

Media and Human Rights

Western Media's coverage of Power Flexing in the Middle-East

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Abstract: The political economy of the media influences the media discourse. This study attempts to study the media discourse of the western media with reference to the human rights violations in Palestine. Given the fact that the human rights regime, especially the idea of civil and political rights has been established by the west, a discourse analysis is necessary to gauge how the west portrays the violation of the human rights of the Palestinians. Further the study employs Fairclough's Inter-Textuality for the Critical Discourse Analysis. It uses theoretical frameworks such as Chomsky's Manufacture of Consent and Golding's Critical Political Economy Theory so as to provide explanations for the outcomes of the study.

Index Terms - Inter-textuality, Manufacture of Consent, Critical Discourse Analysis, Human Rights Violation, Political Economy.

I. INTRODUCTION

"How can a man in a cave out-communicate the world's leading Communication societies?"

-Zaharna (2001)

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was drafted with the intention of protecting the rights of all the citizens of the world owing to the privilege of being human. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights predominantly guaranteed Civil and Political Rights without giving much emphasis to Social and economic rights.

The Western Nations were instrumental in drafting this declaration of rights. Here, a special mention needs to be made of Eleanor Roosevelt who is said to have come up with the idea of a declaration of Rights, which was to be signed and ratified by the member nations of the United Nations.

Over the years, the western nations who had drafted the declaration of rights, post World-War II, paid little or no heed to the very same rights, owing to their agenda of the spread of capitalism and to promote a free market economy. The agenda also involved the elimination of communism which was viewed as a threat, owing to, it being a conflicting ideology. A number of other instances could also be quoted where the western nations side-lined the idea of Human Rights and put in effort only towards spreading their ideology or their version of truth (Foucault, 1979).

The discourse of the media text originating out of any media organization is influenced by its political economy. The corporate and the ideological state apparatus (Althusser, 1970) manage to exercise control over the media organizations either by means of advertising revenue or by lobbying in the machineries of the ideological state apparatus (Althusser, 1970) thereby getting legislations passed in order to control the media content (Chomsky, 1988).

The number of sources from which information originates is also centrally controlled and most often than not at the hands of the power elite who have privileged access to the information which again leads to only selective information being released to the public (Golding P, 1991). This leads to a scenario where it is very much possible that the Ideological State Apparatuses (Althusser, 1970) and the corporate might be able to manufacture a discourse which is in fact non-existent and in accordance to their 'Truth' (Foucault, 1979). This produces a scenario where western hegemony is the obvious outcome.

This study of the influence of the political economy of western media and its impact on the respective media discourse, especially with reference to the Human Rights violations in the Palestinian Authority areas becomes extremely important in order to understand how the hegemonic discourses are used by the west to consolidate their position in the world order. It also helps us to understand how the Human Rights of the people are ignored over the interests of the ideological state apparatuses of the west.

1.1 ISSUES RELATED TO THE PRESENT STUDY: WESTERN HEGEMONY AND AGENDA SETTING

The Cold War era in which the current Global Rights Regime emerged is often characterized as the outcome of a struggle between capitalist countries who sought to prioritize Civil and Political Rights and Socialist and less developed countries who favored economic and Social Rights (Evans 1996 as quoted in Evans 2001). Time and again the more developed nations have violated the Social and Economic Rights of the citizens of the developing nations on the pretext of Free Trade, which comes under the umbrella of Civil and Political Rights.

The policy of 'constructive engagement' with Apartheid South Africa by President Reagan, with the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's support, offers a further example that draws upon the neo-liberal defense of free trade with Human Rights violators (Lawyers Committee for Human Rights 1989 as quoted in Evans, 2001). Apartheid South Africa was at the time grossly violating the rights of its black citizens which in fact are in violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and under such circumstances collaborating with South Africa under no circumstances acceptable and this is just one instance. President Clinton barely hesitated before rewarding post-Tiananmen Square China with the most favored nation status (Alston 1996 as quoted in Evans, 2001).

The Tiananmen Square incident of 1989 is one of the most violent instances of Human Rights Violations that took place in Beijing, China. Although official records are not available because China stalled any information leakage, yet it is estimated that the use of Armed Military with Tanks led to the death of a few thousands of protesters who were mostly University Students. Even after such an incident, President Clinton granted China with the most favored nation status which points to the fact that most of these developed nations including the US have little or no respect for the very Human Rights that they themselves instituted, in the face of economic gain.

1.2 NET-NEUTRALITY AND DIGITAL DIVIDE

Data is transferred, over the internet in the form of packets. The idea of net-neutrality provides for each and every packet to be treated equally over the internet. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Depending on the bandwidth allocation, which is done depending on the payment; the priority of specific data packets is set. The developed nations where the communication infrastructure is much better, are able to access the internet at much higher internet speeds which, in other words means that their data packets are given priority over the data packets of the developing nations. This leads to a digital divide. Digital Divide is the existent social and economic divide, with reference to the access to ICT's and therefore information and knowledge.

1.3 THE ISP NEXUS: DIGITAL DIVIDE IN THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY AREAS

Same is the case with Palestine where gross Human Rights violations are taking place and the western media seems to only play down the violations that are taking place. The nexus between the Palestinian Elites and the Israeli Telecom authorities has led to a digital divide between the Palestinian Authority Areas and the mainland Israel (Souri H et al, 2013).

The Palestinian Authority Area has only one functional telecommunications company 'PaTel' which has its own ISP 'Hadara' which provides internet in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip at higher rates and lower bandwidths.

According to the Oslo Accords of 1993, the Palestinian Areas have been divided into 3 categories A, B and C, out of which only on the areas with Palestinian Control, development of Communication infrastructure is allowed. This hinders the development of Palestine's very own internet infrastructure, thereby rendering slower internet speeds.

Also, 'Hadara' buys internet from Israeli ISP's at very high costs making the internet access inaccessible to the general public in the PA Areas. This Digital Divide points to a reality where the settler colonialism has in fact led to cyber colonialism. The 'Enough Walls Campaign' has also been termed as a failure by a lot of resistance activists.

The only success that this information warfare has achieved is recognition of Palestine by Google in May 2, 2013, in its products and services among other minor successes. On ground, nothing has changed; there is still only 1 telephone line between the West Bank and The Gaza Strip which is frequently cut-off by Israel. It will be long, or maybe never, before the Palestinian Online Resistance actually amounts to action on ground (Souri H et al, 2013).

Although the Information Front has transformed over the years, the hegemonic powers most often than not, dominate the telecommunications and internet scene because of the communications infrastructure and the subsequent flow of the information. Under such circumstances, the idea of cyber colonialism is a universal one and that of a cyber-war is one that is already lost.

1.4 SETTLER COLONIALISM VERSUS CYBER COLONIALISM

Settler Colonialism is a form of colonialism where foreign family units move into a region, most often than not resulting in the depopulation of the previous inhabitants of the respective region. An imperial power or in this case a State Apparatus is involved in providing the logistics for the immigration.

Cyber Colonialism on the other hand is the exercising of soft-power and colonizing or occupying the cyber space. Since the World Wide Web or the virtual world doesn't have geographical boundaries, the concepts of Cultural imperialism come into play here.

The Political economy of the media that disseminate the information also needs to be taken into consideration here. The multi-national companies, either by means of advertising revenue or by lobbying for legislations, through the state apparatus' (Althusser, 1970) exercise control over the media that disseminates the information. Hence there is in fact a situation where the control of information lies at the hands of the corporate, resulting in the manufacture of consent (Chomsky, 1988).

1.5 HORIZONTAL AND VERTICAL POWER STRUCTURES

Traditionally, State Apparatuses (Althusser, 1970) as well as mainstream organizations follow the vertical power structure which means that the flow of information is top to bottom and although implementations are done at the bottom, the decision-making is done at the top. This system is prone to red-tape and other time related inefficiencies. The horizontal power structure is a relatively new concept of operating, where instead of having a vertical chain of command; the actors involved in any task have equal say or decision making capabilities in the process.

Fowler (2009) suggests that the horizontal power structures that the terrorist organizations like the Hezbollah have are more efficient as compared to the vertical power structures that most conventional militaries have, with reference to information warfare because the red tape involved causes hindrance in the fast and efficient dissemination of information.

1.6 THE INTERNET AND SOFT POWER POLITICS

The extension of traditional warfare to the virtual and information fronts requires the parties involved in the conflict to control the respective fronts and develop infrastructure so as to sustain a war in the cyber front. (Fowler J, 2009).

This generates a need for soft power, or rather "attracting people to one's side without coercion" (Nye, 2004), while making an attempt to indoctrinate the very same people into an ideology by emphasizing 'the BAD' of the other conflicting power (THEM) and 'the GOOD' of oneself (US) and vice versa (Van Djik, 1998). Van Djik's ideological square which demonstrates how propaganda is used to manufacture public opinion and in the case the use of soft-power to "attract people to one's side without coercion" (Nye, 2004).

The Internet is supposed to be a platform where the freedom of expression is held paramount, at least that is the argument that the US and its other Western allies put forward when the MacBride Commission Report was published in 1980, which led to subsequent abandoning of the UNESCO by the US and UK.

The west and its allies also termed the Brazilian effort to create 'The New Internet' through the 'Marco Civil da Internet' as the 'Balkanization' of the Internet ignoring the Net Neutrality clause which the western-backed internet doesn't provide for, thereby sustaining the ever-increasing digital divide.

Under such circumstances if the Western Scholars complain about the terrorist organizations having better social-media management, it actually directs our thought process to the reasons as to how a man in a cave is able to out-communicate the world's leading Communication societies.

It's quite amazing that even the smallest of lapses in control over the internet tends to wreak havoc in the policy offices of the hegemonic powers. The need for maintaining the hegemony of culture through the internet seems to be extremely important to these powers.

1.7 CHOMSKY AND THE MANUFACTURE OF CONSENT

According to Chomsky (1988), the media is a tool of the power elites to indoctrinate the masses. The political economy of the media constitutes the corporate and the State Apparatuses (Althusser, 1970) and since the State Apparatus is also controlled by the Corporate in a capitalist set-up, either by means of lobbying or election funding, the media tends to be controlled either by legislation

by the State Apparatus, which is obviously influenced by the corporate, or by direct advertising revenue. Hence the objectivity of the information being disseminated by the respective media houses is definitely a concern.

1.8 PETER GOLDING AND CRITICAL POLITICAL ECONOMY

Golding (1991), suggests that the number of sources through which information is disseminated is very limited and since most of these sources are controlled by a handful of people who have privileged access to information, the final information that reaches the masses is in fact a tweaked up version of the original story, written to satisfy the needs of the power elites and the corporate who control the sources. The idea of gate-keeping (Lewin K, 1943) in media further consolidates the idea, as is suggested by Golding (1991).

1.9 CULTURAL IMPERIALISM AND HEGEMONY

Foucault (1979) suggests that ‘the truth’ is very culture specific and it cannot be separated from ideology, hence it coincides, also with various forms of hegemony. Gramsci (1937) in his prison notes further suggests that the Cultural Hegemony is extended by the west through the cultural institutions in order to maintain power in capitalist societies. The State Apparatus (Althusser, 1970) which is again in control of the corporate uses its cultural institutions in order to establish an idea of superiority which in turn translates to maintaining power and control over its own people for the corporate.

1.10 MEDIA DISCOURSE AND IDEOLOGY

Media discourse is the inclination of the ‘media texts’ that come out of various media organizations. There are various factors that influence the media discourse, of which political economy stands to be the most important. Chomsky (1988) mentions that, the corporate, either through the advertising revenue or with the help of the ideological state apparatus manages to exercise control over the masses. Ideology of the media organization or the Ideological State Apparatus also plays a very important role in determining the media discourse (Althusser, 1970).

The Media Discourse is dependent on a number of factors of which one of the most important is political economy. Chomsky (1988) suggests that the media is a tool at the hands of the power elite to indoctrinate the masses. Further, Golding (1991) suggests that the number of sources from which information originates is centrally controlled by a handful power elite which makes the media content prone to bias. Also, either through Advertising revenue or through the lobbying in the machineries of the ideological state apparatus (Althusser, 1970), the corporate manages to exercise control over the content coming out of the media organizations (Chomsky, 1988).

The media discourse could be analysed using a number of techniques of which the Critical Discourse Analysis is one of the most efficient techniques. Of the innumerable number of theoretical frameworks that could be used for the study, some of the most efficient ones are the Ideological Square (Van Dijk, 1998), Fairclough’s Inter-Textuality (1995), which has been employed for the conduct of this study and Lacau and Moufée’s Discourse Theory (1985).

1.11 CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Critical Discourse Analysis is a technique that is employed to gauge the media discourse of any media organization. There are various techniques that could be used to do a critical discourse analysis of media content. The ideological square (Van Dijk, 1998) which emphasizes on the positives of oneself (US) and negatives of the conflicting idea (THEM) and vice-versa is a very efficient technique to do the same. Lacau and Moufée’s (1985) discourse theory suggests that discourse is an ever changing process and not absolute, therefore a study of discourse can never be complete. Only a documentation of the change in discourse is possible.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section discusses the methodology adopted to collect the corpus for the study and the techniques employed subsequently to determine the media discourse of the western media organizations towards the portrayal of the human rights issues in Palestinian Authority areas. The thrust of the study is towards analysing the influence of the political economy on the media discourse and the role of the internet towards enhancing Western Hegemony and Cultural Imperialism on the cyber front.

2.1 DATA AND DATA SOURCES

The corpus of data used for the study has been collected using keywords such as: ‘human rights violations+Palestine’, ‘human rights violations+Israel’, ‘human rights violations+Gaza’. The search has been restricted to the first two pages of Google News Search. Relevant news articles, based on their association with human rights violations, all of western origin have been selected at random and placed in the corpus of study. A total of five news articles have been selected, as part of the corpus for the conduct of the

study. All effort has been made to keep the selection of the news articles as random as possible so as to obtain a result which is as unbiased as possible.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study employs the use of Fairclough's Inter-Textuality (1995) to determine the discourse of a respective media organization. Fairclough (1995) suggests that, quotations are highly effective in determining the discourse of any media content. While direct quotes provide for the least amount of scope for altering the underlying meaning of any text, indirect quotes tend to add the intent or ideology of the reporter or the media organization from which the text originates.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The political economy of the media, since they form the main backbone for the running of the media organization, in terms of finances, it greatly influences the content. The media discourse of any media organization is mainly dependent on the political economy of the respective media organization. Since these finances mainly come from the corporate, they tend to exercise substantial amount of control on the media texts originating out of the media organizations and hence, influencing the media discourse.

The 'Manufacture of Consent Theory' (Chomsky, 1988) which proposes that the premier function of the mass media is to serve the interests of the power elites and thereby to indoctrinate the masses to make them believe that the interests of the power elites are also their interests, although they in fact might be counterproductive.

In this case since there is huge Jewish lobby in the United States who are in fact the political elites, manage to control the discourse of the media and therefore also the policies of the government. Further, the number of sources that disseminate the information is very limited and at the hands of a handful power elites, since they have privileged access to information manage to control these sources in order to disseminate the information which is in support of their interests (Golding, 1978). This leads to the widespread indoctrination of the general masses.

Also, the internet, is being used as a tool by the power elites and the hegemonic powers to construct a truth that is in support of their interests. In this case the support to Israel is actually being legitimized (or the points of view of the Palestinian victims whose Human Rights have been violated are sidelined) from mainstream media.

Table 1: an analysis of the news reports from 5 eminent western media organizations based on Fairclough's Inter-textuality

Serial No.	Media Organization	Link	Actors who were directly quoted	Actors who were indirectly quoted
1	The Guardian	http://www.theguardian.com/global/2014/jul/23/un-high-commissionernavi-pillay-war-crimesisrael	Navi Pillay (UN High Commissioner for Human Rights), Israel's Envoy to UNHRC Eviatar Manor, Riyadh Malki, Foreign Minister, Palestine	Navi Pillay (UN High Commissioner for Human Rights)
2	The Weekly Standard	http://www.weeklystandard.com/blogs/humanrights-watch-does-israelagain_928119.html	The Australia/Israel and Jewish Affairs Council (AIJAC) in Melbourne	N.A
3	The Huffington Post	http://www.huffingtonpost.com/human-rights-watch/watch-its-illegal-in-isra_b_7056168.html	Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East and North Africa Director, Human Rights Watch	N.A
4	The Baltimore Sun	http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/opinion/readersrespond/bs-edisrael-letter-20150427-story.html	President George Washington	N.A
5	The Chicago Monitor	http://chicagomonitor.com/2015/04/illinoislawmakers-vote-todivest-from-companiesthat-support-humanrights/	N.A	Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

The Guardian quotes Navi Pillay, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights at least five times in the report which includes both direct and indirect quotes. Although Navi Pillay is the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights yet, owing to the Political Economy of United Nations itself, the views expressed by her should inevitably contain biased undertones.

The Israeli Envoy to UNHRC has also been quoted and in doing so, Israel is in fact represented on a platform to express the views of its people. On a single instance, Riyadh Malki, Foreign Minister of Palestine has also been quoted directly which again gives Palestine a platform to express their views. The report doesn't quote the voices of the very people whose rights are being violated, viz. the common people. The Western Hegemony is evident from the fact the most quoted of all the actors, is Navi Pillay.

The Weekly Standard, which is an American weekly, quotes The Australia/ Israel and Jewish Affairs Council (AIJAC) in Melbourne, directly. The bent of the discourse towards Israel is very much evident. The fact that, this was the only actor that was quoted in the report further consolidates the idea of Cultural Hegemony (Foucault, 1979), since there is an attempt to only present only a single side of the story. The Huffington Post, which is also a west-based news organization, quotes Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East and Africa Director, Human Rights Watch. Although Human Rights Watch is known to be an organization that is against Western Establishments, the political economy of Human Rights Watch also constitutes of the same western powers. So there is a clash of interests here. The Human Rights Watch always mentions of the violation of civil and political rights and pays little or no attention to social and economic rights.

The Baltimore Sun, although had used a quote, an inconclusive one, by President George Washington. We must understand here, that use of quotes such as that of George Washington provides for the consolidation of the American idea of Truth, which in other words points to cultural hegemony (Gramsci, 1937).

The Chicago Monitor quotes only Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and in fact only provides a platform for Israeli discourse. The nature of the report itself, calls for the lawmakers to dis-invest in companies that support the human rights regime in Palestine and provide for a more Israel friendly regime, owing to the fact that most of the investors are of Jewish origin.

3.2 CONCLUSION

The political economy of the media influences the media discourse. Infact the media is a tool at the hands of the power elite in order to indoctrinate the masses (Chomsky, 1988). In the case of this corpus of data, it is very much evident that only certain actors are being quoted which in other words means that only certain voices are being highlighted while ignoring others. This selective choice of the quotes provides for a certain discourse which supports the Western Cultural Hegemony.

In the case of the violation of Human Rights in Palestine and the subsequent quoting of only the actors having a western origin consolidates the fact that the views of the Palestinians are being suppressed and are out of the mainstream media. This further consolidates the idea of Fairclough's Inter-Textuality (1995).

Since internet is the source from which the news is being obtained therefore the nature of the news points to the fact that the internet is being used as a tool by the power elites in the west to indoctrinate the rest of the world and further solidify the already existent digital divide, which in other words means the flow of information (Golding, 1991).

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