinian women and children'… the way that Hamas says; 'let's go kill a few Israeli women and children'.

QD: …that is a form of war, ruthless war, not conducted according to the rules of war, the Haig conventions or Geneva conventions or something, it is the most unpleasant kind of murder, absolutely

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[12] See Furedi's (1994) work on 'New Imperialism' in which he describes the Western need for a new 'communist' threat to fuel the failing economy and the imaginary enemy which legitimizes 'homeland' security and the radical expansionism of the Western frontier which now stretches to the border between Iraq and Iran.

[13] Zizek (1989) makes an interesting articulation of how the Jew's were positioned by the German Nazi's as a type of necessary 'figure' (Lacanian) in the ideals of the Third Reich. They were necessary in that utopian ideologies must find ways to compensate for 'gaps' between the symbolic promises of utopian 'societies and nations' and the Real.

appalling cold blooded murder of innocent people, men, women and children by these suicide bombs. So it is utterly hypocritical, utterly hypocritical to blame the Israeli's for taking out Sheikh Yassin and other terrorist leaders. And it seems to me to be utterly hypocritical to criticize the building of the security wall. I would have built the wall…I would have done exactly the same.

The implication that the Israeli government 'did not start that (the violence)' marks history 'after' the Israeli declaration of statehood in Palestine in 1948 and their eventual occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. Then a differential is constructed in the categorization of types of violence which fit the 'rules of war' and those types that constitutes 'ruthless war'. This is instrumental in the differentiation and construction of an 'other' who commits the 'most unpleasant kind of murder' in contrast to the Israelis who are depicted as a group that commits 'legal' forms of violence. What is inferred is that the Israeli violence is sanctified as a 'democracy' trying to defend itself against aggressive 'enemies' effectively creating an alliance with other Western 'democracies' in 'the war on terror'.

National identities, positions, and 'inter'national relations

a. The British: as 'balanced, fair, and helpful'…

Example 1

I3: We just want to make sure that the British government remains as impartial as possible…and more important than impartiality is to be constructive in the situation… Britain I think is uniquely placed in that because it has very good relationship with Israel and also has a very good relationship with the Arab world. As well, Tony Blair,…he's a man who has an intense understanding for Israel's unique position in the Middle East…. at the same time, he understands, um…what the Palestinians are facing as well, and how important it is for them to gain a state and how they need to be masters of their own destiny. Now that is pretty much unique in the world and certainly in Europe in the moment.

The British are enlisted as a 'bridge' and as an 'understanding' nation that has a unique vantage point that allows it to see the arguments on both sides. Tony Blair is the 'informed and balanced world leader' who has empathy and understanding for both sides in the conflict in contrast to the US 'one sided' position. With the identification as a fair 'mediator' in the region and proclamations that Palestinians should be 'masters of their own destiny' the British imply their allegiance to the liberal democratic ideal of 'sovereignty of all nations'. This is problematic in that it obscures the actual political, economic, and social investments the British have in the region resulting in particular policy directions for the region through trade and strong alliance with U.S.

b. British relations with the United States: 'The only superpower…'

Example 1

I1: I think that the (USA) is the only mediator to be honest because it is the only country in the world, if it turns the tap off, Israel will suffer. And if the US government were to say, 'ah, look Israel, unless you were to bring that wall down, or bring it along the (19)67 borders, we are going to turn the tap off', I

think the Israeli government would jump frankly… (even) people in the Arab world recognize that only Washington can pull the Israeli's around to agree to a comprehensive peace settlement ….

The US is depicted as the dominant power in the region and the only power that has the ability to effect Israeli policy. As result, the British and EU become subordinate to the U.S. and as less powerful they can be seen as less responsible for what is occurring in the region. In a somewhat contradictory representation, the U.S. is seen as the political body that can pressure Israel into significant change and the best 'mediator' in the situation.

Most of the interviewees expressed criticisms of the Israel and the Sharon government in one form or another. Most stated that the US was a force for 'good' in the region, but there were exceptions and strong criticisms of U.S. policy and the desire for Britain to take a stronger stance against US support for Israel. Some attributed the U.S. 'one-sided' approach to Israel as related to either the Jewish or Christian lobbies in the U.S. and several commented that no changes would take place on the Israeli issue till after the November, 2004 U.S. election. This was attributed to the fact that the Bush administration would not risk upsetting either the Jewish or Christian lobby's or constituency.

Example 2

I4: We recognize the domestic forces which pushed the U.S. administration in a specific direction… the world repetition that Israel is the only democracy in the region. And… that the Israel of today is the Israel of Abraham and the promise of God made to the people of Israel which I think is a distortion of the bible, but that is by the way. The essence of the British role would be… to recognize that the US is a decisive player in the region and unless and until the US becomes more positively engaged it will be part of the answer as to why we are hated in the Middle East[14].

The British position being described is for a 'balanced view' in contrast to U.S. positions which are inferred to be 'unbalanced'. It challenges the rhetorical construction of Israel as the 'only democracy in the region' suggesting that this misrepresents Israel, and/or the other countries in the region. The interviewee understands why the U.S. lack of engagement and 'double standards' have resulted in 'why we are hated' in the Middle East. The critical stance taken by the interviewee suggests that Britain understands and believes the U.S. position is destructive. The question of political importance is how these opinions relate to actual policy construction.

Example 3

I1: I would argue strongly against sanctions. To me you use sanctions against dictatorial regimes where, you don't use sanctions against democracies and Israel is a democracy.

I3 …. it is only when you've been out there (Israel) …and you've been to visit the only democracy in the Middle East, and you've gone to visit Israel's Parliament, and gone to visit the holy sites of

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[14] In a rather humorous although telling account of the US mainstream understanding of what terrorist positions are really all about, Fareed Zakaharia enlightens us in his post-9/11 special report entitled 'Why they hate us?.http://www.fareedzakaria.com/ARTICLES/newsweek/101501_why.html

Jerusalem, to actually understand why the city is so important to the Jewish community and Muslim faith and to Christianity..

In a kind of ideological 'carte blanc' the violence and policies of Israel as a 'democratic nation' are differentiated from non-western nations. As a 'democratic' nation, Israel responds to concerns from the international community without the necessity of 'sanctions' where as force may be necessary with 'non-democratic' nations. As repeated throughout the interviews, this democratic 'divide' is constructed between the US, the EU and Israel and surrounding Middle East Arab nations that are then positioned as not 'democratic' implying a myriad of 'negative' assumptions through the inscription of 'non-western'.

Intertextual legitimization: putting it all together

Discourses occur and work within complex and multilevel associative networks which structure and define political and social spaces. Nationalist references overlap with 'racial' discourses to construct and utilize particular ideological associations as well as functional usages within social institutions (Zavos, 2004). The following interview uses representations of 'terrorism', 'democracy', 'nationalism' and constructions of 'history' work to construct rationales for the British position.

Example 1

I3: But I think that anyone that has a real understanding of the current situation knows that it is terrorism which is undermining the peace process and the peace makers. History shows it, again and again, every time there is a government in Israel that's willing to make far reaching concessions with the Palestinians, concessions that would be very, very difficult for the Israel public to face, but if the price is the end of the conflict, then I think an Israeli government would be willing to make those compromises. But every time we get close to that point, it's the terrorists which defeat the peacemakers every single time…we can not let the terrorists…dictate the peace process. The Israel army's reaction is just that, a reaction, its reaction to terrorism, now terrorism is the real problem. Terrorism is just as much an enemy of the Israeli people as it is to the Palestinian people as well, because unfortunately, it keeps them in the situation which they are currently at.

The interviewee consistently speaks from a position of 'authority' and narration defining the parameters of 'peace' and 'terrorism' as the central problem in the region. The Israeli government is represented as a political body that 'reaches out to make far reaching concessions' and is 'willing to pay a great price' for an 'end to the conflict'. The 'terrorists' amongst the Palestinians are then defined as defeating 'the peacemakers every time'; in a kind of good verses evil mythic narration. In unfolding this narration the 'occupation' can be perceived as a 'logical' outcome of Palestinian terrorism, in that Israel as a 'democratic nation' is just doing what it needs to do 'to survive' while it never gives up on its attempts to bring about 'peace'.

Section II: Discourse and Political Policy Making

An analysis of the efficacy of the above cited discourses within British policy making would involve a broader and more extensive level of analyses than can be provided in this paper. I will address the question of efficacy of the text through a specific political debate in Parliament which centered on the question of whether the British government should support EU 'sanctions' on the Israeli government to pressure them into allowing the free movement of trade in Palestine (IDC, 2004). In these dialogues I asked the representatives to address a basic contradiction; that the British identification as a democratic liberal government contradicts with their trade and diplomatic relations with the Israeli occupation government. I was questioning if the discourses used by the British to legitimize their involvement work essentially to obscure their own invested interests and political alliances in the region.

British 'supportive' relations with Israel

The British government has at least several significant official involvements with Israel and Palestine in regards to trade and diplomatic relations. In November and December of 2003 the British Parliamentary International Development Select Committee studied and evaluated how the aid money they were sending through the EU and UNRWA to the Palestinian Authority was being utilized[15]. They found that the aid money was having little benefit due to the devastating impact of the Israeli occupation practices on the whole infrastructure of the Palestinian society (IDC Report, 2004). In the following excerpt I questioned this participant as to their opinion concerning the IDC report.

Example 1

I4: ….if the EU were to take some initiative (put conditions on trade), … it would totally disqualify the EU as a partner in negotiation because it would play into the hands of those in Israel who see the EU as a wholly bias interlocutor…effectively siding with the Palestinians, and for the EU to seek to play the role of an honest broker would become increasingly impossible if they intervened in a Partisan way….. we are both… tied with the same brush…

I4… the US is paying to high a price for their apparently absolute defense of Israel. And we are losing with them. We think the West as a whole is losing by the failure of the U.S. to intervene positively and to speak out …in my own judgment the UK is losing being linked to closely with US policy. And we should say to the US 'unless and until 'you show a more balanced position… you will be on your own.

M: Why do you think, why doesn't Britain? (take a more critical approach toward the US policy in the Israeli Palestinian conflict)..

I4: Now the UK for good or ill took a particular view on the Iraq conflict, we happen to agree, at least the government agreed with the US position, but also recognized that to have distanced ourselves would have reduced to nil any influence we might have not only on that, the Iraq issue, but also on other matters such as Israel/Palestine.

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[15] Since the start of the Oslo peace process in 1994, DFID's bilateral programme has grown from 3 million pounds to 20 million annum. (IDC report, 2004. #15)

Variegated and complex positions are articulated in response to the contradiction of British policy. The Prime Minister is inscribed as the political figure dedicated to unity U.S. policy[16]. The position of the interviewee softens through the rationale that a counter position to the US is 'counterproductive' and reduces the British government's ability to influence policy to 'nil' in Iraq as well as in the Palestinian region. In this the U.S. serves, for the British position, as a rational behind which the British government legitimizes its rejection of their own committee's recommendations and in turn 'normalizes' current supportive relations with Israel.

Delivering 'prosperity' to the Middle East.

In the last section of my interviews I questioned participants as to the contradiction of British and US economic interests and investments with the Israeli government in relation to their own committee's criticism of the Israeli occupation.

I7: …. I work with major multinationals in terms of delivering prosperity, but in the wider sense; good health care, good education, not simply money in their pocket, and I believe that business is largely misunderstood and is regarded as being the problem,.. It's actually the solution. And when you look at the problem for instance of the West Bank, the problem is business can not operate there, sadly, because the situation is getting worse now in the state of Israel, business can not operate there either. So both economies are going down…and ninety-nine percent of that population (Palestinians) wants a Palestinian state at peace with the state of Israel….and business will deliver that. One of the reasons why we suggested that trade sanctions should come in was because business would be hurt by that and it would actually say to both sides, now come on….

The solutions to the regional problems lay in the development of EU market involvements for both Israel and Palestine. This promotes the neoliberal ideal that EU trade and business can move the Palestinians and Israeli's into 'prosperity' and thus create the conditions necessary for 'peace'. Interestingly this interviewee agreed with the concept of conditions on Israel trade relations, seeing these as a way of pressuring both sides of the conflict into peaceful cooperation in the name of economic prosperity.

I6: *The American support for Israel has not been driven by economic criteria… the main aim of American foreign policy is stabilization,… it's a world which is reasonably stable, and therefore the concern with failed states and so forth is they are ultimately a threat to stability and to the security of the United States and their allies… I think on the whole we share the same interests as the United States. We share the same interest in stability.*

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[16] Tony Blair's Jan, 2003 speech to British ambassadors in London (The Guardian, Tuesday January 7, 2003)

The interviewee sees Britain here as interested in stability along with the U.S. and is concerned that 'failed states' are a threat to that stability. 'Stability' is defined as an economic climate where business is allowed to operate effectively. 'Failed' states appears to mean 'nations' that do not fit in well, are resistive to Western interventionism, and/or are not efficiently functioning in the neoliberal modal of global economics such as Iraq, Afghanistan, and other 'non-western' states. What this legitimizes is the efforts to 'create' stability within 'non-Western' regions that are perceived or labeled as 'security' threats to Western stability. In this way Israel support is positioned as part of the British (and U.S.) efforts to create a more secure and 'stable' world.

Discussion

"*Colonialism reorganized geographical space into sovereign zones of ideological and economic allegiances."* (Gillian Fuller, 2003).

Based on my analysis, British political representatives appear to utilize discursive legitimizing strategies which (re)produce liberal and egalitarian national identifications while obscuring historical and representational dynamics material involvements in the region. One possible explanation for these legitimizing rationales is that they are 'necessary' as part of a larger hegemonic struggles to navigate critical contradictions and a 'gaps' between these identifications and the uneven products of neoliberal capitalism (Harvey, 2003). In this, the participant's legitimizations are arguably not a causality of, but produced and sustained by the necessities of Western neoliberal expansionism within contradictory and contested liberal and egalitarian identifications (Aruri, 2003)

Histories

The history of Palestine is represented by the participants in variable narratives and positioning, yet certain themes appear to operate consistently as a part of legitimizing efforts. Even in narratives that include and articulate the historical devastation of the British colonial 'divide and rule' strategies which supported and legitimized Jewish migration to the region, most accounts end with the positioning of the Palestinians as the 'responsible' party in relation to the continued necessity of the occupation practices. Within these narratives is also the striking absence of the West in the construction and current maintenance of the Israeli occupation. These accounts serve to maintain a focus on the motives and sequences of injustices of the two groups, the irrational behaviours of both sides, and the failed attempts of the West to bring 'peace' to the region. The British and the U.S. are most often not seen as invested actors nor complicit in the current repressive dynamics of the occupation. In the more critical viewpoints expressed by the interviewees, rationales were given as to why these dynamics were unavoidable; while other participants expressed that they were speaking out about needed changes in British and U.S. political policy. In identifying these contradictory representations I am suggesting that these histories construct British positions that at times attempt to 'cover' rather than address a basic contradiction between their identifications as 'liberal and egalitarian' and their actual political and economic practices.

Inscriptions of nations

The hierarchical positioning of nationalistic power relations inscribes positions of responsibility and determines who has ability to control and influence particular contexts. If there is a 'nodal' point of reference which seems to appear as a unifying force within the participant's responses it is centred around the dominance of the U.S. both ideologically and in the definitions of current political policy. This differential can serve to both legitimize the inaction of the British in countering U.S. policies with Israel and support the British ongoing involvements. As stated explicitly by Tony Blair, the alliance with the U.S. is representative of a hegemonic and ideological field in which Britain and the U.S. gather around a complementary and committed investment in neoliberal strategic interests (Blair, 2003). Most interviewees clearly suggested the necessity and desire for the British nation and government to be clearly aligned with the U.S. Some interviewees criticized the U.S. position, yet rejected the proposal to challenge U.S. policy. In turn these critical positions can be recuperated by the British government and used as examples of 'diverse' debate within the multi-ethnic and religious make up of British politics. In this way, the constructions and narratives of 'nation' function to rationalize persistent domination in the region and obscure debates concerning responsibility and accountability.

Without debating the issue of the benefits of contemporary neoliberal market relations in this paper, what is assumed by the interviewees is that the Western European model of economic development is the 'solution' to the structural and economic problems of the region. Within the 'solution' lies the rational also for continued British support to both Israel and Palestine, and perhaps arguably in the long run an incentive for Britain to continue to push for Palestinian rights to develop a sustainable and strong economy. Regardless of the economic ramifications, the current supportive economic relation with Israel goes unchanged.

Peace rhetoric, violence, and the global 'terrorist'

To suggest that "terrorist' discourses are used as a means to justify the forwarding of British and Western support to Israel is accurate from a discursive perspective, but simplifies the position of the British and the West to mere economic and political rationalities. Two points seem important in this regard; one is that new possibilities are now available in the use of 'terrorist' discourses since September 11, 2006 that provide the ability to 'globalize' particular regional resistances, demonstrated by the participants as they move freely between Palestinian 'suicide bombers' and more globalized images of 'irrational and destructive anti-western forces'. These associations intensify polarizations and provide new discursive, ideological, and material alliances between Britain, U.S. and Israeli that now can be framed as a shared battle against a common 'enemy'. The second point is that unifying attempts to construct overarching dominant ideological systems are inherently problematic in their efforts to organize 'reality' within a 'pure' symbol of ideological reference (Zizek, 1994) We can ask; what are the general characteristics of this 'projected other' and how might these reflect discursive efforts to 'suture' fragments into an ideological whole? (Laclau, 1985). In other words, how does the construction of this 'irrational and destructive other' fill in a 'gap' (contradiction) in the liberalist logic of a 'democratic' British nation? It may be suggested that this 'gap' is filled by the 'irrational terrorist' in that it legitimizes for the Western governments what might otherwise be considered un-democratic and therefore unacceptable aggression. What is unquestionable within the British political position may be the 'legitimacy' of current forms of Western 'interventionism' as '*reasonable and rational'* under the egalitarian and democratic 'ideal'. Larger questions are raised concerning the regulatory functions of

contemporary political discourse with neoliberal expansionism as far as what discourses are allowed or disallowed within governmental 'halls' of debate.

Political rhetoric and material realities:

The IDC report made a clear recommendation for a shift in British governmental policy due to their extensive accounting of the impact of Israeli occupation practices. It concluded that the Israeli practices were a breech of international agreements and a destructive internment of the Palestinians creating 'inhumane' living conditions for the Palestinians[17]. The question is 'how do they continue to legitimize a policy of support in a situation in which their own investigative committee has determined is illegal and 'inhumane'?

In spite of their clear assessment of the destructive and 'inhumane' effects of the Israeli occupation practices on the Palestinian population, different rationales were given by the government representatives as to why they felt that they would not 'push' the issue of 'sanctions' through instituting even minimal conditions on the EU preferential trade agreement with Israel. Some clearly felt they had to back off of their position rather than risk political 'hot water' and a potential conflict with the Prime Minister's position. Others suggested that it would upset relations with the U.S. and, like in the case with the German Chancellor; Britain would risk being "effectively frozen out of contact with the US administration". The importance of maintaining U.S. alliances points to the 'gap' and basic contradiction within British political identifications and practices. Put in overly simplistic terms, Britain's global economic alliances with the U.S. and Europe cause pressures that result in supporting the Israeli state in spite of a large body of evidence indicating the Israeli government continues to violate international humanitarian agreements.

Critical research and political debates

Although limited in scope, these results support arguments that the study of power relations and their (re)production should be theorized within an account for both the micro relational dynamics of discursive exchange and the larger historical ideological and regulatory regimes which order and organize social institutions and geopolitical forces (van Dijk, 1993; Fairclough, 1995; Hook, 2001; Laclua,1985). Rhetorical discourses and strategies can (and perhaps in more cases should) be evaluated for their legitimizing *effects* through an analysis of their relation to larger political policy outcomes; otherwise what appears as critical political discourse in textual form may actually function as an integral part of legitimizing the dominant position it purports to analyze.

Critical social research has a role in unravelling what is hidden and operative in contemporary political discourse including how dominant discourses obscure ideologies and 'logics' which (re)produce inequities of social domination and exploitation. By unravelling what is 'fixed' within these discursive legitimizations, perhaps we can access and open new spaces for critical debate. In this, critical analysis is a useful research framework to account for micro discourses within the contested spaces of

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[17] These factors include an analysis on Palestinian movement, the 'separation fence', demolitions of Palestinian homes, the blocking of food aid and food resources, the lack of access to water and rights to use, poor healthcare, lack of education, and an inability for the Palestinians to protect themselves from Israeli attacks (IDC second report, #21 through #57, 2004).

global neoliberal hegemony in the ongoing effort to avoid recuperation into new (or perhaps old) forms of accumulation.

Epilogue: End the Occupation?

The rhetorical speeches of Western leaders who call for a 'peaceful' resolution to the Palestinian and Israeli conflict obscure and fail to mention there contradictory role as invested parties promoting both ideological and material integration within neoliberal economic systems. Those 'nations' or pockets of resistance who challenge and articulate resistance to the U.S. and Western led expansion in the Middle East risk international economic isolation, U.N. monitoring systems, and surveillance mechanisms which increasingly patrol the borders of political expression and movement. For those who live (at times imprisoned) behind these new 'walls of security', the borders are very real and dangerous to cross. As academic social researchers in the West, we have a responsibility to deconstruct these 'walls' discursively and ideologically in efforts to create more critical spaces of engagement.

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Historia editorial

Formato de citación

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