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## **A Critique of BBC's Middle East News Production Strategy**

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the production strategies of the BBC and the impact they exert on the Corporation's news output, namely the coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We argue that the newsroom strategies the BBC has in place for the reporting of this sensitive story help shape and inform the discursive and social practices of its discourse. Critical Discourse Analysis literature abounds with studies on how a news outlet's final output can be used to unravel reporters' social and discursive world. While we agree with what the prevalent literature suggests about the 'dialectical' relationship between discursive and production strategies, we feel there is currently little to explain how the latter influence, inform and shape the former. We start from the media outlet's production world and pursue the process in which news is transformed progressively to the point it reaches the final shape. Besides textual material, we rely on interviews, internal style guidelines, and secondary data, focusing in particular on the role played by the recently inaugurated BBC College of Journalism. The paper sheds helpful light on the issues of power asymmetry in news production and how it is discursively realized in the BBC as an institution.

**Keywords:** BBC, College of Journalism, Critical Discourse Analysis, Israel, Palestine, institutional power

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## **Introduction**

The paper provides a critical discussion of the news production strategies of the British Broadcasting Corporation, the BBC, namely its coverage of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. There have always been concerns over the coverage of the Middle East for the BBC, and as Jeremy Hillman, Editor, BBC World, says, “The Middle East has been one of the areas of the most controversy ... an area where a huge amount of BBC attention has gone into at different levels.”

The paper aims to investigate the social and discursive rules of BBC’s English language report of Israel and Palestine. It wants to find out the type of discursive and social transformations the broadcaster employs in its coverage, the power and ideology behind them and how and why they are transformed into institutional reality. In its investigation, the paper places special emphasis on the BBC College of Journalism launched in 2005 following recommendations from the Ronald Neil Report to develop a far-reaching training program for the corporation’s journalists. The college offers a variety of journalism training through virtual and interactive learning modules. This paper is specifically concerned with the mandatory Middle East module which basically covers the terminology that is to be used when covering the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

The paper’s next section deals with a review of the relevant Critical Discourse Analysis literature. Then it moves to the actions the BBC has taken to formulate its discursive and social rules regarding the Middle East and the part its senior editors play in determining the terminology its reporters are to employ in their stories. Thereafter, it analyzes samples of internal guidelines and hard news stories in terms of lexis and clauses in light of the discursive and social actions undertaken by institutional actors and ends with the conclusion of major findings.

## **Literature review**

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) literature relies heavily on textual evidence to reveal the processes through which discursive and social rules and structures are enacted and how social power and inequality are produced and reproduced. As Mouzelis (1995: 139) says, “Rules are 100 per cent the medium and outcome of action” by systems or institutions. But how and why these discursive and social rules and structures are there? Who decides about them? From where do they originate? How do institutions ensure that they are included in the final news product? These are some of the crucial questions we feel critical research has hitherto overlooked. To answer them, we have taken the BBC English coverage of the Israeli/Palestinian struggle as a case study, and have supplemented our critical analysis with interviews, and diversified and triangulated our data to see how the social and discursive patterns of discourse come about. As Bourdieu (1991) says the structures and patterns of discourse are mainly the property of institutions and not texts.

The question of how ideological ideas help conceal social inequalities, and therefore help (re)produce inequitable social realities, have been most fruitfully broached by Marxist scholars (Althusser 1971; Callinicos, 1983; Pêcheux, 1994), and of these, Gramsci’s (1971) theory of hegemony – and more specifically, the distinction between force and consent – has arguably been the most enduring and analytically productive. Hegemony may be described as the process in which a ruling class persuades all other classes to accept its rule and their subordination (Gramsci, 1971). Put another way, hegemony is “a condition in which the governed accept or

acquiesce in authority without the need for the application of force. Although force was always latent in the background, hegemony meant leadership rather than domination” (Cox, 2004: 311). In the words of Gramsci:

The ‘normal’ exercise of hegemony [...] is characterized by the combination of force and consensus which vary in their balance with each other, without force exceeding consensus too much. Thus it tries to achieve that force should appear to be supported by the agreement of the majority, expressed by the so-called organs of public opinion - newspapers and associations (*Quaderni del Carcere*, p.1638, cited in Joll, 1977: 99)

A hegemonic ruling class is one that gains support and power for itself from other classes in three principal ways: a) taking into account the interests of the groups it exercises its hegemony over, b) publicizing the concessions it makes to show that it takes the interests of other groups into account, and 3) maintaining its hegemony via education, i.e. inculcating into the general public its ideas, tenets and values, mainly its claim to power (Gramsci 1971). Education, therefore, lies at the heart of hegemony, imparting unto the masses “the nature of authority” in general, and who should be “the authority” in particular (Cox 2004: 310). Journalists, having internalized “commonsensical notions of who ought to be treated as authoritative”, accept the frames officials impose on events and marginalize the voices that “fall outside the dominant elite circles” (Reese, 1990: 425). However, it should be noted that such elite ideological dominance arises “as a property of the system of relations involved, rather than as the overt and intentional biases of individuals” (Hall, 1982: 95). In short, the current practices of journalism play an essential role in maintaining authority within the political system, even if this ‘rule by consent’ “is always a partial, precarious and fragile state of affairs” (Jones & Collins, 2006: 33).

The critical knowledge we now have on the workings of news discourse is mostly based on media texts, the discursive and social structures of which critical analysts have used in order to arrive at the world of the individuals or institutions producing them. The trend has persisted despite repeated calls to have the linguistic and sociological positions of texts integrated. As early as 1966, Weiss (1966: 90ff) pointed to “[t]his problem of mediation ... between text and institution, between communication and structure, and between discourse and society.” Some 37 years later a different Weiss, writing with Wodak, finds that the issue of relations between texts and institutions is still ongoing, urging analysts to delve into the institutional and contextual worlds of the texts they study:

Communicative actions, social and symbolic practices are things that happen within wider frames of reference and contexts, such as in social systems, in a way that microcontexts would take place with macrocontexts or be embedded in them; hence it is not a box system in which one box contains another (Weiss and Wodak 2003: 10).

One way to understand Weiss and Wodak’s “non-box system” is to view discourse in terms of three intertwined levels: texts, discursive practices and social practices (Fairclough 1995). Prominent critical analysts and social philosophers (c.f. Fairclough 1989, 1995, 2003; Foucault 1972) argue that these levels are dialectically interrelated, with each level shaping and being shaped by the other. But social practices which are the work of institutions or systems, in Habermas’s (1984) terms, are not isolated planets. They may be difficult but not impossible to fathom. This paper tries to address these concerns, relying specifically on the access its first author had to the institutional corridors of the BBC to assess the hitherto missing gap in CDA media studies of the dialectical relationship between news discourse and social practice, and examine how far this giant media institution is involved in the production and reproduction of the Middle East communicative act.

We start from the world of institutions because we are mainly interested in the institutional production of discursive and social power in the BBC. According to van Dijk (2003: 88), a vital element of critical approach is to investigate

the relations between knowledge and social groups and institutions: which groups or institutions set the criteria for the very definition of legitimization of knowledge, and which are especially involved in the distribution of knowledge – or precisely in the limitation of knowledge.

The news media are rarely balanced. Relations are set in a way favoring the most powerful, not only of the institutions producing news but also of the individuals, groups and states which the news covers. Although one of CDA's fundamental concepts, power remains a complex issue. Here we will distinguish three of its most general senses: power to, power over and power behind (Lukes 1974; Fairclough 2003). The first sense sees power as a matter of A getting B to do something which otherwise B would not do. This is a simplistic view of power which CDA generally rejects since it takes "no account of the fact that power may be, and often is, exercised by confining the scope of decision-making to relatively 'safe' issues" (Bachrach and Baratz 1970: 6).

In the other two senses, power behind and power over, A acts as part of an institution "creating or reinforcing social and political values and institutional practices." Decisions and actions come about only when A sees them as "comparatively innocuous" regardless of B's attitude. In the course of time, A's actions and decisions are no longer seen as the outcome of individual endeavor. They are generally viewed as socially structured and culturally patterned behavior of groups and practices of institutions. A exercise power over B "by influencing, shaping or determining his attitudes, beliefs, and very wants" (Luke 1974: 21-23). To our knowledge, there is a dearth in CDA literature of studies examining notions of power and ideology from institutional perspectives, particularly of media behemoths like the BBC.

## **Data and method**

To understand the production strategies of a giant media institution like the BBC, one has to get to the roots of the unequal distribution of discursive and social power, which critical analysts have been striving to uncover mainly through textual evidence. Besides textual material (hard news discourse), we resort in our analysis to the backstage practices (Chilton 2004) the BBC has in place to inform and 'naturalize' its Middle East discourse. We see the analysis of text as a final product not sufficient to locate institutional and social meaning. For this reason, we triangulate our data and supplement textual material with interviews, documents – namely BBC's internal guidelines, editors' blogs – commentaries senior editors write on a variety of editorial and coverage issues, as well as the observations the paper's first author gathered in his two tours of the BBC. In the first (May 2007), he interviewed 11 editors. In the second (December 2007), he interviewed the director of the BBC College of Journalism, a College's senior editor and the Middle East editor who helped design BBC's Middle East teaching module. The paper's ethnography shares some common critical features of CDA because both CDA and critical ethnography target power and control and how powerful groups sustain social inequality and injustice (c.f. van Dijk 1993; Thomas 2003; Madison 2005).

The BBC editors and their respective editorial positions, who were specifically interviewed for the purposes of this research are as follows:

1. Vin Ray, Director, BBC College of Journalism
2. Kevin Marsh, Editor, BBC College of Journalism
3. Jeremy Bowen, BBC Editor, Middle East
4. Malcolm Balen, Senior Editorial Adviser
5. Jerry Timmins, Head of Region, Africa and Middle East
6. Hosam el-Sokkari, Head, Arabic Service
7. Adam Curtis, World Editor, News Interactive
8. Jeremy Hillman, Editor, BBC World

### **The discursive and social dimension of BBC discourse: the actions**

The following two sections examine the institutional actions and actors with power, mainly 'power over' and 'power behind' the news discourse.

#### *4.1 BBC College of Journalism*

The college was created in 2005 in response to a recommendation by a review commission set up in February 2004 to examine the lessons the BBC could learn from the Hutton Inquiry. The Hutton Inquiry released its report in January 2004 and was critical of the BBC's coverage of a government dossier on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. The Inquiry rattled the BBC, prompting the broadcaster to set up its own review to identify what it can learn from the criticism. The review was lead by Ronald Neil, BBC's former Director of News and Current Affairs, and included a former Editor of ITN and BBC Editorial Executives.

The report by Ronald Neil, generally referred to as the Neil Report, was published on June 2004 and made several recommendations on how to strengthen BBC journalism. At the heart of these recommendations was the proposal that the BBC should establish "a formal college of journalism under the leadership of an academic principal, organized as an industry-wide training campus ... to ensure that all BBC journalists were being trained to deliver the BBC's core values at every level in their career" (Neil Report: 2004).

As far as the authors are aware, there is nothing in the critical discourse literature examining how the College delivers its instruction modules, and how it produces and disseminates them. There has always been training and development inside the BBC but it had never operated on a formal, organized and compulsory basis until the launch of the College. The BBC has up to 10,000 reporters, if we include employees whose titles do not name them as journalists but in fact do journalism. The College gives a variety of courses some of which are not strictly related to the content side and attended by employees not directly involved with news. For instance, the two-week mandatory course on Safeguarding Trust has so far been completed by nearly 20,000 employees. The College runs a leadership course for the increasing numbers of executives with editorial responsibility. There are courses on ethics and values and one on law. One particularly interesting course, The Journalism Tutor, advises students on writing headlines and snaps from a breaking story. The College's mandatory online legal training course comprises four modules of 40 minutes each and is to be completed in six months. About 20,000 staffers have done the course.

The College has a separate module on the coverage of the Middle East and specifically the Palestinian and Israeli struggle. This module is mainly based on the Middle East glossary called *Israel and the Palestinians: Key terms*, which in essence form the bulk of the broadcaster's Middle East internal guidelines. This is a compulsory module which the corporation's core constituency of nearly 7,500 journalists have to take. Since most modules are online, there is very little need for traditional classroom teaching. And instead of bringing hundreds of journalists to London from across the U.K. or the world, it is faculty members who go to them. The College wants to spend most of its money on training and very little on overheads, "which is a better use of the license fee which is after all the British taxpayers' money," says Vin Ray, the director. So, it is not a college in the 'brick and mortar' sense nor in conventional sense that it awards degrees or has registered students; rather the College exists as an institutionalized attempt to instill the values of BBC journalism in its journalists.

The College went public in December 2009. Previously, its access was limited to BBC employees. The public in Britain have free access to the site since the BBC, as a public broadcaster, has no right to charge its own license fee payers. People outside Britain will have to pay to access the site. But a recent search of the website inside Britain has shown that the BBC still keeps its Middle East module and the related glossary of key Middle East terms outside the reach of the public, whether inside or outside Britain.

#### *4.2 The Middle East module*

For the BBC, "The Middle East" is almost tantamount to the coverage of the struggle between Israel and Palestine. The College's Middle East online module takes journalists through the language and a brief history of the conflict and some of what it sees as "sensitive and danger" points of reporting it. The College's editors say up to 6,000 journalists have taken the Middle East course. The Corporation spends a lot of effort and time on how to 'balance' its Middle East reporting where, according to College's Editor Kevin March, "even a pathetic mistake or a slip of the tongue is bound to generate a barrage of letters." Asked whether it was possible to have a close look at the module, the College's director Ray replied:

Absolutely. There is absolutely nothing on the site that I would feel worried about. What on earth would we tell our journalists that we wouldn't want anyone to know? [And] I mean the BBC is a massive organization so anything that is on that site in some senses is already public because the place leaks.

Most of the tasks and exercises revolve around language and specifically the Middle East glossary – a massive entry of words and phrases which the broadcaster still keeps confidential apart from two dozen terms it has opted to post on the website for the public (see below). The module sticks very closely to the glossary, its social interpretations and discursive suggestions.

Four senior BBC editors are involved in the writing of the glossary but it is mainly the brainchild of Senior Editorial Adviser Malcolm Balen, nicknamed 'the BBC Tsar' by the British media (Economist 2003). Everything in the module and anything new added to it must be first sanctioned by these four editors, known in the corridors of the Bush House and the White City in London as 'the four wise men'. No such rigor and oversight is required for any of the other modules. Asked why the Middle East was placed under such a scrutiny, Ray said,

“Because this is such a contentious subject, we wanted to make sure that it was absolutely right and fair”.

### **The discursive and social dimensions of BBC discourse: The actors**

Here we would like to discuss in some detail the forces determining the discursive and social practices of BBC Middle East discourse. These include mainly individual editors appointed to monitor the coverage and panels set up to examine it.

#### *5.1 Sir Quentin Thomas report*

This report was published on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2006. It was written by a panel the BBC Governors (Trust) had commissioned in October 2005 and was chaired by Sir Quentin Thomas. Though the panel’s review of Middle East reporting covered the BBC U.K.’s domestic public service output, many of its findings and recommendations were also adopted by the network’s international broadcasting services. The report, copy of which is available on line on BBC website, says: “Apart from individual lapses, sometimes of tone, language or attitude, there was little to suggest systematic or deliberate bias” (Thomas 2006: 3).

Of the report’s 38 pages (excluding appendices), the section on language is of direct relevance to this study. “Language is an issue at the heart of impartiality,” says the report (34). The reason for this central role “is because words can convey judgment and value separate from or additional to their apparent or surface meaning. Some words become over-familiar, or abused or irretrievably loaded” (op.cit). This, in a sense, mirrors what critical analysts say of both the latent and explicit power of language to label and characterize either negatively or positively. While calling for the BBC to “get the language right”, the report fails to give examples of the loaded terminology in the coverage and provides no alternatives of what to choose in case words become a barrier to proper understanding.

More interesting and more important is the view the report has on power and hegemony the two sides of the conflict have on the ground and how this reverberates in discourse. It embraces discourse that typically reflects power disparities on the ground because the conflict

by its nature, impose[s] some constraints and imperatives of its own [...] There is an asymmetry of power between the two sides and this is reflected in a number of ways which impact on the journalistic enterprise [...] the two sides are not on equal terms.  
(13)

The report received mixed reviews in international media. The Guardian (May 3, 2006) had concluded BBC coverage was ‘misleading’. The BBC (May 2, 2006) said the report urged the corporation to improve both its view and coverage of the Middle East. The Jerusalem Post (May 2, 2006) gathered that BBC’s coverage was “flawed” but not “biased”. The Times (May 3, 2006) saw that BBC news “favors Israel” at the expense of Palestinian view. The Guardian (May 2, 2006) focused on the report’s recommendation with regard to terrorism “Call terrorist acts terrorism, BBC told”. The Independent (May3, 2006) highlighted the report’s criticism of the coverage. In America, the Washington Post’s (May 9, 2006) Jefferson Morley wrote about BBC’s faults in covering the conflict.

#### *5.2 The Balen report*



The Balen report is controversial in the sense that it has created a heated debate in the press. The BBC has adamantly insisted on its secrecy despite a court battle which, though it won, cost British taxpayers more than £200,000 (more than \$307,000). The 20,000-word report is written by Senior Editorial Adviser – and ‘wise man’ of the BBC – Malcolm Balen. Most media coverage surmises that the BBC wanted to keep it under wraps because it points to bias against Israel. The Israeli *ynetnews* (October 24, 2006) said the BBC was seeking to suppress the report because it discovered that its reporting was biased against Israel; the *Independent* (March 28, 2007) said there were allegations that the fight to keep the report secret was due to “bias against Israel”; the *Mail online* (April 27, 2007) said the BBC was to do everything to keep the “report on anti-Israel bias secret”; *Haaretz* (February 2, 2007) struck a similar tone.

But Balen, unlike Sir Quentin Thomas, is an institutional actor and the only insider with a say on what discursive and social practices are to be present or absent in the news output. In BBC corridors, he is more known for his Middle East glossary than his report. Sir Quentin Thomas recommended that the BBC make this “key points” handbook public as one of the measures to increase audiences’ understanding of the context (Key terms: 2006). Discursively and socially, the glossary is vital for both the coverage of the conflict and the Middle East teaching module.

Balen does not hide the fact that the glossary is a “deliberate and conscious” attempt by the BBC to instruct journalists about what type of discursive item or term to use and when and how. But the guide is much more than individual words. It incorporates historical, political and legal background to the conflict. It advises journalists not only on what word or adjective to use but also what phrase and occasionally clause or sentence to include. In other words, the glossary is both a discursive and social guide to the conflict. The glossary in a sense predefines the conflict for the journalists and its discursive patterns and social contexts are reinforced in the teaching module. Says Balen, “We have certainly in the Middle East, have had much more concerted attempt to have one BBC language.”

### *5.3 Head of Region, Africa and Middle East*

The Head of Region, Africa and Middle East is a senior editorial position held by BBC’s ‘wise man’ Jerry Timmins. As one of the four actors at the center of the institutional hegemony in the BBC with regard to the Middle East, Timmins says the glossary has been compiled so that journalists can be clear about their language. He gave the example of “barrier” which the BBC prefers to use. He said, “The Israelis tend not to call it a wall because they see it has connotation of Berlin Wall (sic), negative connotations that they don’t want to put across. But the Palestinians may well call it a wall.” Asked whether it was part of BBC strategy to avoid using the protagonists’ language regardless of accuracy, Timmins said, “We are sensitive towards our audiences ... you try to choose the term that is less loaded and more literal and closer to the object or issues you are trying to get across.”

### *5.4 The head of BBC Arabic Service*

The head of the BBC Arabic Service Hosam El Sökkari is another institutional actor who was involved in the drafting of the glossary. Sökkari agrees that BBC’s Middle East module centers on the glossary Balen put together in coordination with other senior editors. But no attempt has been made to render the glossary into Arabic although nearly 70% of Arabic

news output is a direct translation from English. Sokkari says the glossary does not only advise on what terms or phrases to use, "This piece of work is not just about terminology. It explains the context and we (in the Arabic service) use a language that is comparable to what is meant by the English terms that are there ... We have a consistent editorial line ... We are consistent across different languages."

### 5.5 Middle East Editor

The fourth BBC Middle East 'wise man' is Jeremy Bowen. His jurisdiction includes oversight of the Jerusalem bureau, the BBC's largest in the region, and advises on sensitive issues of the conflict. He is the only senior editor who is directly involved in the design and writing of the Middle East module and has prepared the videos the College uses as teaching aids. He says the BBC is very careful with the use of language because it wants "to avoid characterizing people."

Bowen's position as Middle East Editor was created in August 2005 in response to the Balen report. His duties include ensuring that the coverage meets the standards Sir Quentin Thomas panel set up for impartiality. So the post is comparatively new and is still evolving. Bowen currently leads a monthly editorial meeting in London for an overview of the coverage. Throughout the conversation, Bowen insisted that the BBC is "not in the business of characterizing people negatively."

## The discursive and social dimensions of BBC discourse: Actions

In this section we will introduce the discursive and social actions the BBC has in place and which it wants its journalists to use as reference points when covering the conflict. At the heart of these actions are Balen's aforementioned glossary known as *Guide to Facts and Terminology on Israel and the Palestinians: Key terms* (2006) and the compulsory Middle East teaching module which essentially 'inculcates' many of what the tutors see as the 'most sensitive' among its terms. We shall first concentrate on phraseology and round up with clauses which the actors say there is no attempt to have them imposed on the discourse.

### 6.1 Vocabulary

The choice of vocabulary testifies disequilibrium in the social relations of power, and the decision to employ certain words and discard others plays a vital role in "inculcating and sustaining or changing ideologies," says Fairclough (2003: 9). The choice of lexical items has the potential of characterizing people in different ways. Discourses, and mainly through the management of vocabulary, 'word', 'lexicalize' and even 'standardize' the social world (c.f. Fowler et al. 1979; Gumperz 1982; van Dijk and Kintsch 1983; Fowler 1991).

The first lexical items students confront in the module are *Eretz Israel* and *Palestine*. Only *Palestine* is included in the glossary portion on the net. The glossary advises journalists to *be careful with the use of the word "Palestine"*. Thus, "Palestine" as a reference to Palestinian land or territories is shunned in BBC news discourse and all the documents it has on the net and is almost uniformly replaced by "Palestinians" because *There is no independent state of Palestine today ...* Does the BBC pursue the same discursive policy in reporting other world conflicts? There is no independent state of Northern Ireland, there is no independent state of Chechnya, there is no independent state of Kurdistan, and similarly of Abkhazia and Ossetia (only Russia and quite very recently recognized them as independent states). The way the

BBC handles the two terms is a classic example of the power asymmetry Sir Quentin Thomas refers to in his report and how it is represented discursively. For a critical analyst it is a classic example of how hegemonic power (Israeli) is given preferential discursive treatment at the expense of the dominated (in the case of occupied Palestinians). *Palestine* is explained in five lines but *Eretz Israel* has 18 lines of historical background all immersed in Biblical discourse as the following six lines exemplify: *This phrase literally means the Land of Israel (Hebrew: Eretz Yisrael) and refers to the ancient kingdoms of the Bible. According to the Bible, the Kingdom of Israel was the nation formed around 1021 BC from the descendants of Jacob, son of Isaac, who was given the name Israel, meaning struggles with God. (Following the death of King Solomon, in around 922 BC, the realm was divided into a Northern Kingdom, known as Israel and a Southern Kingdom, known as Judah.)*

It is culturally and institutionally accepted at the BBC that the sides cannot be reported equally due to the social, political, military, and economic power disparities on the ground. The social asymmetry, according to Balen, is the reason for the lack of balance in discourse. He says: "Israel clearly has more power to do things, because it is a bigger country, more money, more support from America, more technological developments, more weaponry, all the rest of it." The discursive asymmetry is clearly discernible in the way the BBC explains other religious terms in the course. The historicity, religiosity and sanctity of the main holy sites for Muslims and Jews, *the Temple Mount* or *Haram al-Sharif*, *Dome of the Rock*, *Western Wall* permeate with Biblical references. The Temple Mount is described as *the Abode of God's presence ... where the redemption will take place when the Messiah will come*. It is described without attribution as *a profound national symbol and for them (religious Jews) and secular Jews, giving up the Temple Mount is unthinkable*. There is twice as much explanation for the significance of the sites to the Jews than Arabs and Muslims.

The BBC says it cannot make the module publicly available because of copy right and license-fee issues. But no reason is given for keeping the glossary confidential. A request by the paper's first author for a copy of the glossary was denied. Besides terms, the module includes multiple choice questions with key to the right answers. One such question has several versions on how to describe Hamas, for example, and the students have to choose the right one. There are exercises on how to build cues in case of major news such as suicide bombing, how to issue bulletins and back them by leads, how to treat flashes from news agencies, the rules to pick up news guests on major stories and how to write straplines for television.

## 6.2 The abbreviated version of the guidelines

BBC's Middle East internal guidelines (the glossary) have simultaneously generated a lot of interest and controversy. The giant public broadcaster has persistently resisted demands to make this particular handbook public. Due to space constraints, we provide a brief critical analysis and only cite three terms here. Readers can retrieve the abbreviated 24-online item glossary from:

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/newswatch/ifs/hi/newsid\\_6040000/newsid\\_6044000/6044090.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/newswatch/ifs/hi/newsid_6040000/newsid_6044000/6044090.stm)

- **SETTLEMENTS** - ... Settlements are residential areas built by Israelis in the **occupied territories**. They are illegal under international law: this is the position of the UN Security Council and the UK government among others - although Israel rejects this.

- **TERRORISTS** - We should try to avoid the term, without attribution. We should let other people characterize while we report the facts as we know them. We should convey to our audience the full consequences of the act by describing what happened. We should use words which specifically describe the perpetrator such as "bomber", "attacker", "gunmen", "kidnapper", "insurgent" or "militant."

Fowler's (1990) "authority differential" is vividly displayed in the glossary. Note the 'warning' nature of the command and instruction discourse *be careful, avoid saying, avoid the phrase*, etc. Note likewise the frequent use of obligatory modal verb *should*. But what is more important is the way the writer or writers of the glossary assume the role of omniscient 'scholars'. They, and not BBC reporters in the field, say what words and phrases Middle East stories should include, e.g. the suggestions on how to describe *INTIFADA*. They occasionally 'prescribe' readymade clauses (quotes), such as the suggested samples in *GREEN LINE* and *SETTLER NUMBERS*.

BBC's discursive policy, as editors point out, is to shun the use of value-laden words such as 'TERRORISTS' unless attributed. But the guidelines are not consistent in this regard as they allow the use of lexical items which are no less loaded such as *militant, insurgent, Islamist, bomber*, etc (see 7.1). But what is striking about these words is that they arise mainly in the discourse describing the Palestinians fighting Israeli occupation. They and others like *extremist, fundamentalist*, etc. are not deployed to characterize other voices in discourse even if those voices do similar things or harbor similar ideologies (see the analysis in sections 6.1 and 6.2). Also, the glossary is straightforward about the role of political power, the British government, which decides the license fee and the Foreign Office which finances the World Service –BBC's international broadcasts. The views of U.K.'s Foreign Office are clearly expressed in the glossary:

For example, the Foreign Office says it "regards the status of Jerusalem as still to be determined in permanent status negotiations between the parties. Pending agreement, we recognise de facto Israeli control of West Jerusalem but consider East Jerusalem to be occupied territory. We recognise no sovereignty over the city".

### **How hegemonic production practices impact news discourse**

In this section, we will discuss how the above institutional actions and actors are intertextualized in the final news output. The discussion draws on the textual analysis of 20 BBC online stories, ten of which report Palestinian casualties and the other ten report Israeli casualties. The target is to see if the power differentials or asymmetries at the institutional level creep into the final news output and, if so, at which discursive or structural levels.

The corpus includes 9,636 words, 537 paragraphs and 946 lines. Statistically speaking, each paragraph comprises nearly 18 words of about two lines each. On average, each story has close to 500 words. The frequency difference with regard to the number of paragraphs, lines and words in the two sets of stories, is rather negligible. There are 4,634 words, 254 paragraphs and 402 lines in stories on Palestinian casualties. Israeli casualties are covered in 5,002 words, 283 paragraphs and 544 lines.

#### *7.1 Lexical hegemony*

Lexical hegemony is the first social and discursive feature that attracts attention. It simply demonstrates that there are two distinct discursive categories at the level of vocabulary which see the two protagonists from two different angles. Simply put, the lexis at several levels characterizes the Palestinians as the ‘bad guys’ and the Israelis as the ‘good guys’. In the 20 stories the BBC avoids using the word ‘occupation’ in its own lexical characterization. The word is only mentioned three times – each time as part of a direct statement quoting Palestinian sources.

The Palestinians are, discursively and socially, at a disadvantage. They and their groups are invariably labeled as ‘militants’, ‘gunmen’, ‘bombers’, ‘suicide bombers’, etc. The word ‘militant’, for example, is used 90 times in the corpus. But more interesting is the way the BBC collocates both adjective and noun forms of the word, generating expressions like ‘Palestinian militant groups’, ‘militants’, ‘a militant’, ‘Palestinian militants’, ‘a militant group’, ‘the Islamic militant group’, etc. ‘Bomber’ is used 49 times with collocations such as ‘master bomber’, ‘female suicide bomber’, ‘a Palestinian suicide bomber’, ‘the apparent bomber’, ‘the bomber’s home’, ‘the alleged bomber’, ‘ Hamas woman bomber’, ‘male bombers’, ‘female bombers’, ‘women bombers’, ‘bombers’, etc. In contrast, Israeli actors responsible for killing and injuring Palestinians are not reworded or re-lexicalized (Fowler: 1991).

## *7.2 Clausal hegemony*

Lexical items mainly represent ideas about the world and how the speaker or writer characterizes it. In clauses or sentences speakers and writers arrange these items in patterns that may reveal their presuppositions about the world. Critical analysts have dwelt at length on the interaction between the discursive and the social at different textual levels, namely vocabulary and clauses (see Richardson, 2007; Fairclough 1995 and Chilton, 2004). We will first examine the headlines of our 20-story corpus and the top four paragraphs, particularly the leads, as they, according to BBC’s Adam Curtis (World Editor, Interactive), are used throughout the broadcaster’s different and multiple platforms, mobile, television, text, etc. Note the following two sets of examples. The first, (A), is drawn from stories reporting Palestinian casualties and the second, (B), from Israeli casualties.

A.

### **1. Deaths mount in attacks on Gaza**

An Israeli air strike on the Gaza City home of a member of the Palestinian militant group Hamas has killed nine members of the same family. (12 July 2006)

### **2. Israel strikes Gaza after siege**

Israeli forces have killed at least 17 people in Gaza on one of the deadliest days for months in the territory. (4 November 2006)

### **3. Palestinians die in Gaza violence**

At least five Palestinians have been killed by Israeli military action in the Gaza Strip as troops pressed on with operations against armed groups. (24 November 2006)

B.

### **4. Bomb kills clubbers in Tel Aviv**

A suicide bombing has killed four and injured about 30 outside a popular seafront night club in the Israeli city of Tel Aviv, police report. (26 February 2005)

### **5. Bomber targets Israeli shopping mall**

A suicide bomber has killed himself and two Israelis - including a small child - in the town of Petah Tikva, near Tel Aviv. (27 May 2002)

#### **6. West Bank gunmen kill six Israelis**

Palestinian gunmen have shot and killed six Israelis in an ambush near Ramallah in the West Bank. (20 February 2002)

A detailed critical analysis of the two sets of texts above is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is worthwhile to say a word or two about the striking social and discursive asymmetries they display. In (A), the perpetrator or agent causing the casualties is not there in the three headlines. The patients or victims either are nominalized as in 'deaths' in (1) and if they are mentioned as in 'Palestinians' in (3), they are part of the circumstance in a complex and convoluted noun phrase which to anyone with decent knowledge of English would attribute their killing to violence originating in Gaza itself and not by Israel. The examples in (B) are discursively and socially the opposite. The perpetrator causing the casualties is easy to identify. The inequality is not confined to headlines. The leads in (A) are discursively constructed in a manner which clearly says what motivated the Israelis to cause the casualties. In (1) the Israeli strike was aimed at 'the Gaza City home of a member of the Palestinian militant group Hamas' in the third the casualties happened 'as troops pressed on with operations against armed groups'. Motivations like these, discursively realized mainly in complex noun phrase and parenthetical subordinate clauses are a feature of BBC's coverage of Palestinian casualties. But they do not surface in covering Israeli casualties as the examples in (B) demonstrate.

### **Conclusions**

In light of our discussion and analysis we find that BBC's English Language reporting of Israel/Palestine to have the following discursive and social interactional processes, some of which contradict commonly held views of media discourse in critical literature. Discursive formulations and their social implications, despite their being the work of only a handful of powerful individuals, are transformed into collective, authoritative ideological moves through institutional reality. Specifically, the BBC's Middle East news strategy relies heavily on two of the three senses of power (Fairclough: 2003), namely 'power over' and 'power behind'. 'Power over' is evident in the influence some BBC actions and actors wield in determining which discursive and social patterns are to be used. 'Power behind' is evident in the power asymmetries which differentiate the voices the BBC covers. The discursive work is aimed at building support for the institution ostensibly through consensus. But the analysis shows consensus comes about through control. The language of the internal guidelines gives little discursive leeway for the reporters and editors to maneuver and the College's module is designed to provide social and discursive support. The actors at the heart of laying down discourse production strategies position themselves as the consensual and collective identity of the institution – the owners of knowledge – with the right to construct social and discursive reality for the others.

The analysis demonstrates Bourdieu's (1977) notion of how the structures and practices of discourse, of which listeners, readers and viewers are rarely aware, are part of the 'invisible censorship' certain institutional actors impose on the news both directly and indirectly. Bourdieu outlines the limits modern institutions impose on contemporary journalism and shows how institutional practices constrain the public's vision of what constitutes social reality. In a media giant like the BBC, most practices are discursive, communicating meaning

through language. The social reality of BBC's practices regarding the coverage of the Israeli/Palestinian struggle emanate from the actions of particular social actors. The analysis departs from Bourdieu in the sense that BBC's discursive practices are not improvised or contingent. They are deliberate, planned by institutional actors to reproduce the symbolic and material orderings of the social world of the conflict. BBC's discursive practices, regardless of the intentions of its social and institutional actors, tend to reinforce the discursive claims of the most powerful side in the conflict.

Our analysis therefore complicates the notion of hegemony as consent, introducing a number of institutional and discursive levels into the relations of dominance that are frequently absent from academic discussion of journalism and hegemony. Indeed, critical research has focused strongly on hegemony-as-consent and has overlooked how coercion or force is practiced in discourse (c.f. Gramsci 1984; Blommaert et al. 2003). Examination of the institutional – and *pedagogic* – discourse internal to the BBC shows that consent and coercion are mixed, with BBC employees unable to do anything to change the discursive and social reality with which the institution views the conflict, even if they are aware of the inefficiencies and to a certain extent 'unfairness' of some discursive practices. Hence, the relationship between the discursive and social patterns on the one hand, and reporters on the other, borders on coercion.

In our case we link coercion to institutional hands with the power to force their (or the institution's) discursive and social practices across the organization. In short, BBC journalists and editors involved in reporting Israel and Palestine are all required to successfully complete a training course in 'the BBC way of reporting' the region – a training course founded on adherence to an ideological vocabulary agreed upon by four men, according to subjective criteria (albeit criteria that are then institutionally objectified through intertextual ratification). BBC journalists are then expected to reproduce, and *disseminate*, this ideological vocabulary in their reporting irrespective of their own views of its legitimacy. Accordingly, we hope that our analysis of institutional actors and actions has thrown some light on the "chains" and "interconnections" (Fairclough 1995: 747) between the text and the social. Power and hegemony in news discourse do "not fall from the sky" (Heller 2003). Analysis of the institutional discourse of the BBC demonstrates that power and hegemony are produced and reproduced by powerful actors and actions, and in ways that match existing power disparities of the voices reported.

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