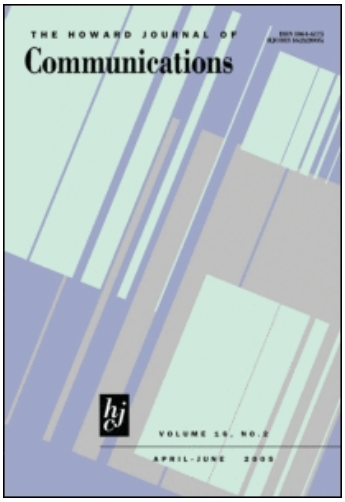

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Oppositional Discourse in Israeli Media: Reflections of Multiple Cultural Identities in Coverage of the Rabin-Arafat Handshake

Tema Milstein [a]; Valerie Manusov [b]
[a] Department of Communication and Journalism, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA [b] Department of Communication, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, USA

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Oppositional Discourse in Israeli Media: Reflections of Multiple Cultural Identities in Coverage of the Rabin-Arafat Handshake

TEMA MILSTEIN

Department of Communication and Journalism, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA

VALERIE MANUSOV

Department of Communication, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, USA

Israeli media coverage of a well-known event, the 1993 handshake between Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat, provides a glimpse into the nature of competing collective identities held by Israelis. The potential for multiple interpretations (and therefore multiple perspectives) of the largely nonverbal event allows for these identities to be presented and, in many cases, contrasted. To assess competing identities in the mediated discourse, we reviewed 191 articles/transcripts in the Hebrew-language Israeli media that had been translated into English and in the English-language Israeli media. These texts provided an array of what we argue are dialectics or oppositional forces present in the discussions. Most notable of these dialectics were those that characterized the handshake and the accompanying negotiations as inevitable or impossible, as opening or closing opportunities for Israelis, as resulting in feelings of euphoria or betrayal, and as splintering or unifying the relevant parties. The authors argue that these dialectics, sometimes presented as both/and *rather than* either/or

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Address correspondence to Tema Milstein, Department of Communication and Journalism, Office 226, MSC03 2240, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131-0001. E-mail: tema@unm.edu

(L. A. Baxter & B. M. Montgomery, 1996), reflect a larger, complex negotiation of collective cultural identity for the Israeli people.

KEYTERMS collective identity, cultural identity, dialectics, Jewish Israelis, nonverbal events

Cultural identity involves a complex set of issues. In a recent analysis of the discourse occurring in an international, on-line discussion group, Manusov and Rivenburgh (2002) found that participants talked about cultural identity in six different ways: (a) as a set of elements and indicators (e.g., music, language, food), (b) as a territory-based construct, (c) as a multifaceted set of identities, (d) as occurring on both global and local levels, (e) as dynamic and changing, and (f) as a central feature of people's sense of selves and their place in the world. This complexity is reflected similarly in the array of discussions regarding the nature and consequences of cultural identity (e.g., Banks & Banks, 1995; Collier, 1998; Drzewiecka & Nakayama, 1998; Freeman, 2001; Hall, 1990; Hecht, 1993; Kondo, 1990; Lee, 1998; Tanno & Gonzalez, 1998) and serves to highlight the role of communication in creating, reproducing, and changing cultural identities (see Ellis, 1999, for a more general discussion of communication in "crafting selves").

Part of individuals' cultural identity is often an incorporation of a *collective identity* (i.e., the ways in which a nation as a whole conceptualizes itself both to its own members and to others outside the collective; Peri, 1997). Just as is the case with many individuals' cultural identities (see, e.g., Gong, 2004; Hegde, 1998; Nakayama, 1997; Perlmutter Bowen, 2004), collective identities are often highly contested between individuals or groups within the collective (Peri, 1997). Arguably, this is the case for Israeli Jews, whose historical existence is relatively short but who take part in an often-overt discussion of their sense of selves in public discourse (Bloch, 2000; Peri, 1999). The media, particularly newspapers (up until recently), have been the forum for much of this identity debate (Liebes, 1992; Peri, 1997).

The present article looks further at public discussion of collective identity as revealed in the prolonged coverage of the 1993 handshake between then Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and then Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat on the White House lawn. The fact that the event surrounded a nonverbal cue is particularly important, in that such behaviors have the potential to be ambiguous, with users and "audiences" providing a range of meanings for the cues (Manusov, 1990). Further, we argue that the Jewish Israeli media, in the ways in which they discuss the event, the behaviors accompanying the handshake, the processes that occurred subsequent to the handshake, and the accords the handshake represented, provide a glimpse into the multiple, and sometimes competing, visions of a possible collective identity. In doing this analysis, we also hope to show other ways in which Martin and Nakayama's

(1999) call for thinking about culture and communication dialectically may be useful for understanding the dynamics of cultural life.

THE EVENT

Prior to September 1993, a series of secret negotiations between representatives of the Israeli government and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) were conducted under the auspices of Norwegian negotiators. The public acknowledgement of these talks was to occur in a signing ceremony on the White House lawn. Immediate discussion arose in newspapers, television, and radio about the nature and content of the upcoming ceremony. One of the main points of discussion was the projected behavior of the two main participants: Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat. It was known that the two would meet face to face at the ceremony, but more uncertainty existed around how they would act toward one another. Specifically, would they shake hands? What other forms of display would they show? When the handshake came, it generated a flurry of discussion in various nations' media that has continued into the present (see Manusov & Bixler, 2003, for an analysis of U.S. media coverage, and Manusov & Milstein, 2005, for an analysis of Palestinian and Israeli coverage). Notably, Rabin's subsequent murder by a Jewish Israeli citizen was often seen in Israel and globally to emerge from the division within Jewish Israel over Rabin's administration's move toward peace with the Palestinians, and even to emerge from the resultant emotional trauma within certain extremist right-wing Israeli Jewish populations to the symbolic strength of the handshake itself. At the end of 1999, the handshake was still central enough in media consciousness to make *Time Magazine*'s list of 100 events of "the 20th century we shouldn't ignore."

The public ceremony captured on film preceded the primary purpose of the meeting: the signing of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements. Subsequent negotiations between the Israeli government and the PLO were based on these "Oslo Accords." But the original signing and the ongoing conflict and current attempts toward peace between Israelis and Palestinians are themselves the subject of intense controversy within and outside of Israel. In part, at least within Israeli Jewish populations, we argue that this controversy concerns differences in perceptions of their sense of who and what they should be (i.e., their collective identity). To understand this argument better, it is important to look further at the nature of Israeli communication.

THE CULTURAL CONTEXT

As with all cultural groups, Israeli discourse tends to reflect the values, characteristics, and tensions within the larger society. In their review of

Israeli-Jews' and Palestinians' interactional communication practices, for example, Ellis and Maoz (2002) asserted that the two cultures "have each emerged from the special circumstances of its history" (p. 181); they also concluded that Israeli-Jewish face-to-face communication, based in this history, can be categorized as largely direct, pragmatic, explicit, clear, and assertive. Katriel (1986) identified such "straight talk" as *dugri* (Katriel, 1986). In a related, face-to-face, "dialogue speech event," Zupnick (2001) was also able to see specific manifestations of Jewish Israeli (and Palestinian) identity (i.e., "the verbal expression of the stance of the speaker relative to one of his or her dominant macro-affiliations" p. 279), including both personal and intragroup sociopolitical identity displays.

Though Jewish Israelis comprise multiple cultures—including Western European, Eastern European, Middle Eastern, and African—for Bar-On (1999), Jewish Israelis' communicative display "represents a dominant Jewish-Israeli identity that emerged in reaction to historical oppression and the Diaspora experience of the Jews" (cited in Ellis & Maoz, 2002, p. 182). Jewish Israeli communication also tends to be highly political. In an investigation of the frequent use of bumper stickers in Israel (with often-opposing messages), Bloch (2000) argued that "[t]his complex mode of political discourse has been so well incorporated into daily life of the society, that both the code and the tools by which to decipher it have become imbedded within the culture itself" (p. 49).

Whereas this politicization of the culture is reflected in everyday interactions (and in expressions such as the bumper stickers, which Bloch described as "complex reflections of national ideological values"), much of the discussion of identity and politics occurs in the media. According to Peri (1999), Israeli media are concerned greatly with politics, though they have changed significantly overtime in terms of the degree to which they diverge from the state in presentation of Israeli culture, and are thought of as "the central arena for [political] deliberation" (Peri, 1997, p. 436). Within the larger discourse, First (2002) described Israeli media as particularly "preoccupied with the Arab-Israeli conflict" (p. 175).

In their most recent form, Israeli media have been defined as multi-voiced, reflecting a range of ideological views that are consistent with divisions within the nation (see Liebes, 1992; Peri, 1997). In particular, newspapers are characterized as reflecting the "variety of opinions within the public at large" (Peri, 1999, p. 329), oft times presenting quite different interpretations for the same event (Nir & Roeh, 1992). This coverage, whatever the viewpoint, tends to be, like *dugri* speech, quite direct and confrontational (Peri, 1999), reflecting the larger communicative values of the culture in which it occurs. This direct and political, but diverse, coverage can also be seen as an opportunity to assess the different ways in which a particular culture may promote actual or ideal collective identity. This opportunity is the guiding concern underlying the present investigation and led us

to ask these research questions: What are some of the primary political positions reflected in Jewish Israeli media coverage of a particularly noteworthy cultural event (the 1993 handshake)? How do these political positions reflect actual or ideal collective identities?

Following the tenets of a dialectical perspective (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) and the argument that identity is often contested and oppositional among Israeli Jews, we believe the media coverage surrounding this important event will reflect "contradictory themes [that] illustrate the multifaceted process of social life" and that "social life is a dynamic knot of contradictions, a *ceaseless interplay* between contrary or opposing tendencies" (p. 3, emphasis in original). Consistent with other dialectical approaches (see, e.g., Bakhtin, 1981), media discourse in a nation like Israel is likely to reflect contradictions, multiple voices that are aligned with different perspectives (Baxter, 2006), which may be antagonistic (i.e., each media account would present one perspective that differs from other media accounts) or nonantogonistic (i.e., a particular media account includes multiple perspectives). According to Baxter (2006), such contradictions are "not a negative factor in . . . dialectics theory; rather the interplay of competing voices [can be] an energizing source of vitality" (p. 132). Like Baxter (2006) and Baxter and Montgomery (1996), who applied their work to everyday relational dynamics, we assert that a dialectical perspective also reflects well the ways in which multiple collective identities, through reflection and production of particular values, are portrayed in public life.

METHODS

Text Selection

Our goal for collecting Jewish Israeli media texts to examine included getting an array of sources that may represent multiple positions. We restricted our search to Hebrew-language media available in English translation and English-language media that originated from within Israel. We included radio and television reports, news articles, editorials, opinion columns, and letters to the editor.

We started with Lexis-Nexis, which archives *Ha'aretz*, a leading Israeli Hebrew-language daily that publishes an English translation version. The earliest *Ha'aretz* story found was dated July 16, 1999. Lexis-Nexis also archives the *Jerusalem Post*, an Israeli English-language daily newspaper, and the *Jerusalem Report*, an Israeli English-language magazine published biweekly in Jerusalem. Each was available, archived from before the handshake until the present. On all Lexis-Nexis searches, search terms *Arafat* and *Rabin* and *handshake* were used on the full texts. The *Jerusalem Post* provided the most articles: We found 126 articles that referred directly to the Rabin-Arafat handshake. The *Jerusalem Report* provided the second

largest number of relevant articles: 35. The *Report*, like the *Post*, is distributed both in Israel and overseas. Whereas the *Post* in recent years has leaned to the right of center, the *Report* tends to be more moderate and includes a wider range of views and subject matter. A Lexis-Nexis search of *Ha'aretz*, a widely read Hebrew daily and the Israeli paper of record, found 12 articles, three of which were appropriate for this study (i.e., they referred to the handshake specifically and presented some meaning/interpretation/evaluation of it).

We also used the Index to the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), which archives daily translations issued by the U.S. government of non-U.S. broadcast and print media. This search directed us to microfiche with translated news. A search of FBIS, which only existed through 1996, using the same three keywords as above was limited, so an additional search was done using just the terms *Arafat* and *Rabin*. FBIS pointed to 71 articles. In addition to articles that came up with the "Rabin" and "Arafat" search, we read every Israeli microfiche entry for September 13 to September 17, 1993. In total, however, FBIS provided only four relevant texts: two from Israel's *Qol Yisra'el* radio news program; one from *Israel Television Network*; and one from *Yedi'ot Aharonot*, a major Jewish Israeli daily newspaper.

The final search used World News Connection, a successor to the daily reports from FBIS that provided translations of non-U.S. print and broadcast media. Two searches were done: the first an open search using *Rabin, Arafat, handshake* not combined; the second a boolean search using *Rabin, Arafat*, and *hand**. After paring down to articles pertinent to this study, three Israeli articles remained, with the earliest dating Feb. 13, 1999. Israeli outlets were limited to *Ma'ariv*, Israel's second largest circulation Hebrew-language daily newspaper.

The total number of texts we compiled was 191. Once gathered, these texts were divided between ourselves, with approximately one half going to each of us. We separately cut down each half to handshake-relevant sections of the articles; we then combined our cut-down versions. Using a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), we next assessed separately all the articles for meanings and clusters of meanings that reflected positionality (i.e., the evaluation or orientation) regarding the event. Each author independently went through the full set of texts and compiled a list of what appeared to be dual or competing meanings in the texts. The authors then met again to discuss the saliency and consistency of the meanings we found.

From this discussion, we created a list of tensions apparent to us in the data. We then went back to the data to assess the list's ability to capture the most common tensions. In addition to those reported in the following section, we discarded some other possible tensions that appeared in our initial assessments but did not seem to be particularly salient in the data on closer inspection. An analysis of all of the most salient meanings found for the handshake and other nonverbal behaviors can be found in Manusov

and Milstein (2005). For this investigation, however, we focus on meanings that appeared to represent certain dialectical pulls upon which portrayals of the event—and their underlying cultural values—could be contrasted. We report these in the following.

FINDINGS

As noted, Jewish Israelis live highly politicized lives (Bloch, 2000; Yuri, 1999), and their varied political frameworks inevitably influence their meaning-making. In these data regarding the momentous handshake, there were a number of ways in which the two opposing political poles of the dialectics were presented. For example, some of these diverse and competing "pulls" occurred within the same texts; at times, the journalist presented them as apparently consistent (what Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, would refer to as *both/and*). More often, however, the contrast was the point of the text (i.e., the text provided more than one interpretation). In other cases, however, only one pole existed in a particular text. To see the dialectic *as a dialectic* when only one pole was presented, the audience (and, in this case, the researchers) had to often look across texts. The following represent the most identifiable sets of tensions that we saw within and across this set of media discourse.

Inevitable versus Unimaginable

One of the most apparent dialectics or contradictions that occurred in these texts revolved around the issue of whether the handshake and the subsequent peace talks were inevitable (i.e., bound to happen) or unimaginable (impossible to envisage or, in some cases, accept). Such conceptualizations portrayed the signing event and the negotiations as consistent with the belief that Israel was bound to be a part of an attempt to move toward reconciliation in the region (i.e., inevitable) or that doing so was surprising or unwarranted (i.e., unimaginable). Within some articles, both poles of this dialectic were presented in seemingly non-contradictory ways. An example of the simultaneous presentations of two poles can be seen in the following: "The OOOOHHHHs cascaded even louder across the South Lawn, as the inevitable, unfathomable moment struck. The right hands met" (*Jerusalem Post*, Sept. 14, 1993).

More often, as is the case with many of the other dialectics, one pole was emphasized and/or mentioned without the other position. For example, one "inevitable" text noted that the handshake came "to symbolize the inherent solubility of all international conflicts" (*Jerusalem Post,* August 16, 1996). For another, "[t]hat handshake, despite all the ups and downs since that time, symbolized more than anything else the irreversibility of the process"

(*Jerusalem Post*, January 17, 2001). Yet another noted, "the Israeli Prime Minister realized that, eventually, he would have to succumb to the PLO leader's embrace" (*The Jerusalem Report,* October 7, 1993). One text stated, that "when the dreaded moment arrived, and Clinton ushered Arafat toward him for that handshake, Rabin hesitated, then realizing the gesture was inescapable, proffered his hand and shook his head, as though in recognition of yet another taboo broken" (*Jerusalem Report,* October 7, 1993). Discussion of the event and the accompanying talks as an inevitable part of Israel's course provides a picture of not only the Israeli Jewish culture, but also the Palestinian culture, as cultures embedded in a larger, global drama.

As can be seen, some of the portrayals of the event and the talks as inevitable were relatively if not highly positive. Interestingly, those referencing the event as unimaginable sometimes presented the handshake as surprising but positive as well. This relatively positive perception of an unexpected action is represented in the following: "The day I thought I'd never live to see was Rabin doing it [shaking hands with Arafat]... When Rabin did it, it was reality. Unbelievable. But new reality" (*Jerusalem Post*, September, 6, 1996). The event was in some cases seen as representing a sense of cultural movement that, albeit potentially out of the control of the average Jewish Israeli, was a good thing that collectively represented the culture. For example, for one writer, the handshake represented that "Israel is Israel again. The nation has taken its destiny into its own hands," *Jerusalem Post*, September 24, 1993). The unimaginable pole was likewise represented in an article that stated "the world saw the two former bitter enemies shake hands on stage, something 'a lot of people thought would never happen'" (*Jerusalem Post*, September 14, 1993). Another writer commented that "few ever expected to see" pictures of the handshake (*Jerusalem Post*, September 21, 1993).

For others, however, the portrayal was a devastating one for Israel and Jewish Israelis' future; for example, the article "there is no way out" (*Jerusalem Post*, September 24, 1993). "[T]here appears there really is no limit to the amazing, worrying actions of the government" (*Jerusalem Post*, October, 25, 1993). Interestingly, and unlike the remaining dialectics, the presentation of the handshake as inevitable or unimaginable, and of Israel and Jewish Israelis and Palestinians (as well as Arab Israelis) as part of this inevitable or unimaginable process, was restricted largely to the early days following the handshake itself.

Opening versus Closing

Another notable, and somewhat related, dialectic in these media sources can be described as an opening versus closing tension. That is, much of the media coverage presented the view that the handshake and the accompanying agreement was likely to (or did) begin the possibility of greater exchange

and opportunity between the two groups and reflected the Jewish Israeli willingness/desire to change in this direction. Or it showed the event as the beginning of a "closing in" of Israeli society and its sense of self. Typically, these media portrayals reflected only one pole or the other.

The more common pole emphasized was the "opening" pole. One example of the opening pole was as follows: "After the effect of the Rabin-Arafat handshake on Israel's public, the trail-blazing concept of a constitution for Israel must certainly fall on more willing and attentive ears" (*Jerusalem Post*, Jan. 23, 1994); another stated that "the Rabin-Arafat handshake on the White House lawn marked the collapse of the last taboo. If Israel could come to an accommodation with its most bitter Palestinian enemy, then there was no reason for it to deny the seemingly reasonable demands of its civilian Arab population" (*Jerusalem Report*, March 10, 1994). Each of these portrayed (at least the desire) that Israel and Jewish Israelis could see themselves as both accommodating and inclusive.

Other examples are as follows: "Now that we have entered the post-White-House-lawn-handshake era, it would seem only natural for there to be new hope for the families of the prisoners, and that new avenues for negotiations would open up" (*Jerusalem Report*, August 11, 1994). "[The handshake] helped free us from the feeling that everything that is bad for the Arabs is good for the Jews, and all that is good for the Jews is bad for the Arabs" (*Jerusalem Post*, September 11, 1998). Another stated that the handshake created an "open-ended agenda" (*Jerusalem Post*, February 5, 1999). Other texts focused on the positive opening created outside of the culture: "Since the Rabin-Arafat handshake, it has become far easier to be pro-Israel in France" (*Jerusalem Report,* June 16, 1994).

Fewer examples represented only the closing pole (i.e., the belief that the handshake limited rather than opened up opportunities), and many of those that did occur were written well after the event. As one noted, "For seven long years since that hesitant Rabin-Arafat handshake at the Whitehouse, we have been tearing ourselves apart over this peace process . . . we have dug ourselves deeper into our own mindsets, rejected other viewpoints with ever greater force, justified our own intolerance" (*Jerusalem Post*, July 31, 2000). Others asserted that the closing represented a movement backwards: "Ever since Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin shook the hand of the war criminal Yasser Arafat, on the White House lawn in September 1993, the Jewish-Zionist state has started going downhill with ever increasing momentum" (*Jerusalem Post*, September 14, 2000), and "that handshake . . . catapulted us back 46 years to 1947" (*Jerusalem Post,* September 14, 1993).

Unlike the opening poles, which tended to represent the position that the handshake and the accords provided the opportunity for Israel and Jewish Israelis to change their view of themselves and others, this "closing" type of text reflected the event as moving the collective Israeli identity to one

that was mired in a previous sense of self, unwilling or unable to be more open to new ways of being, and/or hurt in profound ways by the handshake and the accords. Specifically, one text noted that "immigration by young Jewish families has all but dried up since the Rabin-Arafat handshake" (*Jerusalem Post*, August, 16, 1995), suggesting that the country's vitality, at least as measured through immigration patterns, may also have closed or decreased.

Although uncommon, both poles were reflected occasionally within the same text. One interesting example does so without taking a position; rather, the writer uses the poles to ask a series of questions regarding whether the handshake (and the possibility of peace) opens new opportunities or closes down a culture, in this case an asserted collective culture of U.S. Jews: "Will peace free up the energies of America's 5.5 million Jews, long mired in crisis and defense at home and abroad, and spark a new renaissance of Jewish spirituality and social reform? Or will it . . . drain the nervous vitality that fuels Jewish philanthropy and political activism" (*Jerusalem Report,* October 21, 1993). More commonly, however, the handshake was portrayed as an opportunity for all Jews, but most commonly Israeli Jews, to see themselves as involved wholeheartedly in the peace process, or the handshake was represented as an action that led to greater cultural stagnation or backward slide. In both cases, however, the event was seen to bring about or close off a way of being for Jewish Israelis.

Euphoria versus Betrayal

One of the most value-apparent of the poles we discerned in these data dealt with the opposing views that the handshake and the talks that followed it were something to be celebrated or that the handshake was an act of betrayal, something to be hated and/or mourned. As with the other dialectics, a few examples provide both poles in one text. In one case, different viewpoints were represented by different people in the account: "[W]hen the peace accords were signed and the historic handshake on the White House lawn took place, my sons and daughters were pleased, hopeful, excited. I was sick to my stomach. How could Rabin do it? Arafat was a terrorist, the enemy, the murderer of small children" (*Jerusalem Post*, June 7, 1996). Other examples of the both/and within this dialectic occurred in a text looking back across time. For one writer, "the Rabin-Arafat handshake on the White House lawn two and a half years ago was a decades-old dream come true . . . The utopian visions [have now] been replaced by cynicism" (*Jerusalem Post,* May 14, 1996). For another, the demise of an organization called Builders for Peace "sadly illustrates the contrast between the euphoria of that day and the harsh realities that have dashed so many hopes" (*Jerusalem Post*, January 17, 1997).

In the latter two cases, the authors were attempting overtly to represent the positions of many Jewish Israelis. In this way, they appear to be taking a

stand on what Jewish Israelis as a people believe or are like. They also reflected an interesting way in which both poles of one dialectic may be manifest in the same text: using time to note one sentiment at one period and another after subsequent events. In certain cases, the positive view came after the negative. For example, Leah Rabin, Yitzhak Rabin's widow, stated that the handshake was first "traumatic," although she became a strong supporter of the larger process and her husband's relationship with Arafat (*Jerusalem Post,* December 1, 1995).

The negative attitude ultimately reflected by most of the previous authors (at least in retrospect) was prefaced earlier by others who described the original event as "funereal" (*Jerusalem Post,* July 18, 1996) and as accompanied by "a terrible curse" (*Jerusalem Post*, September 14, 2000). These texts often exhibited only one pole per story for this particular dialectic, and many of these exhibitions were negatively toned. One article noted "many Israeli Jews saw his handshake with Arafat as an act of betrayal" (*Jerusalem Post*, June 4, 1996). A similar sentiment was expressed in one article that stated, "[t]o Likudniks, the handshake was bad enough" (*Jerusalem Post*, September 6, 1996), and another that included the following: "[It was hard] for the Israeli public to swallow the first meeting and handshakes between Rabin and Arafat" (*Jerusalem Post*, December 14, 1997).

But other expressions were more positively valenced. For instance, one text reflected bicultural euphoria: "[T]he picture that left an indelible mark and swayed the hearts of hundreds of thousands of Israelis and Palestinians was the Rabin-Arafat handshake on the front lawn of the White House" (*Jerusalem Post*, Nov. 21, 1995). Another text stated that the "great euphoria" was based on an "optic trauma" (i.e., watching the handshake) from which Jewish Israelis later, less blinded than they were at the time by the handshake, finally emerged (*Jerusalem Post*, July 13, 1998). Other more positive accounts, even in retrospect, called the handshake "momentous" (*Jerusalem Post*, November 19, 1997), an event that "amazed guests and a hopeful world audience" (*Jerusalem Post*, September 11, 1998) and reflected a "hopeful spirit" (*Jerusalem Post*, September 14, 1999).

These contradictory images of reactions to and interpretations of the handshake reflect very different identities for Israeli Jews. The euphoria pole shows Jewish Israelis as a group supporting the peace process and excited about the possibilities of the new life it may bring. The betrayal pole reflects an identity for Jewish Israelis that saw the handshake and the accompanying negotiations as a profound threat to their future and their sense of selves. This is perhaps the most notable split across these texts.

Splintering versus Unifying

Like the betrayal/euphoria dialectic, texts exhibiting the splintering (i.e., fractionating Israelis) or the unifying (i.e., bringing Israelis together) dialectic

were often split into one pole or another. For example, some articles focused on splintering, as can be seen in the following texts: "the traumatic handshake between Rabin and Arafat set off a crisis of confidence" (*Jerusalem Post*, July 13, 1995) and "agitation and the harsh expressions of protest against Yitzhak Rabin . . . characterized the reactions of the Jewish right in New York to Rabin's handshake" (*Ha'Aretz*, Jan. 15, 2001); and "[t]he two Likud deputies to the Knesset speaker . . . as well as [the] . . . head of the Likud Knesset faction, boycotted the state reception. They said: We will be unable to shake the prime minister's and foreign minister's hands, which are still warm from shaking the hand of the arch-assassin, Arafat" (*Qol Yisra'el*, Sept. 15, 1993).

In other examples of the splintering pole of the dialectic, "splintering" was portrayed as occurring within political orientations: "But the very proliferation of ideas points to the Right's dismay: Eight months after the Rabin-Arafat handshake, no unified plan has emerged to translate the growing disenchantment in the public with the Israel-PLO pact into an effective protest campaign. Indeed, with only a few exceptions, anti-government rallies have attracted mostly teenagers wearing knitted yarmulkes or denim skirts of the Orthodox nationalists" (*Jerusalem Report,* June 2, 1994; interestingly, this last text also implies an inadvertent large-scale Israeli unifying that may have occurred based on the political Right's perceived inabilities). Other discussions of splintering focused on the divide between the Israelis and the Palestinians. For instance, one writer noted that "basic enmities still simmer" and that the desire for revenge will continue (*Jerusalem Post,* October 7, 1993). Another commented on the behaviors of the handshake's observers: The audience "stuck almost rigidly to their own crowds. The Israeli diplomats stood clustered in one group . . . Palestinian figures in another, and American Jewish and Arab dignitaries in larger groups of their own" (*Jerusalem Report,* October 7, 1993).

A different subset of texts focused on unifying. As mentioned earlier, one text stated, "[t]he Israeli public is more unified in support of this agreement than at any time since the euphoria surrounding the first Rabin-Arafat handshake" (*Jerusalem Post*, January 17, 1997). Others focused on a general consensus: "The prevailing feeling after the famous handshake and recognition [of the PLO] was that Israel was willing to accept a Palestinian state—eventually" (*Jerusalem Post*, April 3, 1998). For still others, the unifying occurred across cultural lines: "there was a feeling that some things could be good for both sides" (*Jerusalem Post,* September 13, 1998).

As with the euphoria/betrayal dialectic, however, the unifying position sometimes changed over time: "People started having a feeling that they have things in common. But now that feeling is melting away" (*Jerusalem Post*, September 13, 1998). For others, the unifying remained, but the original tone was more negative than in other accounts: The handshake and its violent aftermath "embittered the entire land of Israel" (*Jerusalem Post*,

July 18, 1996). In this dialectic overall, however, the focus was not necessarily on whether the handshake and the events that followed were good or bad inherently, as was the case in the previous dialectic. Rather, this set of poles projected a generally Jewish Israeli identity as united or divided. It also reflected a relatively dynamic view of collective identity.

DISCUSSION

The premise of this article is that differing cultural positions can be seen reflected in the coverage of a potentially multi-meaning communicative event and that these cultural positions can be seen as part of the discourse of potentially conflicting collective identities. We focused on Israel, largely because scholars argue that its collective identity is diverse and often challenged (e.g., Yuri, 1997, 1999); we centered on this particular event, the first public handshake between Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat, because of its importance in recent Israeli, Palestinian, and international history, because its meanings were contested, and because discussion of its meanings and effects has continued over time. We believe that looking across the media coverage referencing this event shows one of the means through which a collective identity may be reflected, created, reproduced, or contested.

Consistent with the tenets of dialectics theory (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996), we found several notable contestations in these texts. Sometimes these dialectics or oppositional forces/representations occurred within a single text (i.e., they were nonantagonistic); in other cases, one needed to read across texts to see the potentially competing visions of the handshake and its meaning for Israeli identity (i.e., they were antagonistic). We labeled these dialectics as inevitable versus unimaginable, as openings versus closings, as resulting in feelings of euphoria versus betrayal, and as splintering versus unifying Jewish Israelis and Jews with one another and with members of other cultural groups. Each pole presents very different views on the handshake, the Oslo Accords, and the events that followed. The texts and the underlying poles the texts portray also conceptualize Israelis and their reactions to these events in different, and often competing, ways.

An individual's cultural identity is often discussed as multi-layered (Freeman, 2001; Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau, 1993). These data reflect that collective cultural identity can be similarly multi-faceted and, perhaps, contradictory and oppositional (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). In cases where different identity displays are highly political, as is the case in Israel (Bloch, 2000), the communication regarding identity (and even the communication that is not directly about identity) may be similarly political and tensional. We argue that this is reflected here. In these media texts, writers are reflecting different interpretations and responses to an important cultural event. They are not presenting them merely as reflections, however, but, arguably, as affirmations of what is or what should be. In this way, the discourse surrounding

the handshake works to display the writers' contentions regarding how their readers—specifically how Jewish Israelis—should define the event. These definitions, and the values and worldviews they present, embody very different views of what Israeli Jews' sense of themselves and their political world are like and reflect the highly contestational nature of Jewish Israeli identities.

Such identity contentions here were often informed by the writers', quoted participants', and opinion makers' positionalities. In this way, the cultural identity and political value stances of the viewers of the handshake seem as vital as their descriptions and assertions about the handshake. Social, political, and cultural results that might arise from successfully asserting one's stance in the media about such an important event as the handshake are not inconsequential. In the case of this study, those assertions that survive might also be seen to define collective cultural identities.

We also saw the direct style previous scholars have said marks Jewish Israeli speech (e.g., Ellis & Maoz, 2002; Katriel, 1986; Zupnik, 2001). These texts reflected very strong statements about what the events "meant" in and of themselves and for Israeli society more broadly. Positive and negative evaluations appeared to be offered freely, and, as noted previously, writers often expressed the view they presented as absolute. Thus, despite an overall tendency to contest or contrast meanings across the texts, most texts when viewed individually provided one overriding dialectical pole as their "answer." These answers can be seen to reflect a particular way of being—or aspiring to be—in the world.

The particular "ways of being," or collective identities, portrayed co-exist in contemporary Israel. In this sense, they reflect the ability of dialectics to exist together (i.e., the "both/and" of dialectical pulls) even if they appear contested or oppositional (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). But the overt discussion of potentially diverse identities likely also reflects attempts to create, or avow, one collective identity: one that is working with or separate from other social groups; one that is an open or a closed system; one that is enthused or concerned about change; one that is coming apart or pulling together. If one of these dialectical poles prevails, or if the tensions continue to mark Jewish Israeli identity, this will no doubt have tremendous effects on future actions and behaviors.

Whereas we argue that this analysis of discourse helps to reveal some of the specific ways in which collective identities can be partitioned, ours, as with all investigations, had a number of limitations. One was our reliance on only those texts that were written in English originally or were already translated into English. This limited the generalizability overall; more importantly, however, it meant that only certain kinds of texts were included. The English-language texts, particularly the *Post*, which we relied on heavily, tend to reflect a more conservative orientation and are aimed at an English-as-a-first-language Jewish Israeli audience. In addition, although we included Hebrew-language media that were translated into English, we

did not include Israeli Jewish media originally published in languages besides Hebrew or English, such as Russian, that are aimed at more recent immigrant populations. None of the media sources used here is thought to be particularly extreme, however, although some other media sources in Israel are labeled as such. It is likely, then, that additional investigation of a broader array of texts, especially those in the diverse and untranslated Hebrew-language Israeli media, will reflect even more the areas of division within Jewish Israelis' conceptions of themselves and their hopes for their culture and country.

A parameter but perhaps not a limitation of the study was that we looked specifically at Jewish Israeli identity and not Arab Israeli or Palestinian identity in regards to the handshake. While Arab Israeli citizens, many of whom in post-handshake times also self identify as Palestinian, take part to varying degrees in public discourse about politics and cultural identity, this study was particularly concerned with Jewish Israeli discourse and identity and the ways in which collective identity is negotiated within this diverse and divergent culture. (For a study that compares Palestinian and Jewish Israeli media coverage of the handshake, see Manusov & Milstein, 2005.)

In addition, we assert that the positions taken in these texts are representative of a dialogue that manifests views of current or preferred collective identities. In one way, this contention reaches away from the details of the texts to larger claims regarding the nature and manifestation of collective identities. We believe that making this inference offers an opportunity to go beyond traditional means for categorizing and capturing collective identities. Future work is needed, however, to more fully explore this connection.

Overall, we believe that these texts, and the process of placing on them a set of dialectical categorizations, are a useful way to reflect on the complexities of collective identity in Israel. It is our hope that doing so broadens the overall understanding of the diverse Jewish Israeli culture and the processes through which collective identity may be offered, accepted, and challenged within that culture. Despite often tumultuous recent changes in Israel, the Palestinean Territories, and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, and the election of a different ruling party for the Palestinian people, we believe that the pulls revealed in these texts showcase—and provide fruitful reflection on—the lived tensions of Israeli Jews.

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