

## Bill Clinton on the Middle East: Perspective in Media Interviews<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

*A corpus of four TV and two radio interviews given by Bill Clinton after the publication of his memoirs 'My life' in June 2004 is examined for expressions of perspective on the Middle East. Bill Clinton's personal perspective is clearly reflected in his choice of referencing terms for parties in the Middle East conflict: The Israeli and Palestinian points of view are designated by first-personal and third-personal pronominals, respectively. A similar relationship is to be found for his references to the U.S.A. and Iraq. His perspective is manifested in his references to countries, people, and individual political leaders. Such references thus become expressions of a more general frame of understanding of power relationships in discourse, in which a progressive, advanced world is compared with a primitive, violent world. Implications for a theory of personal perspective in discourse and the dialogic nature of perspective are discussed.*

### Introduction

In the following, we investigate the influence of the personal perspective of speakers on the expression of power relationships. We argue that talk at the micro perspectival level reproduces the macro frame of the larger power relationship between the USA and the Middle East. A corpus of four TV and two radio interviews given by Bill Clinton subsequently to the publication of his memoirs as 'My Life' (2004) is used and compared with similar passages in the book.

We argue that Clinton's perspective is built within the general frame of a) depersonalizing the Arabs, b) supporting Israeli policies, c) linking the Middle East to Christian symbols. Clinton achieves that through a) naming such as groups and places (Israel/Palestine, Israeli/Palestinian), b) address forms (first name/last name) and through the gendered link, c) through the use of impersonal 'they', and lastly through conflation of Iraq/Palestine and Saddam/Al-Qaida.

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The concept of personal perspective has become well established within phenomenology (e.g., Mead : 1934/1962: 89). Every utterance expresses a physical and socio-cultural orientation on the part of the speaker, a point of view on his or her part (see Suleiman & O'Connell 2003). Earlier research (e.g., O'Connell & Kowal 1998) has shown that markers of orality and literacy, in addition to referencing (including primarily both naming and pronoun reference; see Suleiman & O'Connell 2003), do indeed index personal perspective. Previous research has also shown that perspective is dialogic in nature (e.g., O'Connell, Kowal, & Dill 2004). Dialogism is understood within a Bakhtinian (1981) framework as engaging the intersubjective relationships of the participants in an interaction.

The present paper builds on this earlier research to explore the expression of socially constructed power relations in terms of personal perspective. Accordingly, we hypothesize that Bill Clinton's personal perspective on the world expresses the dominant American political culture, and more explicitly that his perspective on American politics in regard to the Middle East is an indicator of a power relationship: Instead of challenging the currently existing power relationship between 'West' and 'East,' he recreates it in his political discourse. In short, we find referencing a legitimate indicator of Bill Clinton's personal perspective.

A broader background for our argumentation is to be found in Bourdieu (1991, 1998): Media networks are part of the political landscape. And because they compete with one another to capture the same audiences, they become 'mirror images of one another' (Bourdieu 1998: 72). Bourdieu also suggests that, as a part of the political structure, the media have a selfish interest in *not* challenging extant power relationships in society. Hence, our hypothesis that Bill Clinton and his interviewers will reflect the current socio-culturally constructed power relationships in society – and more specifically between the U.S.A. and the Middle East.

Our methodology is in accord with critical discourse analysis (CDA), but not with Schegloff's (2002: 21) conviction that ethnomethodologists are able to arrive at "the understandings of *the participants*." It is certainly true that interaction is "grounded in those very understandings," but no empirical methodology ever allows immediate access to them. Hence, we contend that it is not possible to analyze Bill Clinton's discourse without taking into account the fact that he is a former U.S. president, and without taking into account the role of the U.S.A. in world affairs. Even were Bill Clinton and his interviewers to make no reference to this background, it would still remain a most important factor in the participants' 'sense making' of the interview. For example, the topic 'The Couch' (see O'Connell & Kowal 2005) in the present corpus is not significant just because some husband is having marital

troubles, but because of the implications it had for the President of the U.S.A. and for his efficient execution of his internationally important responsibilities. In other words, the international socio-cultural milieu influences the expression of Bill Clinton's personal perspective in these interviews, and this perspective is more important than the specific format of the interview. Talk is not only an activity "in its own right," but also it is an activity "that can be appropriated and made subject to interpretations and relevance assessments that are far beyond the (direct) participants' concern. 'Talk-in-interaction' is very often accompanied by 'talk-out-of-interaction'" (Blommaert 2005: 56). Blommaert adds that 'talk-in-interaction' is at the same time subject to interpretations beyond the immediate demonstration of the relevancies of the talk by the participants themselves. Hence, in the following we concentrate on Bill Clinton's perspective toward the Middle East, and more specifically toward the Middle East peace process and the U.S. intervention in Iraq. While our current research may not involve CDA methods, it does relate to CDA literature in that it assumes that power relations are discursively expressed and reproduced. However, we remain independent of the internal debates among CDA researchers.

### Referencing

It has long been accepted as established in linguistics that pronouns and address forms reflect power relations in society (Brown & Gilman 1960). This function of social deixis in pronouns, terms of reference, and forms of address led Benveniste (1971: 271) to declare that the nature of pronouns is still subject to debate. The present authors are of the same mind with respect to both pronouns and other terms of reference. A cursory glance at any major linguistic journal confirms that many articles are currently being published on the social and interactional meaning of pronouns and terms of reference (e.g., Epstein 1998; Ritva 2001).

Pronoun use involves the human consciousness and a sense of selfhood or 'subjectivity,' hence the suitability of pronouns for the study of perspective and the discourse of power relations. According to Benveniste (1972: 221), subjectivity is "the capacity of the speaker to posit himself as 'subject'." It is not experienced as feeling, but rather as "the psychic unity that transcends the totality of the actual experiences it assembles and that makes the permanence of consciousness" (221). Benveniste (1971: 226) also argues that "language is so organized that it permits each speaker to *appropriate to himself* an entire language by designating himself as *I*." The use of pronouns and address terms reveals the speaker's personal perspective by forging closeness or distance with other groups, or as Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1995: 470, cited in Suleiman & O'Connell unpublished manuscript) argue:

“How people talk expresses their affiliation with some and their distancing from others – their claim to membership ... in certain communities of practice and not others.”

Referencing also reveals the larger frame of power relations among individuals as well as among different groups in society. Mey (1993: 210) argues that:

By speaking (or not speaking) about some vital issues, or by speaking about them in a special way, categories and attitudes are created that are conducive to keeping the power alive that created the ‘discursive space’ in the first place. Participation in discourse happens on the premises and conditions of the powerful: as a result, those that are powerless are *ipso facto* disempowered to change their powerless condition, since their only way of speaking (‘discoursing’) about power is that imposed upon them by the powerful.

### **The Political Interview**

We investigate herein the link between perspective and power relations in one type of media genre: the media interview. Terry Gross (2004: x), a National Public Radio (NPR) interviewer opens her book ‘All I did was ask’ with the following remarks: “The interviews on *Fresh Air* sound conversational. But they bear little resemblance to the conversations we have in daily life.” Gross adds that the interview is its own unique form of interaction. The interviewer violates all the rules of basic conversation styles and asks penetrating intimate questions of total strangers. Gross attributes this anomaly about the interview to the pressures the networks work with: The networks have to make the interview newsworthy, in other words, marketable.

In contrast to Gross, Fairclough (1994) and Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) argue that public discourse in general and political discourse in particular have moved to a more conversational style. In their search for political domination, politicians are pressured to speak in a more conversational style so that they reach out to the widest array of audiences. Further, public discourse generally and the discourse of politicians in particular are a mismatch of styles taken from different genres and oriented toward a wide range of audiences. This has resulted according to these authors in a democratization of public discourse in late modern societies. People from different educational and social backgrounds are able to participate in public life because of the diverse discursive options that are open, i.e., late modern societies are witnessing a ‘proliferation of public spheres’ (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999: 5; see also Habermas 1989). Robin Lakoff (1991) expresses

a similar sentiment and argues that the political interview specifically has moved to a more conversationalized style (see also Atkinson 1984).

O'Connell and Kowal (1998) tested Fairclough's (1994) thesis by 'operationalizing' the conversational style. They found that the dominance of markers of orality over markers of literacy does reflect the conversational style. Their markers of orality are the following: pronominals, turn-initial words, hesitations, questions, emphatic and/or repetitive *yes* and *no*, personal reference utterances (e.g., I think), relative numbers of syllables spoken, and interruptions and overlaps in turn-taking. However, they did not find any evidence of such conversationalization of public discourse and the political news interview.

Further research by O'Connell and Kowal (2003; see also Alber, O'Connell, & Kowal 2002; Kowal & O'Connell, 1997; O'Connell & Kowal 2005; O'Connell, Kowal & Dill 2004; Suleiman, O'Connell, & Kowal 2002) has shown that markers of orality/literacy are also markers of perspective. More recent research has shown that referencing (primarily pronoun and name reference) is also an indicator of perspective (Suleiman & O'Connell 2003; Suleiman & O'Connell 2007).

On the other hand, Clayman and Heritage (2002: 55 f.) argued that the news interview in Britain is interactionally different from the news interview in the USA. The British news interview has become more adversarial over the decades, whereas its American counterpart has become more deferential. Clayman and Heritage further argue that the news interview attempts to strike a balance between adversarialness and deference in order to maintain a certain journalistic neutralism. We argue in this paper that perspective is the most significant phenomenological tool that participants in an interaction utilize to construct and make sense of their own reality. We also argue that perspective supersedes stylistic considerations about the adversarial or deferential nature of the news interview. Assumptions about the world supersede the interviewer and interviewee's attempts at cooperating to maintain the neutralistic stance of the interview (see also O'Connell & Kowal: 2006).

### **Perspective**

Perspective engages Goffman's (1974: 1) macro question 'what is going on, here?' in interaction at the micro level of the production of utterances. We argue further that 'what is going on, here' is wrapped in a complex state of socially constructed power relations.

Perspective implies that every human communication reflects a point of view. This point of view is drawn from the physical and socio-cultural environment. Graumann (2002: 25, cited in Suleiman & O'Connell 2003: 403) defines it as follows: "Any form of representation by

which the parts or the object or the elements of a complex state of affairs and their interrelations are construed and presented as if seen from a given point of view.”

Perspective is an integral and necessary condition of human consciousness. Graumann and Kallmeyer (2002: 2) appropriately distinguish between perspective setting, which is epistemological, and perspective taking, which is interactional. Perspective implies dialogism because of its very definition, involving other persons' points of view: Humans “learn what others see from their vantage-points and they learn to take the others' perspectives” (1). In this regard, Foppa (2002: 17) states: “We cannot help to see things from a certain standpoint *and* in relation to a given horizon. And whenever two people are engaged in a dialogue they are displaying their respective perspectives on the issue in question.”

Dialogism is understood within a Bakhtinian (1981) framework as involving all forms of human interactions (Linell 1998: 9). Linell defines dialogism as “any dyadic or polyadic interaction between individuals who are mutually co-present to each other and who interact through language (or some other symbolic means).” A basic assumption of dialogism is that it is socially constructed. This concept of dialogism is more than a re-assertion of dialogue itself. Dialogism constitutes the epistemological basis for dialogue and asserts the essentially interactional nature of dialogue in contrast to monologue. One can well argue that spoken discourse is always in principal dialogical; true enough, but at a theoretical level, it is usually not engaged dialogistically. We accept the premise that perspective is dialogic and further argue that because of its dialogic nature, perspective is, at least partially, constructed by the power relations that exist in society. We take referencing as an indication of this socially constructed nature of perspective. In this respect, Graumann and Kallmeyer (2002: 1 f.) argue:

One and the same thing can be viewed, judged and evaluated from more than one viewpoint, but, above all, one and the same thing, person, event and state of affairs can be named and communicated in different ways. Names or, more generally, words for the same can be so different that the sameness of the differently named is perfectly hidden – reason as well as motive for many a heated argument.

This dialogic nature of ‘perspective’ is also captured by Mead (1934/1962: 89). Meaning is “indicated to others while it is by the same process indicated to the indicating person.” In other words, we do take the other person's perspective as we display our own, Both Mead and Bakhtin emphasize the socially interactive nature of this “heteroglossia” (Bakhtin, 1981: 428), whereas our emphasis is on the perspectival, i.e., a psychological parallel to the

sociological. Perspective is per se psychological, but not isolated from the contextual world at all. Insofar as it is sociologically dependent, it is also constructed in the course of dialogue

Research on perspective follows two main themes: a) language structures that reflect perspective, b) linguistic practices by individual speakers that can reflect perspective (see Graumann and Kallmeyer 2002: 4). The current research focuses on the latter. Moreover, perspective is primarily implicit (see Linell 2002: 44) and dependent on the general interpretative frame (Linell 2002: 46). We take framing as the set of possible interpretations of a situation drawn from the socio-cultural resources of the individual (Goffman 1974, but see also Wolfsfeld 1997).

In sum, a) perspective is dialogic, thus understood within the frame of meaning that embodies it, at both the macro cultural level and the micro interactional level, b) is commonly implicit. We argue in the following that perspective can be sufficiently studied through reference. We do that by examining Bill Clinton's use of reference in his television interviews on American networks. Bill Clinton's references to the Middle East (Iraq, Palestine, Terrorism) represents a perspective that divides the world into 'us' and 'them'. Moreover, this relationship between 'us' and 'them' is informed by a larger general American frame of how people and events in the Middle East are understood.

### **Media Reflections of Power Relations**

Van Dijk (1987: 41) puts it very generally: "Much of the news is not so much about happenings or events, but about what other people, typically the powerful and the elite, say or write." He further argues (Van Dijk 2001: 361) that studies of power relations in society and more specifically relations of ethnic or racial inequality "reveal remarkable similarity among stereotypes, prejudices, and other forms of verbal derogation across discourse types, media, and national boundaries." Teo's (2002: 360) evidence in this regard concerns the representation of Vietnamese gangs in the Australian media: "A systematic 'othering' and stereotyping of the ethnic community by the 'white' majority." He found what he refers to as 'over-lexicalization' in the descriptions of the Vietnamese, i.e., a heavier description of the less powerful, e.g., a Vietnamese lawyer or 'a female lawyer' (374). Wodak and Matouschek (2002: 252) found in general that whites in Austria portray ethnic conflicts in oppositional terms, assigning positive self presentation marked by the 'we discourse' in portrayal of the conflict (see also Wodak & Reisigl 2001).

Teo also found that Vietnamese were generally indirectly quoted, whereas the whites were directly quoted (see also Wodak 2002; Van Dijk 1987, 2002 for similar findings). Similarly,

Suleiman *et al* (2001) found that, during the first three months of the Aqsa Intifada, CNN regularly quoted more Israeli officials and laypeople directly than they did their Palestinian counterparts.

There has been extensive commentary on the news coverage of the Middle East in Western media. Michael Hudson (1980: 92) found that news coverage in the U.S. stereotypically portrayed the people of the Middle East unfavorably and that this portrayal was chronic and consistent, whereas other groups (e.g., Germans and Japanese during WWII) were only intermittently so portrayed – evidence “that Americans are misinformed and uninformed about the peoples of the Middles East” (see also Fulbright 1975; Said 1981, 2004a, 2004b).

Philo and Berry (2004: 136) from the Glasgow media group also studied the news coverage of Israel in the British media and found therein both a neglect of the history of the conflict and a bias toward the Israeli point of view: “The Israelis used their commanding position in TV interviews and in the supply of statements to the media.” They also state (251) that the close relationship between Britain and the USA resulted in a similar bias in the USA in favor of the Israeli perspective. Arafat was blamed by the Israeli media for the eruption of the second Intifada (see Dor 2004), and the British and USA media followed suit.

## **Data Analyses**

### *The Data Base*

The following article is based on analyses of four TV interviews (Larry King, CNN, June 24, 2004; Katie Couric, NBC, June 23-4, 2004; David Letterman, CBS, CBS, August, 3, 2004; and Dan Rather, CBS, June 20, 2004) and two radio interviews (Juan Williams, NPR, June 23-4, 2004; and Terry Gross, NPR, June 24, 2004) with Bill Clinton just after the publication of his book ‘My Life’ (2004). Accordingly, passages from the book also enter into our discussions. In a USA Gallup Poll for June 21-23, 2004, 61% of the people interrogated believed that Bill Clinton was appearing on these interviews to improve his self-image and to give an account of his own perspective on the events of his presidency. We analyze only excerpts of the interviews and the book that deal with the Middle East. Sometimes these excerpts are no more than two minutes of an entire interview. Note that the Middle East as a geographic location is dealt with in these interviews in terms of Iraq and Israel/Palestine. We excluded references to Afghanistan since it is not part of the historic Middle East.

Note also that these interviews are taken from mainstream American media channels. In reviewing the data we found few differences between media formats (radio versus television



versus print) and genre (serious versus entertainment), with regard to Bill Clinton's handling of the above-mentioned topics.

### *Israel/Palestine*

The background for the topic of Israel/Palestine is Bill Clinton's involvement in the Oslo Accords signed at the White House in September 1993. Bill Clinton brought Yitzak Rabin, the then Israeli prime minister, and Yasser Arafat, the then head of the Palestine Liberation Organization, to sign the declaration of principles for future negotiations based on mutual recognition. Towards the end of Clinton's second term in office, he brought Arafat and Ehud Barak, the then prime minister of Israel, to meet at Camp David in July 2000 to complete final status negotiations. The parties failed to reach an agreement and Clinton and Barak publicly blamed Arafat for the failure. The second Palestinian Intifada broke out two months later.

In the index to Bill Clinton's book 'My Life,' there are 43 entries for Israel and none for Palestine. However, there are 40 entries for Palestinian and none for Israeli. This extreme asymmetry in references to Israel/Palestine also characterizes all six interviews. And the conflict itself is referred to with the generic and euphemistic 'Middle East Peace Process.' The conflict itself is thereby referred to as geographically diffuse – neither focused nor urgent. In the few specific place references in the interviews, Israel is mentioned as a place; Palestine is not (e.g., in the Larry King interview, Israel is mentioned once, Palestinians three times, and 'they' with reference to Palestinians as a group once). It should be noted that both Palestinians and the Arab media refer to Palestine when referring to the Palestinian homeland. Said (2003: xxxiv) has called attention to the historic origin of this namelessness of Palestine for others at the very eve of the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948:

Because Palestine is uncomfortably, indeed scandalously, close to the Jewish experience of genocide, it has been difficult at times even to pronounce the name *Palestine*, given that entire state-supported policies by enormous powers were dedicated to making sure that the name, and more so the memory and aspiration – to say nothing of the often startling similarity between namelessness and rejection – simply did, would, could not exist. But we are after all a coherent people (see also Kimmerling & Migdal 2003: 136 f.).

By way of contrast, Jimmy Carter's (2006) recent controversial book includes Palestine in the very title.

Furthermore, the terms 'Israel' and 'Israeli' generally precede 'Palestinian' when used in collocation with it in the interviews. The one exception to this sequencing is to be found on the part of Bill Clinton in his interview with Katie Couric. It should be noted, however, that none of these words occur in half of the interviews, i.e., with Letterman, Gross and Williams. In Clinton's (2004:542) book, the sequencing also places 'Palestinian' second, specifically with reference to the signing of the Oslo Peace Accord at the White House in 1993. Goffman (1977:303) notes that the analogous sequential preference for 'man' before 'woman' indicates the subordination of women in society.

Overall, in the six interviews, Israel was referred to three times, Palestine not at all; Israeli(s) three times, Palestinian(s) four times; and the impersonal and generic 'they' four times with reference to the Palestinian people, not at all with reference to the Israeli people. Suleiman and O'Connell (2003) had also found this impersonal and generic 'they' with reference to the Palestinian people on the part of Colin Powell in a CNN interview with Larry King. Powell also referred to Iraqis and terrorists with this impersonal and generic 'they,' whereas 'they' was always used to refer to specific individuals, not to the group as such when reference to Israelis or to American allies was intended.

In short, Palestine is a nonentity in both Bill Clinton's interviews and in his book; the word is simply never used. Instead, Clinton contrasts Israel with Palestinians. And he referred to the Middle East twelve times in the course of the six interviews in reference to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Such a generic reference to a Middle East conflict is clearly a perspective that does not place the Palestinians at the center of the conflict; their national grievances are instead subordinated, made to seem remote and indeed nonexistent. A similar observation is found in Tavis Smiley's interview with former secretary of state Madeleine Albright on National Public Television on July 25, 2005. Smiley asks Albright a question about the current US government involvement in the Palestinian/ Israeli conflict. Not only does he name it 'crisis in the Middle East', but he also refers to 'Israel' as a place name and to the 'Palestinians' as a people in the generic sense. Albright's response goes as follows; (silent pauses are indicated in parenthesis in seconds)

**Excerpt # 1: Madeleine Albright (MA) with Tavis Smiley**

MA well Secretary Rice has just come off a trip there (0.28 s) uh and so it's hard to say that (0.19 s) uh people aren't there but I don't think they're engaging it enough it's a day-to-day business (0.55 s) very hard for a secretary of state to do it on a day-to-day business and I don't think (0.32 s) that they have uh engaged a

high-level envoy (0.26 s) that can be there on the ground doing the day-to-day kind of negotiations as necessary

Not only does Albright shift from place 'Israel' to people 'Palestinians' and stumble and hesitate in the process, but she distances herself from both the place with a generic reference ("there" three times), and from the Republican administration with third person generic references ("they," "they're").

#### *Yasser Arafat and Yitzak Rabin*

Yasser Arafat, as a figurehead representing the Palestinians in the peace negotiations, is depicted in Bill Clinton's interviews and in his book as: (a) damaging the peace process, (b) irrational, (c) untrustworthy. These depictions are in close accord with the findings of Wodak and Matouschek (2002:245) regarding neo-racism against foreigners in Austria, in accord with which foreigners were described as: (a) damaging the economy, (b) different, and (c) involved in negative activities. These descriptions are also in accord with Van Dijk's (2001:361) powerful prediction that verbal derogations that depict unequal power relations transcend both ethnicities and discourse types.

More specifically, in reference to the White House signing ceremony of the Oslo Accords on September 13, 1993, Arafat is described in Clinton's book (2004) as "a great showman (544), "trying to wiggle out of" (943), "confused," and "not wholly in command of the facts" (944); "like Rabin, he promoted the peace Process, but with an edge" (544), and "now in a rhythmic, singsong voice, he spoke to his people in Arabic" (544); finally, "he looked uncomfortable and skeptical" (544). In his interview with Terry Gross, Clinton expands this depiction of Arafat. Words spoken laughingly are underlined:

Arafat was never kind of a linear thinker in the way that you know this interview that you're havin' with me goes from A to B to C you know but not and I just think something spooked him him out of it and I think it had something to do with the fact that he was getting older and probably did not carry around in his own mind as many of the details uh and as the sort of general concepts of what we were tryin' to do as he already had

In contrast, Yitzak Rabin is described as "sounding like an Old Testament prophet" (Clinton 2004: 544) and in the following terms:

I had admired Rabin even before meeting him in 1992, but that day, watching him speak at the ceremony and listening to his argument for peace, I had seen the

greatness of his leadership and his spirit. I had never met anyone quite like him, and I was determined to help him achieve his dreams of peace.

In the part of the book where Clinton describes the Oslo Accord ceremony (542-545) Rabin is more cited (directly and indirectly and in positive terms) by Clinton than is Arafat. An example, is the citing of the content of the conversation that took place between Clinton and Rabin during the lunch after the ceremony (545). In comparison, there is only a brief mention that he met with Arafat after the ceremony, with no indication to what went on between both during the meeting (545). Moreover, the invocation of imagery from the Old Testament blurs the lines of religion and politics for the largely religious American audience, in sharp contrast with the association of Arafat with mistrust and 'wiggling out of' a deal. Clinton's religious references are quite in accord with Israelis' consistent use of religious arguments to gain the sympathy of the American public and an advantage over the Palestinians (see Khalidi 2004). Clinton's disdainfulness shows itself in his reference to Arafat not as 'President,' but as 'Mr. Chairman,' as Rabin too insisted on calling him during the Oslo Accords (see Aburish 1998). The Arabic media meanwhile referred to Arafat consistently as 'President' Arafat.

The other time the Oslo Accord ceremony is described is in the interview with Dan Rather. Again, actual conversations between him and Rabin are cited, but no equivalent is there with Arafat. A Palestinian perspective of the signing ceremony for the Oslo Accords was completely missing from the six interviews and from Clinton's book. To illustrate the lack of a Palestinian perspective, we cite the writer Barghuti (2003: 177 f.) whose book 'I Saw Ramallah' was well received in Arabic. He pinpoints this bias in this manner:

So when Yitzhak Rabin spoke so eloquently of the tragedy of the Israelis as absolute victims, and the eyes of his listeners in the White House garden and in the whole world got wet, I knew that I would not forget for a long time his words that day: . . . I felt the tremor that I know so well and which I feel when I know that I have not done my best, that I have failed: Rabin has taken everything, even the story of our death. . . . He presented us as the initiators of violence in the Middle East and said what he said with eloquence. It is easy to blur the truth with a simple linguistics trick: start your story from "Secondly." Yes, this is what Rabin did.

The other time the Oslo Accord ceremony is described is in the interview with Dan Rather. Again, actual conversations between him and Rabin are cited, but no equivalent is there with Arafat.

Bill Clinton (2004:543) describes in his book and in his interview with Dan Rather how he prevented Arafat from Kissing Rabin. The traditional Arab gesture of friendship is here reduced to the mechanics on how to prevent the incident. Clinton clearly takes Rabin's perspective and does his best to prevent Arafat from kissing Rabin. The possibility of instead convincing Rabin to accept this gesture of good will from Arafat seems never to have been entertained. In his interview with Dan Rather, Clinton illustrates with gestures how he prevented Arafat from kissing Rabin. Excerpt # 2 describes the transaction in detail. Therein, Clinton's perspective is revealed in the referencing of Rabin and Arafat and by laughter. Again, laughter is notated by underlining, uncertain passages as a number of syllables in parentheses (e.g., 2 syl). Otherwise, punctuation is not used, in order to avoid the possibility of biased interpretation on our part:

**Excerpt # 2: Bill Clinton (BC) with Dan Rather (DR)**

BC it seems so easy now how they'd do that but at the time it was revolutionary you know the idea that they were gonna come and sign a deal together before the whole world

DR and even shake hands

BC yeah so first thing we had to deal with was were they gonna shake hands at all and I could tell Rabin didn't want to do it the Arafat was very much unpopular very unpopular in Israel I said to him I said uh we were talking I said Yitzak you know you're gonna shake his hand and he says no oof an' you know and he went to (2 syl) I said Yitzak you got to shake his hand you're gonna have a billion people looking at you on television I said what are you gonna do I've got to shake hands with him you got to shake his hand so he said in his wonderful deep voice all right all right but no kissing hu because you know this traditional Arab greeting is a kiss on the cheek

....

BC so I shook hands and you come in and he put his hand like this in my elbow and he says if you've got your hand in your elbow he can't kiss you so we practiced it so then we

DR so you gave him a stiff arm wi- your left hand while you give him a shake with your right

BC yeah you can say that so it's like an affectionate thing like I'm so happy you know  
if you if you can fake it good it looks like...

In this excerpt, Bill Clinton directly cites his conversation with Yitzak Rabin with regard to the handshake with Arafat. In doing so, he takes Rabin's perspective rather than Arafat's. Moreover, Rabin is addressed in direct speech by his first name, possibly to demonstrate affection and closeness. And Clinton laughs as he relates the conversation between himself and Rabin to Dan Rather. O'Connell and Kowal (2005) comment on this particular instance of laughter as revealing a perspective on Clinton's part that does not respect Arafat – and by extension, the national claims that he represents. Clinton further illustrates how his national security advisor taught him a trick that would prevent Arafat from kissing Rabin during the ceremony. Clinton directly cites his national security advisor to Dan Rather and concludes with “so we practiced it.” The ‘we’ here signifies the collaborative work Clinton had to do in order to prevent Arafat from kissing Rabin (see also O'Connell & Kowal 2005). Arafat is discussed here in the third person singular, whereas Rabin and the national security advisor are referred to in the first and second person. Clinton's (2004: 543) book confirms the above-mentioned observations further:

We practiced it a couple of more times until I felt sure Rabin's cheek would remain untouched. We all laughed about it, but I knew avoiding the kiss was deadly serious for Rabin. . . . Mercifully, it was over before long, and we walked downstairs to start the ceremony. Everyone else walked out on cue, leaving Arafat, Rabin, and me alone for a moment. Arafat said hello to Rabin and held out his hand. Yitzhak's hands were firmly grasped behind his back. He said tersely, “Outside.” Arafat just smiled and nodded his understanding.

Notice once again the reference to Rabin with his first name, the mentioned attributes of Rabin (firmness, terseness), and Arafat's subordination as a participant who had to abide by whether and how Rabin was going to shake his hand.

Clinton comments further to Dan Rather (Excerpt # 3) on the Camp David meeting of himself, Arafat, and Barak in 2000 shortly before the beginning of the Second Intifada: (once again, underlining in the excerpt indicates laughter)

**Excerpt # 3: Bill Clinton (BC) with Dan Rather (DR)**

BC I'm sure that all the rest of us made our mistakes along the way but it's was a an  
error of historic proportions and the evidence of it is that about a year after I left

office the mm Mister Arafat said he wanted the deal he said I'm ready to accept the parameters for final negotiation that president Clinton laid out so I I don't think I need to say anything else to show that it was a mistake and by the time he said he wanted it he had an Israeli government that wouldn't give it to him and an Israeli public that no longer trusted him it's tragic

Herewith, Clinton blamed Arafat for the failure of the Camp David talks (see Agha & Malley 2001; Khalidi 2004). Barak had offered Arafat a deal that would have ended the conflict and Arafat refused to sign it. Notice the formal address form in which Clinton refers to Arafat in relation to himself, perhaps as a distancing strategy between himself and Arafat. Clinton laughs at the mention of Arafat's later relenting and proposing to accept Barak's deal for ending the conflict. Again, the laughter might reveal a perspective of Clinton that does not correspond to Arafat's or to the Palestinian national grievances. He further comments that the Israeli government won't offer Arafat any more deals and that the Israeli public no longer trusts him; in so doing, he takes the Israeli perspective without giving any representation of the possible motives behind Arafat's initial refusal of Barak's proposal and without discussing what such a proposal would have allowed the Palestinian people to have or not have.

In Clinton's (2004: 943) perspective, the Palestinian refugee rights become merely a maneuvering act of Arafat:

Arafat was also trying to wiggle out of giving up the right of return. I reminded him that Israel had promised to take some of the refugees from Lebanon whose families had lived in what was now northern Israel for hundreds of years, but that no Israeli leader would ever let in so many Palestinians that the Jewish character of the state could be threatened in a few decades by the high Palestinian birthrate. There were not going to be two majority-Arab states in the Holy Land; . . .

Arafat was trying 'to wiggle out of giving up the right of return' of the Palestinian refugees. Note also that Clinton uses 'Israel' as metonymy for the Israeli leadership at Camp David, thus presenting a perspective of generality and a firm stance on the Israeli part. He also invokes the religious claim that is Jewish in essence, but he blurs it with Christian imagery by making reference to the Holy Land, thus reinforcing to a majority of Christians as his target audience the belief that the religious demand of the right of Jews supersedes any other issue such as the humanitarian refugee issue. Clinton (2004: 944) uses the demographic argument that many Israelis use that puts the Israeli majority of population in the land as a priority over any other humanitarian consideration: "In December the [Palestinian and Israeli] parties had met at Bolling Air Force Base for talks that didn't succeed because Arafat

wouldn't accept the parameters that were hard for him." Clinton insists thereby on Arafat's missed opportunity of accepting Barak's offer. He does not discuss the logic of the refusal on the part of Arafat and the Palestinian team, as if the refusal is beyond the realm of logic. He also does not discuss what and how the Palestinian team had wanted to negotiate as a final agreement. He concludes:

In February 2001, Ariel Sharon would be elected prime minister in a landslide. The Israelis had decided that if Arafat wouldn't take my offer he wouldn't take anything, and that if they had no partner for peace, it was better to be led by the most aggressive, intransigent leader available. Sharon would take a hard line toward Arafat and would be supported in doing so by Ehud Barak and the United States. . . . (Clinton 2004: 944)

Again, Clinton shows a perspective that favors the Israeli stance. Perspectively, it amounts to the following: Arafat must accept Barak's peace proposal; there will be no further peace proposals. A Palestinian perspective, or a perspective that discusses Palestinian living conditions under occupation, simply is not represented. Sharon is described as taking a 'hard line,' as a 'most aggressive,' 'intransigent' leader – the leader that the Palestinian people deserve to have to deal with, because the Palestinian leader, Arafat, had refused a peace deal offered by Barak.

#### *Iraq, Saddam Hussein, and Osama bin Laden*

Saddam Hussein is often mentioned by first name (overall five times as compared with six mentions of his first and last name). This is in accord with the way in which the Western media generally refer to him. Further, Iraq is identified with Saddam Hussein. He is used as a metonym for the Iraqi people and Iraq. This is similar to the way in which Colin Powell refers to Iraq and the Iraqi people with Larry King in an interview at the time the USA military was getting ready to attack Iraq (see Suleiman & O'Connell 2003). Clinton (Excerpt 4) responds to a question from Juan Williams about the type of advice George Bush is getting on foreign policy:

#### **Excerpt # 4: Bill Clinton (BC) with Juan Williams (JW)**

JW who are you talking about Condoleezza Rice

BC Condi Cheney and Wolfowitz and secretary Powell I think was saw the world more like I did hm but I don't want to say that I don't want to get him in trouble but hu but but I but the point is a lot of these folks had been really important players



in the Reagan-Bush years and it was natural for them to be fixated on Iraq and on missile defense

JW natural because of the first Gulf war or because of the threats against his father

BC because because of the first Gulf war because uh tsk before the first Gulf war in the eighties the Reagan administration supported Saddam even when he used chemical weapons and they he sort of didn't stay bought then he pulled that stunt on uh you know trying to kill the president's father so all I was trying to do is to use some portion of the time I had with the president-elect to tell him that based on my reading of the intelligence for eight years and dealing with the real problems I thought that he would have more trouble with Osama bin Laden and al Qaida with the absence of a peace process in the Middle East...

Notice the repair from 'they' to 'he' in Bill Clinton's second turn. This repair from 'they' (a term reasonable in reference to the Iraqi people generically) to 'he' (in reference to Saddam Hussein himself) provides evidence for a blurred boundary between Saddam Hussein and Iraq/the Iraqis in Clinton's perspective. Such language use narrows the dissonance with respect to the morality of the attack on Iraq (with a total of 20 references to the Iraqi people in the generic 'they'). Note that we have mentioned earlier that the Palestinian people are also referred to in the generic 'they' (a total of four times) by Bill Clinton, but the Israeli people are never referred to in the generic 'they.'

In addition, in the same turn in which Clinton discusses the situation in Iraq, he mentions Osama bin Laden and al-Qaida and the peace process in the Middle East all at once. The blurred boundaries between Iraq, Palestine, and terrorism constitute a perspective that several American politicians and media personalities have displayed. This may indicate in turn a coherent American foreign policy with regard to the Middle East. Suleiman and O'Connell (2003) found, for example, that Colin Powell makes similar references to the three above-mentioned entities in contrast to his references to people and countries of the West: The generic impersonal 'they' is reserved for people from the Middle East, whereas people from Western countries are referred to as specific persons, and the 'they' (with reference to people of the West) refers to specific people and is used individually. This usage may intensify the already existing discourse of the 'we' and 'they' in Western political and media talk after 9/11: The 'we' represents the free democratic world, and the 'they' represents the faceless, violent, irrational, and chaotic world that exists in the East and that is obviously not 'us'. Overall, there were 30 mentions of the generic 'they' in the six interviews in reference to terrorists at large (see Caldas-Coulthard 2003 for further discussion on the post 9/11 use of

'we' for the West vs. 'they' for the Third World, particularly the Middle East in Western media and public discourse).

In his first turn in Excerpt # 4, Clinton refers to personalities in Bush's administration as 'Condi Cheney and Wolfowitz and Secretary Powell'. The only woman is mentioned with a diminutive form of her name, whereas the men are referred to with their family name, with or without a title. Similarly, Wardhaugh (2002) had stated that women are referenced or addressed by their first names more often than are men in public settings. But a comparison between Saddam Hussein and Condoleezza Rice with respect to personal references is even more noteworthy. The tendency to refer to people from the East in terms similar to references to women might well be thought of as part of a more general inclination to 'feminize the East.' By way of contrast, the West is 'energetic, inventive, progressive' and Westerners are

open, honest, sexually normal, monogamous and Christian. While the 'West' is the home of rationality and science, the 'East' staggers under the yoke of irrationality, superstition and tradition. By distributing these qualities between the two domains, the moral universe of the orient comes to bear the characteristics which in Western culture are allocated to women while the rational 'West' is gendered as male. (Marcus 2001: 109-110; see also Said 1978).

In this respect, Massad (2004) goes even further: "The mixture of sex and violence in an American (or European) imperial setting is characterized by racism and absolute power is more uniform than the American or British media may think."

In addition, Bill Clinton describes Iraq as 'a very tough neighborhood' in the following excerpt with Larry King (LK):

**Excerpt # 5: Bill Clinton with Larry King (LK)**

LK let's first things first though we've got major news today out of Iraq uh today a coordinated bombing and ambush across Iraq ninety people were killed today in Mosul Baghdad Ramadi Falluja and Ba'qubah I think I'm pronouncing that right what do you make of this

BC tsk I think first of all it's a very tough neighborhood it always has been when uh the first President Bush was concluding the gulf war mm there were a lot of people in the State Department and elsewhere who said that they shouldn't even

destroy the whole republican guard and run the risk of Iraq breaking up because there'd be a lot of internal violence so you see that uh it also is more vulnerable now to infiltration from outside terrorists who wanna stir things up I don't know how many of those there are...

This overlexicalization (e.g., Vietnamese gang, female lawyer, instead of simply saying gang, or lawyer is a marker of social prejudice and lack of equality, [Teo 2002]) is further intensified by Clinton's statement that 'it always has been,' as if this is the natural course of the region without any provocation from any outside force. Notice again the linking of terrorism with Iraq in the same turn. Iraq with its rich history and affluent literate society prior to the first Gulf war is reduced to a place of violence, terrorism, and 'tough neighborhoods.' Bill Clinton's depiction exemplifies Said's (2004: 216 ff.) critique regarding the one-sidedness of the American media with regard to Iraq:

Yet, since the period before the first Gulf War, the image of Iraq as in fact a large, prosperous, and diverse Arab country has disappeared; the image that has circulated both in the media and policy discourse is of a desert land peopled by brutal gangs headed by Saddam. That Iraq's debasement now has, for example, nearly ruined the Arab book-publishing industry, given that Iraq provided the largest number of readers in the Arab world; that it was one of the few Arab countries with a large, educated, and competent professional middle class; that it has oil, water, and fertile land; that it has always been the cultural center of the Arab world (the Abbasid Empire, with its great literature, philosophy, architecture, science, and medicine was an Iraqi contribution that is still the basis for Arab culture); that the bleeding wound of Iraqi suffering has, like the Palestinian cavalry, been a source of continuing sorrow for Arabs and Muslims alike – all this is literally never mentioned.

In the Larry King interview, Bill Clinton refers to Iraq as "the Iraqi thing." Iraq the place, history and people are all reduced to a 'thing.' Perhaps, Clinton's derogatory references to his affair with Monica Lewinsky and to Kenneth Starr are structurally similar to his way of describing Iraq: "The Lewinsky incident" (with Juan Williams), "this guy Starr" (with Larry King), and "the Starr imbroglio" (with Katie Couric).

The blurring of boundaries between Iraq/Palestine and terrorism is also established in the following two excerpts from the interview with Katie Couric and the interview with David Letterman:

**Excerpt # 6: Bill Clinton with Katie Couric (KC)**

KC did you sense during the course of your administration that Osama bin Laden would change the world in a very bad way

BC mm-hm I thought he was a big player uh f- from fairly early on in the beginning we thought bin Laden was we knew of quite a bit about him starting in my first term in but we thought in the beginning he was essentially a financier of other people's terrorist operations then we came to understand that he had his own independent network and they were connected with a lot of others. . . so my biggest disappointment abroad were was that and mm the not making peace in the Middle East becau- and the two things are actually two sides of the same coin because the continuing problems between the Palestinians and the Israelis at least serve as a pretext for a lot of these terrorist uh recruitment tactics and what they later do

In response to a question about bin Laden, Clinton brings in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and comments that the 'two things are actually two sides of the same coin,' thus painting a picture of different political and social contexts in the Middle East in one stroke. This coherent view of 'they' in the Middle East in contrast to 'we' in the West is further emphasized in the following excerpt in which Clinton discusses Saddam Hussein and al Qaida in the same turn (laughter is underlined).

**Excerpt # 7: Bill Clinton with David Letterman (DL)**

DL HE HE HE HE HE HE HE

BC was it uh the answer to that is I do not believe it was political uh they just got the the fact that they've been plannin' this for four years uh didn't necessarily mean anything it could they they they they have uh these al Qaida in particular uh makes lots o' plans uh they had a plan in ninety eight to hijack a plane and hold the passengers hostage unless I released the blind sheikh from prison. . . I don't think it was political I do think it points out a a decision that was made however we we got this because the Pakistanis arrested one of the terrorists who is a computer whiz and got into his computer uh they're basically doin' that work for us along the Afghan border with Pakistan that's becuz we have a hundred and thirty thousand troops in Iraq and only fifteen thousand in Afghanistan I believe our number one priority is al Qaida and bin Laden and I noticed in the convention

Senator Kerry said he'd ask for forty thousand more troops in the regular army I I would like to see us beef up our forces in Afghanistan cuz I always thought that he was a much bigger threat than Saddam but I mean nobody likes Saddam Hussein but this guy's very serious

Notice the repair of the indefinite 'they they they' in reference to al Qaida, and the association of terror with Saddam Hussein and what went on during his regime in Iraq. Note also the over-lexicalization of the reference to the man who planned the first bombing of the twin towers in New York. His identification as 'the blind sheikh' casts a perspective that associates Islamic religion with terrorism.

Overall, the 'terror', 'terrorism', 'terrorists' were used 30 times through the corpus of interviews as a perspective on how American foreign policy has turned towards fighting 'terrorism.' Terrorists are referred to with the indefinite impersonal 'they' and so are the Iraqi people (20 times) and the Palestinian people (four times), as noted earlier. In the war against terrorism, the enemy is unidentified; and people from the Middle East such as the Iraqis and the Palestinians are referred to similarly in the collective sense as a faceless people.

## **Conclusions**

We began this report by examining references to the Middle East in six media interviews as a manifestation of Bill Clinton's personal perspective. We also compared excerpts of the interviews with excerpts from his book 'My Life' (2004) that discuss the Middle East. The media interviews drew from several mainstream American networks and from NPR.

Perspective is dialogic in nature and therefore we assume that Bill Clinton's perspective on the Middle East is embedded in the American media and political environment that consider the Middle East in relation to American foreign policy. His perspective appears also to be embedded in a larger picture of 'West' speaking about 'East.'

Bill Clinton's perspective on the Middle East peace process clearly favors the Israeli point of view. While the word *Israel* occurs both in the interviews and the book index, the word *Palestine* appears in neither. The word *Israeli* precedes the word *Palestinian* whenever both words occur together (except once in the interview with Couric), and the pronoun *they* is used by Bill Clinton to refer to the Palestinian people in generic terms, but not to the Israeli people. This perspective is also present in Clinton's references to Arafat in contrast to his references to Rabin, and in the imagery each of these references invokes, Arafat is depicted as irrational and not trustworthy, whereas Rabin is depicted in positive terms that are often linked as well to Old Testament imagery – imagery well calculated to encourage religionists

in the US to see the conflict in religious terms, in accord with which the state of Israel is pursuing a religious cause – while actually neglecting the human rights of the Palestinians.

Clinton also links Iraq, terrorism, and Al Qaida with the issue of Palestine. In the interview with Juan Williams, Iraq is discussed in terms of the danger Saddam Hussein inflicted on the world. Hussein is referred to here by his first name -- a condescending and disparaging practice not uncommon throughout the media.

Clinton's world is further divided into 'we' and 'they' in a manner reminiscent of what Suleiman and O'Connell (2003) found in a Colin Powell CNN interview. However, while we examined the narrower references of 'we' and 'they' on the part of Colin Powell before the invasion of Iraq, our current research examined such references in a broader way, inclusive of descriptions. In other words, Clinton's usage of 'we' and 'they' represents a much broader world perspective of 'we': the progressive, advanced world, as contrasted to the violent, primitive world of 'they' in the Middle East. We bolster the argument with Clinton's references to the Middle East through names, address forms, pronouns, and related descriptions.

Clinton's perspective is constructed within the general frame of a) depersonalizing the Arabs, b) supporting Israeli policies, and c) linking the Middle East to Christian symbols. He achieves this by means of a) naming groups and places (Israel/Palestine, Israeli/Palestinian), b) using address forms (first name/last name), the gendered link (e.g., the intimate form of 'Condi'), and impersonal 'they,' and finally, d) by conflating Iraq/Palestine and Saddam Hussein/Al Qaida.

## Notes

1. Both authors would like to thank Aman Onallah for her assistance with data analysis. The first author would also like to thank the Jack D. Gordon Institute at Florida International University for financial support.

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