Communicating ‘normalcy’ in Israel: intra/intercultural paradox and interceptions in tourism discourse

Tema Milstein

Department of Communication and Journalism, University of New Mexico, MSC03 2240, Albuquerque, NM, 87131-0001, USA

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Tema Milstein*

Department of Communication and Journalism, University of New Mexico, MSC03 2240, Albuquerque, NM, 87131-0001, USA

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This case study of Israeli tourism discourse during a time of heightened violent conflict compares official state discourse, which situates tourism in Israel as safe and the country’s status as ‘normal’, with material–symbolic interceptions of individuals and occurrences. I locate an intra/intercultural dialectic of ‘normalcy’ used to signify several paradoxical meanings, to achieve and preserve security of being, and to strategically situate an ‘interpretive mismatch’ for ideological and economic intercultural consumption. I also reflexively examine the complicit and resistant roles of foreign media press trips in co-constructing state tourism promotion strategies, in part looking at my own role as a journalist as echoer of strategic intercultural regimes of truth and filterer of interceptions.

Keywords: construction (of place); representations; identity; discourse; conflict; Israel; press trip

At the beginning of al-Aqsa Intifada, a joke circulated within Israel that was emblematic of contemporary Israeli intracultural communication. It was called the schnitzel story1 and was told in versions such as this:

You know, they say it is dangerous in Israel. But Israel is safe. It’s only dangerous in Gilo. But, in fact, Gilo is actually very safe; it’s just a certain Gilo neighborhood facing the West Bank that is dangerous. But even that neighborhood is really quite safe; it’s just a block of apartments near the eastern edge that is not so safe. That block is actually safe though; it’s just one apartment building you should be careful around. However, even the apartment building is safe; it’s just one apartment owned by a certain family that is in any way dangerous. But even their apartment is quite safe; it’s just their kitchen that faces the rocketfire. Still, their kitchen is safe; it’s just the corner of the kitchen where the refrigerator is. And the refrigerator is quite safe; it’s just the freezer area that is at all dangerous. Even the freezer is quite safe; it’s just the section of the freezer where the schnitzel is stacked. That area was hit by a rocket from the West Bank. So you must be careful around the schnitzel. This area is very, very dangerous.

The Israeli government considers Gilo a legal suburb of Jerusalem, while internationally Gilo is widely considered an illegal Israeli settlement built in the Occupied Territories of the Palestinian West Bank (Goldin, 2010). Gilo faces the Christian Palestinian town of Beit Jala, just across a gorge. At the time the joke was circulating, Palestinian militia had been shooting rockets and bullets at Gilo from Beit Jala for a few months, and Israel

*Email: tema@unm.edu

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Defense Forces had been shooting tank fire and bullets at Beit Jala. Since Beit Jala borders Bethlehem, Israeli government officials argued Palestinian gunfire from this area was strategic to force Israeli military to return fire in order to turn the Christian world against Israel at a time when Christian tourists had been arriving in increasing record numbers due to Christianity’s bimillenary and intensive marketing of Israel, as well as the Palestinian Territories and Jordan, as ‘Holy Land’ destinations (Beirman, 2002).

The joke, exchanged in everyday interactions among Israelis and at times by Israelis with non-Israelis, ironically reflects talk in Israel following the September 2000 onset of al-Aqsa Intifada, or the second Intifada, which was not only taking place on the ground in Gilo and Beit Jala but in other parts of Israel and the Palestinian Territories and at their intersections. Pointedly, the joke poked fun at tensions within Israeli cultural attitudes of safety and ‘normalcy’ and, at the same time, satirized the discourse of Israeli officials whose job was to package this ‘normalcy’ for international intercultural tourists’ consumption. This paradoxical symbol of ‘normalcy’ loomed large in state and tourism industry discourses at the time and served to construct and relay multiple, often conflicting intercultural and intracultural meanings. I identify ‘normalcy’ as an *intra/intercultural dialectic*, a contextually constituted discursive formation in Israel of both historical and emergent struggle over cultural meaning that is used both normatively to describe a desired state of affairs and descriptively to describe an actual state of affairs.

This study focuses on this discursive formation within Israeli communication. The target audience of ‘normalcy’ was an international tourist audience during a time of heightened conflict that directly followed a time of heightened hope for Israeli–Palestinian peace (Beinart, 2010). In investigating ‘normalcy’, I examine how Israeli public and private figures interculturally frame for non-Israelis an experience of constant conflict, how various speakers use discursive formations to achieve and preserve intra/intercultural security of being, and how discursive formations centered around tourism are positioned for economic and ideological international intercultural consumption.

In response to Hazbun’s (2010) call to look beyond institutional and governmental tourism discourses to also include those of local societies and communities, I contrast Israeli Ministry of Tourism officials’ discourse, which relates tourism in Israel as safe and the state of the country as ‘normal’, with intercultural interceptions of face-to-face interviews and on-the-ground observations, and with Israeli news coverage. Despite, and in many ways because of, the violent history and ongoing present engaging Palestinian and Israeli populations, tourism is a central economic and cultural concern to both areas. Tourism has been core to both Israel’s economy and cultural portrayal for decades (Mansfeld, 1999) and, as recently as the onset of the second Intifada, tourism was starting to become a profitable cultural economy in the Palestinian Territories, as well (Al-Rimmawi, 2003). As such, to different extents, Israel and the Palestinian Territories both depend upon certain international perceptions in order to attract tourism and to be economically viable.

In what follows, I illustrate Israeli officials’ communication of ‘normalcy’ as paradoxical and dialectic, and as both strategic and culturally embedded. I look reflexively at foreign press roles from my former role within the media in the co-construction of such cultural paradigms for international consumption, and at daily inter- and intracultural interceptions of the concepts of ‘normalcy’ and safety within Israel. Using a multi-lensed participant observation methodology, I illustrate ways public and mass communication strategies occur on the ground and hinge on intra- and intercultural perceptions, articulations, and complicity.
This study joins tourism scholarship from the past decade that has drawn attention to modes of presentation shared by tourism and media systems, industries with powerful shared interests that create shared domains of action, including the domain of tourist vacationscapes (Noy & Kohn, 2010). The study is also informed by the narrative turn in tourism studies, which serves to place topical focus on the construction of collective identities and destinations and follows the critical turn (Noy, 2012a). In addition, this study is grounded in the critical turn in the field of intercultural communication, an aligned approach that introduces cultural notions of dialectics, or context-specific historical and political productions that highlight intercultural discursive tensions (Martin & Nakayama, 1999).

Tourism as intercultural and mediated productions

This study is chiefly concerned with how those in power publicly and interculturally, often through the use of news media, communicate a national image of crisis for international tourist consumption. I look at how such speakers communicate a historically continuous state of conflict in ways that seek to maintain a positive national image and encourage intercultural economic exchange. Avraham and Ketter (2006) argue state officials often attempt to promote inflows of international tourism during times of crisis or violent conflict by using communication strategies such as reframing or denying. For instance, image restoration strategies in Saudi Arabia to repair its reputation as supporting terrorism after 9/11 relied heavily on denial and bolstering and were partially successful (Zhang & Benoit, 2004); strategies in China after Tiananmen Square involved a planned highly publicized international athletic event that failed to shift the country’s marketability (Chen, 1993); and strategies in Thailand to restore its image after 2009 political upheavals relied on increased quantity and placement of marketing via new Tourism Authority offices in international locations and sponsorship on major media outlets such as ESPN (Yin & Walsh, 2011).

In daily practice, intercultural communication scholars have conceptualized tourism as an intercultural activity, constructed within and through language, and played out in the myriad interactions of tourist experience. As such, Jack and Phipps’ (2005) recognize tourism, in part, as a quest for a participatory set of interactions-in-the-world. This framework is useful in investigating tourism as moments, processes, and pursuits of intercultural communication at a level of almost democratic engagement.

Notions of tourism at multiple scales, ranging from the public and structural to the daily interpersonal, are further complicated by the critical turn in intercultural communication and Martin and Nakayama’s (1999) generative proposition of a dialectical approach in which culture is rearticulated as a ‘site of struggle where various communication meanings are constructed’ (p. 8). In this study, I focus on tourism, and state pursuit of tourists, as an intercultural site of struggle over meaning. The examination provides a grounded example of discursive tensions embedded in the intercultural activity of tourism manifested in the intra/intercultural dialectic of ‘normalcy’.

Cultural dialectics, such as that of ‘normalcy’, are ‘historical productions articulated from a specific place’ (Halualani, Mendoza, & Drzewiecka, 2009, p. 31) that implicate histories of domination and conflict, as well as contexts of globalization, neo-liberal trade flows, and cultural commodification. Mendoza (2005) argues that within such contexts, such dialectics are at once sites of ‘governance, consumption, production, contestation, and assertions of new, old, and emergent/ing identities’ (p. 84). At the level of practice, these forces, processes, and constructions emerge in the very language of tourism. Host country recipients of global tourism flows work to discursively construct themselves as ideal spaces for tourism (Jaworski & Pritchard, 2005). Such constructions impart a
normative discourse, shaping perceptions and regulating conduct. Dann (1996) points to ways the language of tourism serves to control attitudes and behaviors, ensuring the practices of tourism proceed in an orderly fashion.

‘Normalcy’ serves in these contexts as both an intra/intercultural dialectic and an intercultural interpretive mismatch. Craik (1998) argues such mismatches embody the discrepant, contradictory, and conflictive communication and interpretation that takes place globally and interculturally among the tourism industry, tourists, and local residents. According to Craik, interpretive mismatches fundamentally characterize most touristic intercultural transaction. By putting into conversation the conceptual frameworks of interpretive mismatches, dialectical lenses, and critical intercultural scholarship, this study examines ways such mismatches can work to create a multiplicity of meanings that simultaneously shape, confuse, discourage, and promote the intercultural activity of tourism in Israel.

Giddens’ (1991) concept of ontological security helps to further elucidate the political and identity elements at work in the dialectical construction of ‘normalcy’. Giddens defines ontological security as the desire to preserve identity projects or to achieve and preserve security of being. This mental state can only be achieved by discursively constructing and maintaining a cultural sense of continuity and order. Tourism narratives often endeavor to secure such ontological security, as demonstrated by Noy’s (2012b) study of ways contemporary forms of Zionism, or national ideology, are constructed and countered via different organizations’ tour narratives in a Jerusalem site that can be understood to promote Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem. Further, Stein (2002) looks at ways discourse about tourism across Israel’s borders in the midst of globalizing processes serves to shore up these borders around normative Jewish Israeli identity, culture, and territory. Similarly, the present study looks at ways Israeli governmental and tourism sectors discursively construct ‘normalcy’ with the aim of preservation and achievement of security of being and the outcome of a range of mutually informing intercultural meanings and mismatches.

Finally, the role of the media in both gatekeeping and framing international and intercultural communication about crisis and tourism cannot be underplayed (Greenberg & Hier, 2001; Volkmer, 2007). Framing theory, in particular, points to the elemental and persuasive interface of public communication with news media (Scheufele, 2004; Tankard, 2001). As mentioned, journalists often repeat and give legitimacy to certain official messages; in doing so, they contribute to a reproduction of meanings that uphold state ontological security for the more or less critical consumption of an intercultural readership.

Noy and Kohn (2010) point to ways this relationship between tourism and media systems can function during times of danger and conflict. They examine how travel warning articles in Israeli newspapers aimed at dissuading Israelis from being tourists during high levels of terrorism threats in particular international destinations constitute a touristic genre in which terror and blissful repose are juxtaposed in a paradoxical fashion. The authors argue the mutual relations that exist between the media and tourism industries manifest in journalists’ attempts to weaken the force of the warnings and to soften menacing tones by juxtaposing state-issued travel warnings with images of peaceful scenes in the touristic paradises under question, such as the beaches of the Sinai Peninsula.

A multi-lensed perspective
The study’s methodology responds to Jennings (2009) call for more innovative research approaches in order to develop new and novel ways of understanding tourism in international and intercultural contexts. I use a multi-lensed perspective to provide views into
some of the manifold realms in which the intra/intercultural dialectic of ‘normalcy’ is produced, reproduced, interpreted, and negotiated, using data gathered through participant observation methods in the dual role of both academic researcher and foreign journalist. To observe using multiple lenses, I employ the close descriptive interpretation of cultural discourse analysis (Carbaugh, 2007), concentrating on describing the nature of my observations of the intra/intercultural dialectic of ‘normalcy’ and focusing my interpretation on official Israeli tourism narratives (Noy, 2012a).

My data collection took place during an Israel Ministry of Tourism-sponsored press trip to Israel in February 2001, during the onset of al-Aqsa Intifada. My analysis unfolded over the next several years as I noted that the shift that took place at that time of data collection in Israel – from hopeful for peace to increasingly hardline (Beinart, 2010) – had seemed to stick and grow stronger. Consequently, my interest in my initial data interpretations increased and I took a more retrospective look at this pivotal moment.

As a researcher, I did not come to Israel as a complete outsider. I had formerly lived in Israel for one year in 1980 and one year in 1990 (during the First Intifada), and I also had visited the country a couple other times. Consequently, my understanding of Israel as a country with a shifting identity over the past more than 30 years has been informed by a time lapse exposure way of experiencing the country, and by noting both continuities and changes in governmental and individuals’ ideology and representation. What struck me as a clear shift in official Israeli discourse during my data collection was the heightened focus on ‘normalcy’. It was perhaps predictable then that, after completing my initial analysis and write-up, I stumbled upon a tourism practitioner scholar’s article that outlined the Israel Ministry of Tourism’s strategy that began at the time of my data collection and that had as its goal ‘to maintain an image of normality’ (Beirman, 2002, p. 171). This discovery of the official strategy of image maintenance in the semblance of normality clearly mirrored my core interpretations. I also learned of an aggressive image management campaign that had begun just before my press trip that focused on using press outlets in an attempt to paint and revive tourist interest in coming to Israel (Mansfeld, 1999).

As an academic, these contexts helped me more reflexively consider my role in maintaining this image of normality as a journalist at that time. In addition, I felt encouraged to revisit my data, again using both the narrative lens and close descriptive lens of cultural discourse analysis (Carbaugh, 2007) to further untangle ways the official governmental and touristic discourses of normality might implicate, and be complicated by, wider Israeli discourses and paradoxical notions and uses of ‘normalcy’.

My data collection included extensive and detailed participant observer ethnographic fieldnotes and audio-recordings (later transcribed into fieldnotes) that I was able to rely on for retrospectively revisiting my initial analysis. Data included field observations, as well as formal interviews with Israeli officials as part of the press trip and informal interviews with private Israeli citizens whom I was able to independently interview during the time of the press trip but not as an official part of the press trip. The press trip provided unique direct access to top Israel governmental tourism officials and their formal and informal discourse about tourism during large event address, press group address, informal gatherings, and one-on-one interview. Access to private Israeli citizens was achieved by approaching a range of individuals who I encountered during the trip and obtained consent to interview. Data also included a post-press trip LexisNexis search of related Israeli news media articles published before, during, and after the time of data collection. In addition, I collected and analyzed press trip fellow journalist-generated articles written upon return to their respective countries.
The ethnographic participant observation approach to this study is aligned with Philipsen’s (1992) and Carbaugh’s (2007) emphasis on interpretation of observed cultural discourse as it reveals itself within a particular cultural setting, and with Denzin’s (1997) notion of bringing such forms of scholarly exploration ‘closer to a set of critical, journalistic practices’. The interpretations and analysis that follow use these scholars’ guiding tenets to tell intercultural accounts that reflexively attempt to connect private experience with public issues, strengthen our capacity to understand ourselves, and attempt to help position participants, readers, and researcher in the role of actor to effect meaningful transformations. I use first-person narrative, in which I attempt to create narrative passageways to reflexive intercultural conversations, in part in an attempt to dislodge study participants from what Denzin (1997) describes as being captured and suspended in unchanging states within conventional researcher monologue.

At the same time, this multi-lensed snapshot-in-time approach has its limitations. While my data sources are diverse, the press trip by design provided a particular slice of Israel purposefully limited in scope and flavor by the Ministry of Tourism. The trip’s structured itinerary presented a strategic framing of Israel meant to be mediated to international audiences by journalists. Such a partial window certainly helps shape observations differently from, for instance, a self-guided long-term ethnographic study. I attempt to use this limitation to the study’s advantage, however, elucidating ways such a structure is designed to direct journalist eyes, ears, and pens. I also reflect on my role as a member of the North American Jewish press participating in the intercultural co-construction of ‘normalcy’. In doing so, I attempt to provide insight into ways Israeli tourism discourse is shaped within relations of institutions, individuals, cultures, and occurrences. I also point to ways such state-sponsored itineraries are fallible insofar as host country participants and foreign journalists mediate their own intercultural meanings.

Case study context: Israeli tourism and conflict

Israel, in its short life as a state, has had a tumultuous history of successive crises that simultaneously have directly affected its core tourism industry (Mansfeld, 1999). In looking at Israeli tourism in the Occupied Territories, Stein, (2008) suggests scholars take ‘Israeli tourism seriously as a complex political domain in which dominant national interests are both fortified and advanced’ (p. 662). Before the moment examined in this study, Israel was experiencing questions and anxieties about its identity in a peacetime era and tourism was one of the centers of those anxieties. As a market, tourism was both product and progenitor of the country’s integration into ‘new regional and global economies; as a field of both representational and spatial practices, it was a crucial tool…’ (Stein, 2002, p. 517).

The moment in which this study took place constituted the initial Israel Ministry of Tourism response to the emerging al-Aqsa Intifada, a crisis that put an end to the ‘terrorized peace’ cycle (Mansfeld, 1999), a peace cycle that has become a more and more distant memory. The moment was decidedly different from its predecessors in that the uncertainty of the dispute’s duration forced the Israeli tourism industry ‘to adopt a programme to market and promote Israel during the crisis, rather than wait until it is perceived to be over and then instigate a post-crisis plan’ (Beirman, 2002, p. 175). This shift involved intensive image management strategies that worked to directly link international notions of peace and stability to the state as a tourism destination.

Beirman (2002) argues that ‘few countries in the world have been obliged to manage as many crises as Israel’ (p. 169) and that the cumulative impact has resulted in the Israel Ministry of Tourism ‘having to confront a strongly ingrained international perception that Israel is a dangerous destination for tourists’ (p. 169). The case study took place at a critical and
unique moment for Israel in that al-Aqsa Intifada directly followed record highs in global inbound tourism (e.g. a 24% increase from 1999 to 2000) that had been boosted by Christianity’s bimillenary and marketing of Israel as the ‘Holy Land’ destination. With the start of al-Aqsa, tourism dropped (50% down from 1999 levels), 15,000 workers in the Israel tourism and hospitality industry lost their jobs, and the tourism industry transformed from confidence to crisis (Beirman, 2002).

In addition, the moment represented a shift in state response to crisis. The Ministry of Tourism appointed an international public relations firm to coordinate an international response to restore tourism. Instead of the state’s former putting-out-fires approach to crisis and image management (Mansfeld, 1999), the government and public relations company established Israel was set to experience ‘a prolonged crisis of uncertain duration’ and the viability of the tourism industry would require a recovery program implemented during rather than after the political crisis. The strategy involved identifying niche markets in order of perceived disposition to travel to Israel during periods of crisis and to focus on them as immediate priority – international Jewish communities ranked at the top of these niche markets (Beirman, 2002).

The shift involved widespread advertising campaigns that focused on the ‘real Israel’ beyond the headlines with ‘real-time’ photos of tourists enjoying Israel in peaceful surroundings (Beirman, 2002). In addition, the Israel Ministry of Tourism was counseled to send delegations of travel journalists and journalists from the identified niche markets during the crisis. As editor of a Western USA state Jewish newspaper at that time, I was contacted by the Ministry’s offices in southern California and asked to attend one such press trip sponsored by the Israel Ministry of Tourism. In January 2001, a few weeks before the trip, I interviewed a Ministry staff person and asked why the Ministry was sponsoring the trip. The staff member’s response clearly articulated the Ministry’s goal was to encourage tourists to come to Israel at a time when foreigners were afraid to come:

We still have thousands and thousands of tourists in the country every day, going about their visits as usual, having a marvelous time. We want communities to know they don’t have to postpone or hesitate about going. We’re sending journalists so you can say this is the truth since you’ve seen it yourself. It’s not just a story that we are giving.

This send-off made it clear from the start that the Israel Ministry’s agenda-setting and ontological security was to be the responsibility of visitor foreign Jewish press journalists on the press trip. The Ministry’s discourse was made significantly easier to echo, and therefore ontological securities significantly more difficult to upset, by strategic structural and spatial planning, including a crowded press trip itinerary in which foreign journalists were shepherded to celebrated ‘crisis-free’ tourist sites such as the Dead Sea and Masada (Beirman, 2002), discouraged from interviewing people on the street, and at night deposited at five-star hotels. When some journalists on the press trip pushed to visit sites in the Occupied Territories, they were told by Ministry staff that they could do so on their own time because, as the Ministry argued, it did not represent tourism in the Territories.

The February 2001 press trip closely followed recommendations from tourism practitioner scholars on ways Israel and other countries facing similar turmoil should use news media to manage image to attract tourism: for example,

an affected receiving country should maintain a constant flow of comprehensive information at the level of security and safety as a travel destination … to be available at all times through communications channels accessible by the generating markets (newspapers [etc]) … Such information will ensure … the reliability of this destination and its image … . (Mansfeld, 1999)
The overt temporal and spatial limitations imposed by the Ministry, in some ways reflecting those implicitly imposed in everyday acts of tourism via guides, schedules, brochures, books, and video travelogs (Dann, 1996), imposed salient material and symbolic restrictions. As journalists, we were directed to view Israel as a touristic and boundaried place, both economically and culturally separate from the Territories. While the discourse and practice of ‘Holy Land’ tourism seemed to challenge the idea of two distinct areas and perhaps even the distinction between the Israeli state and the Palestinian Territories, as foreign Jewish press journalists, we largely complied with these limitations. In this way, to borrow from the opening narrative joke, as a press group we were complicit in allowing our gaze, as well as the gaze of our readerships, to be turned away from the violent tensions surrounding the proverbial schnitzel area of the freezer. Indeed, after the press trip, I learned from Beirman (2002) that this narrowing of the gaze to the ‘real Israel’ went along with an ‘isolation strategy’ the Ministry of Tourism had adopted as part of its international response to the prolonged crisis, in which it relayed messages that most of the country was open to tourists except specific regions or sites.

The symbolic separation of Israel, the Palestinian Territories, and sites of conflict, however, was not mirrored in international response. While the Ministry of Tourism worked to discursively construct Israel as still an ideal tourism destination, the US State Department had issued a travel advisory warning for both the Palestinian Territories and Israel. Ministry officials blamed the advisory for severely curtailing tourism, on top of already existing international perceptions of an increased lack of safety due to al-Aqsa Intifada, which had already taken hundreds of Palestinian and Israeli lives. At the time of data collection, the severity of violence in Israel was outweighed only by the frequency of such acts, and this constant repetition at regular intervals caused a sharp decline in tourist arrivals that resulted in the tourism industry coming to a near standstill (Pizam & Fleischer, 2002).

‘Normalcy’: an intra/intercultural dialectic

Despite the Ministry of Tourism’s ‘isolation strategy’, experienced in practice during the press trip, for someone familiar with Israel, the country felt very different from just a couple years earlier. The difference on the ground was especially evident in Jerusalem, which is bordered by the Palestinian West Bank Territory on three sides. The Jewish quarter entrance to Islam’s third holiest site, Al-Haram Al-Sharif (the ‘Noble Sanctuary’ that contains al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, known to Jews as the Temple Mount), was closed indefinitely. The Muslim Quarter’s market was open for business but empty of tourists, a jarring contrast to its formerly bustling intercultural atmosphere.

While during earlier visits, I had to wait for a table at one popular Jewish Quarter café, this visit I had the place to myself. The waiter and cook spoke in the back and took 10 minutes to notice a customer had materialized. As the waiter took my order, a loud booming sound ripped open the peaceful café interior. Having lived in Israel, I knew the sonic booms of military planes. While the shattering sound was jarring, I assumed it was the same. Then came a second boom, one that shook windows and stopped in their tracks the few people walking outside. ‘You have to wait to hear the rumble afterward’, the waiter said. ‘Then you know it’s a plane and not a bomb.’ Together, we waited silently. No rumble came, but no sirens did either.

Hotel staff explained that from the hotel roof one could see explosions emanating from Gilo. With the back-and-forth shooting between Beit Jala and Gilo audible in the background, in an interview, the hotel manager, a Gilo resident, spoke in a way reminiscent...
of the schnitzel story. The manager stated Gilo was different from the rest of Israel because it was at the heart of the current violence and the violence ‘won’t be forever’. The manager had just spoken by phone to her teenage children, who were staying inside that night. The teenagers and parents had an agreement: They were free to go to the disco as long as the shootings started after they already left the house. If the shooting started before, they were not to go out. The manager said:

Yes, they say at home that they heard some shooting, but that’s all. But you would never know here. I think people need to come here to know because they see things on TV. But we are not afraid. It’s funny because I walk on the streets and see bombs going overhead. It’s not that it is not dangerous, it’s just that you can live as usual.

This utterance provides a first glimpse of the Israeli intracultural dialectic of ‘normalcy’. There is danger – bombs are flying overhead – but one can live ‘as usual’, things are not as they are ‘on TV’, and ‘we are not afraid’. This everyday sense of communal-level safety, hand in hand with a lack of security, emerges as emblematic of Israeli lived experience. Throughout decades of a fragile sense of national security and violence at close proximity, Israelis have often felt uncommonly safe in their day-to-day living. Relatedly, the Hebrew term shigra, which can be used to mean ‘normal’ or ‘routine’, can encompass a very abnormal state of affairs to outsiders. As one Israeli photojournalist explained in an interview,

Low-intensity tension and conflict, for example, are shigra. Palestinian rock throwing, highway shooting ambushes, and rocket attacks are shigra, as are Israeli nighttime army arrest raids and air strikes on Gaza.

The hotel manager further complicated the intracultural dialectic of ‘normalcy’, or shigra, when I asked whether Palestinians who worked at the hotel had been able to come to work since the beginning of the uprising. The question elicited the first of what Foucault (1972) terms an interception, or a resistance to, the dialectic of ‘normalcy’. The manager said, ‘The Palestinians are also very afraid of the situation.’

In this intercultural interception, the sense of safety, or lack of fear, seemingly inherent in the intracultural dialectic of ‘normalcy’ is interrupted. In stating, ‘also very afraid’, after earlier stating, ‘we are not afraid’, the speaker, in the context of our interview, identified Israeli fear and interculturally aligned Israeli fear with that of Palestinians. This interception was reflective of other individual, as well as official, Israelis’ intercultural utterances, some of which I relay below, that serve to intercept, resist, and transgress dominant Israel Ministry of Tourism ‘normalcy’ discourse, as well as material–symbolic separation between Israeli and Palestinian experience.

The day after the hotel manager interview, Israeli soldiers went on the offensive against Beit Jala, moving away from a media-reported defensive position in Gilo of waiting to respond to attacks. An 18-year-old Palestinian was killed when an Israeli tank shell hit his home. Because of this event, and contrary to the agenda-setting hopes of the Ministry of Tourism, at journalists’ request the Israeli press trip guide broke from the Ministry’s itinerary and instructed our driver to take us to the Gilo apartment complex fired on from Beit Jala – the very same block of apartments featured in the schnitzel story. This interception of the Ministry’s spatial–temporal control offered journalists a sight typical of the ironic Israeli peace-at-war atmosphere. Some journalists walked into the open field next to the schnitzel apartments, which had a fortress-like appearance similar to many Israeli settlement structures (Efrat, 2006), and looked down into the olive grove on the Beit Jala side of the
road. All was quiet, appearing idyllic even. A smiling young Israeli Jewish couple with a toddler walked down a Gilo sidewalk edged with early spring flowers. The Israeli military was nowhere in sight. We were in open view and could be shot at directly from Beit Jala if someone had been waiting and wanting to do so.

Set against this backdrop, official discourse, or communication meant for press trip journalists’ pens for mass consumption, both reflected and produced intra- and intercultural notions of ‘normalcy’. The press trip took us to the annual Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations, an event that gathers global leadership of fundraising organizations for Israel. There a top official of the Ministry of Tourism, speaking in a panel discussion titled ‘Israel’s Economy – Vital to Israel’s Internal and External Security’, told the international audience the Ministry was trying to curb the severe drop in Israel’s tourism economy by showing the world Israel was safe and tourists who came were safe. The official, implicitly linking global media’s role in communicating Israel’s ‘normalcy’ with Israel’s economic welfare, told the audience, ‘Only when the normalcy is communicated to the world will the economy improve’. ‘Normalcy’, as a recurring intra/intercultural dialectic within Israeli officials’ discourse, symbolized many seemingly contradictory things. ‘Normalcy’, or life as usual, in Israel never since its founding in 1948 has symbolized peace, stability, or security. Instead, much of Israel’s recent history has been fraught with violent struggles for control of land. Therefore, ‘normalcy’, as a recurring intra/intercultural dialectic in the public communication of Israeli officials, could mean precisely the violent situation occurring during the press trip and continuing in a different vein at present; in other words, shigra. In contrast, the concerted efforts toward a type of peace and the relative calm enveloping the country in moments leading up to the September 2000 reentry into the ‘normalcy’ of conflict could be perceived as abnormalcy.

The intra/intercultural dialectic of ‘normalcy’ served as a strategic tool in Israeli official discourse particularly in the realm of tourism. At times, such as in the official’s utterance, the term ‘normalcy’ was used as an intercultural contrasting mirror to reassure those of other nation states, who might have second thoughts about planning a trip, that Israel maintained a sense of ‘normal’ continuity and order. At other times, officials positioned ‘normalcy’ in other countries, such as the USA, as far more life threatening than ‘normalcy’ in Israel. The top official made such a comparison in his panel presentation, followed by the statement, ‘Yet tourists come to the US.’

In a group press interview, another top official in the Ministry provided numbers, ‘There are 29 homicides a week in Chicago and 979 homicides a year in Los Angeles. In Israel, an entire country, there are only 40 homicides a year’.

A few foreign journalists on the press trip dedicatedly performed their roles as guardians of ontological security, including telling officials the Ministry needed to do a better job of getting these comparisons out to prospective North American tourists, and that such numbers would serve the purpose of making Israel seem safer to non-Israelis.

Number comparisons as a persuasive tool, however, were not necessarily a successful intercultural image restoration strategy. One Israeli individual, an Israeli high-tech company representative, complained in a one-on-one interview that he had to fly twice as much as usual because US businesspeople were not flying to Israel. He discussed his attempts to use such numbers with international business partners, ‘Most Americans aren’t coming. You can give numbers to show it is safer here than in the US, but that doesn’t change their view’.

It is quite possible that the intercultural dialectic of ‘normalcy’ did more to unravel the overall fabric of officials’ discourse of safety in tourism than it did to weave a durable net. Potential international visitors and tourists may have interpreted ‘normalcy’ in Israel as, in fact, constant
conflict and violence. Secondarily, the violent conflict involves a marginalized and occupied cultural population, the Palestinians, who, at the same time they are terrorized by Israeli state and settler violence against them, also terrorize the population in power. The intercultural dialectic of ‘normalcy’ then is perhaps, at least at an intuitive level, something that potential niche market tourists – many familiar with more subdued marginalized or colonized populations – find threatening. Additionally being reminded of their lack of safety in their own home country likely does little to increase their notions of safety in a destination facing defined crisis.

On the other hand, ‘normalcy’ in many cultures outside Israel connotes stability, and stability can connote safety. The paradoxical intercultural dialectic of ‘normalcy’, therefore, can serve two purposes: it can both reflect a material reality – that Israel is seeing recurring violent symptoms of a longstanding and continuous conflict – and at the same time suggest one’s own connotative meaning of safety and stability. In this case, the use of ‘normalcy’ as an intercultural interpretive mismatch can work in Israel’s economic favor, especially when it comes to less personal and emotional choices than the perception that one is putting one’s own life at risk as a tourist. For example, in a panel presentation at the annual Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations, one representative from Israel’s International Technologies explained: ‘If the area is being perceived as unstable, this will have immediate effect on the tendency of large corporations to invest in Israel.

‘Normalcy’ in terms of international business, then, could be used to communicate and encourage economic stability. Economics, as stated, are also the main incentive behind producing an intercultural discourse of safety in international tourism.

Such material and semiotic realities mutually inform and produce one another. In official Israeli discourse, the existence and prosperity of the tourism industry, in itself, becomes a signifier of ‘normalcy’. For instance, that Egyptians seldom come to Israel as tourists indicates that Egyptian–Israeli relations embody a ‘cold peace’ (Uriely, Maoz, & Reichel, 2009). ‘Normalcy’, in this way, is used to refer to a desired state of affairs that Israel has yet to achieve, one that involves open borders, peace agreements, warm neighbors, and a lack of armed conflict. Discourse emerging from the Taba Summit, an Israeli–Palestinian meeting near the time of the press trip that was designed to meet ‘national security and essential needs of each side’, referred to a ‘cold peace’ ‘normalcy’,

The two sides take upon themselves to return to normalcy (emphasis added) and to establish a security situation on the ground through the observation of their mutual commitments in the spirit if the Sharm e-Sheikh memorandum. (Israel-Palestinian Statement, 2001)

A ‘normalcy’, however, that mirrors the above desired state of affairs yet to be achieved is provided in former US President Bill Clinton’s letter in The Jerusalem Post during this time, in which he urged both sides to not be discouraged by the surge in violence and specifically addressed Israelis in stating,

To those who have returned to an ancient homeland ... whose hopes and dreams almost vanished in the Holocaust, who have hardly had one day of peace and quiet since the state of Israel was created, allow me this parting thought: You are closer today than ever before in ending your 100-year-long struggle for peace and normalcy (emphasis added). Don’t give up on the pursuit of peace. (Clinton, 2001)

Such a meaning for ‘normalcy’ is in powerful alignment with international uses and significations for the term and, therefore, Israeli governmental officials’ aim for such significations in interculturally constructing ontological security of being. However, in Clinton’s statement, also evident is the exceptionalist discourse of Israel as under constant threat
from its inception, a discourse that positions Israel as the perennial victim state. The desired normative signification for ‘normalcy’ is in conflict with this other overriding notion. Efforts to rejuvenate and maintain a robust international tourism industry, therefore, are symbolically pertinent and under constant tension, and the importance of the tourism–normalcy nexus to such an endeavor is crucial.

Media roles in co-constructing ‘normalcy’
The role of the media in shaping international perceptions of Israel’s state of affairs is notable. Beirman (2002) argues that, due to the combination of a vast international media presence in Israel and a tradition within Israel of a free press, ‘events in the country attract a far higher level of coverage than almost anywhere else in the world’ (p. 169). Beirman argues that, during the time of the case study, media reporting of events was especially damaging to tourism because it gave a ‘false impression extrapolated by isolated and localized incidents that all of Israel is enmeshed in violence’ (p. 169). It follows, then, that Israel, and the Ministry in particular, endeavors to yield some control over the foreign media’s discourse.

This phenomenon was especially evident at the time of data collection. According to a US-based Ministry of Tourism staff person, the Ministry receives many requests from journalists around the globe for financial sponsorship for a trip to Israel and, before al-Aqsa Intifada, the Ministry said no to more than half these requests. After the onset of al-Aqsa began, however, the Ministry was not just saying yes to sponsoring any journalist’s request but was also actively recruiting. This shift in policy was a direct result of the Ministry’s international public relations strategy to target identified niche markets and its efforts to get out press mediated images of the ‘real Israel’ and of ‘normality’ (Beirman, 2002).

The generally unspoken host assumption of press trips, or press junkets, is that money invested in hosting one journalist will pale in comparison to money made from the journalist’s reproduction of messages and framings relayed during the trip (Stacks, 2001). While hosts may not assume they will receive explicit reinforcement of ontological security, they do assume a story will be published that at least mentions them in somewhat favorable terms. In the case of strategy of the Israel Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry’s assumption was that North American Jewish and Christian press journalists, and even mainstream press journalists, would feel it was in some way their responsibility to echo the dialectic of ‘normalcy’ to their foreign audiences.

Perhaps more importantly, following framing theory’s attention to the interface of news media and persuasive public communication (Scheufele, 2004; Tankard, 2001), journalists might feel their responsibility was also to purge those cultural interceptions that expose rifts or contradictions in the discursive construction of ‘normalcy’. As an example, I offer an issue I faced in writing a story after the press trip. A journalist makes choices when it comes to what to include in a story: the process starts with deciding what issue to cover and proceeds with choosing who to interview, what to include in one’s notes, what to feature and in what order, and what to cut in the final edit. The thinking that goes into such choices has remained largely unexamined from an international and intercultural communication perspective. During the press trip, I recorded a quote from a group interview that I decided not to include when it came time to choose story content. During the press trip, a top Ministry official told journalists, ‘While there are 9,000 to 10,000 tourists in Israel this very day, none have been evacuated. Israel does cover health insurance for any injuries to tourists due to conflicts or terrorism’.

By excluding the quote, I was creating a story I thought would be more interculturally accessible for an American readership. The statement – with its matter-of-fact mention of
tourist evacuation and ‘injuries’ due to ‘terrorism’ – would most likely have represented a major rift in, or interception of, American interpretations of ‘normalcy’ in the international tourism experience.

Regardless of space constraints, in a journalistic format – where ambiguity or contradiction are generally to be avoided – the official’s statement, or interception, would have disrupted the continuity of intercultural representation I otherwise presented in the newspaper article, and instead would have forced my story and its readers to dwell within, and to negotiate, the contradictions and tensions of the *intercultural* dialectic of ‘normalcy’. Though the official, in his role as a promulgator of official discourse, provided this interception in the form of a clear and direct statement, neither I – nor any of the other journalists who later shared their stories – chose to include his statement in our articles. In this case, the Ministry’s assumption that sponsored foreign journalists would interculturally reproduce and propagate Israel’s security of being in their own cultural communities – without interceptions – was well founded.

On the other hand, foreign journalists may use prior experience in a host country to position interpretations within wider and deeper experience and knowledge of culture and place. Journalists on the press trip who had formerly spent time in Israel did not hesitate to point out differences from the ‘normalcy’ during our trip to the ‘normalcy’ of past experiences in the country. One of my own post-press trip newspaper stories featured a front-page photograph I took of machine-gun-armed guards leading our group through the deserted Muslim Quarter’s market; another journalist also highlighted the gunned escort. In the articles, each of us contrasted this with former experiences knocking shoulders and exchanging intercultural banter in those previously crowded alleys, certainly without escorts. In the email in which he sent his article to other press trip journalists, the reporter explained this was one of two stories he wrote and the other story would be the ‘piece that will make the tourist office happy’. I also knew my story would not please the Ministry. Each of us was aware our role was in part to preserve Israel’s national identity project by cooperatively interculturally constructing and maintaining a sense of continuity and order by portraying a particular kind of ‘normalcy’ within our pages that would be favorably interculturally received.

**Daily interceptions of ‘normalcy’**

Israeli news reports during our visit provided additional daily mediated interceptions. I limit my examples to what happened *within* Israel’s borders, reflexively excluding the Palestinian Territories, which, as stated earlier, the officials strategically claimed to not include in their ‘isolation strategy’-informed representations of ‘normalcy’. The day after our press trip left Jerusalem, four Palestinian men stopped an Israeli Jewish man in Jerusalem’s French Hill neighborhood, asked for directions, and then shot him (Harel, 2001). The American-style drive-by crime contrasts other more typical, or *shigra*, reports that week. On Monday, 19 February, stones were hurled at cars on the Haifa-Tel Aviv coastal highway opposite Jizr e-Zarka village … at the same spot where a passenger in a car was killed during widespread riots by Israeli Arabs last October’ (Rudge, 2001). The day before, Hizbullah scouts released large colorful helium-filled balloons at the Lebanese border as they stood in front of an Israel Defense Forces post. The balloons contained a written warning: ‘Beware, Hizbullah is coming’ (Reuters, 2001). A few days before our press trip’s arrival in Israel, a Palestinian driver for the Israeli Egged bus company purposefully drove his bus into a group of female soldiers and as a result ‘mowed down and murdered seven IDF soldiers and one civilian’ waiting at the bus stop (Dudkevitch, 2001). We arrived during the last of the funerals.
Everyday bizarre dangers that come with a region that has endured long-term conflict provided further interceptions. A storm loosened about 500 old mines from their resting spots in the Mediterranean. Some mines were still live as they washed up on popular Tel Aviv beaches. The running theory was the Israeli military industry dumped them in the ocean years ago. The morning after the mines were cleaned from the beach, I watched Tel Aviv surfers stepping gingerly into the waves.

Israeli face-to-face communication also provided interceptions of the intra/intercultural dialectic of ‘normalcy’. The Gilo resident working at the Jerusalem hotel gave the first interception with her statement, ‘The Palestinians are also very afraid of the situation.’ Israeli morale was low, in large part because before the onset of al-Aqsa Intifada, many Israelis had felt, generally for the first time, that real strides toward Israeli–Palestinian peace had been made and that a real solution to the conflict had been on the horizon (Stein, 2002). The Israeli press trip guide provided an additional intercultural interception of ‘normalcy’, and an interruption of Israeli ontological security, contradicting the discourse he also helped produce each day during the trip. After our group with its armed guard walked briskly through Jerusalem’s Arab market, the guide looked visibly shaken. Upon boarding our bus, he took up the microphone and told journalists he personally knew some of the merchants we passed but did not ‘feel right’ about saying hello or stopping to talk to them. The guide lived in Jerusalem but had not been at the market for a few months: ‘I feel I am so remote with them, like we have no common ground. We stepped back like 10, 20 years in these few stupid months’.

The guide’s discursive interception illustrated that life was not ‘normal’, at least not as life had come to be in recent years. The relatively new, finite, and appealing sense of intercultural ‘normalcy’ that had been achieved had been reversed.

Similarly, in an interview, an Israeli businessman said he always considered himself a dovish leftist, but that since al-Aqsa Intifada began, he had changed. For the recent election, he had entered a blank ballot for prime minister, an act many Israelis undertook to protest the unavailability of decent candidates. But he did not express satisfaction in his decision; instead, he expressed sadness and disappointment. For years, he said, he dreamt of a prime minister who would give Palestinians a country and Israel peace. But when he finally saw what he considered his dream come true, he was shocked it was answered by al-Aqsa Intifada. When not working, he said, he liked to drive off-road. After September 2000, every time he drove by Israeli Arab and Bedouin villages, he had seen Palestinian flags up for the first time, ‘You never saw these before. And kids throw stuff. You can see their hate for us in their eyes’.

This emotional interception, like those of the tour guide and hotel manager, reveals additional ruptures in the dialectical fabric of ‘normalcy’, indicating a break from both the Israeli intracultural shigra signification of ‘normalcy’ and a disappointment in losing one’s grasp on the more interculturally and internationally signified ‘normalcy’ indicated in nearly achieving sought-after peace and stability.

In the same vein, while before it was common to hear of young Israeli pacifists serving prison sentences after refusing to serve as soldiers in the Palestinian Territories due to moral opposition to the Occupation, in sharp contrast, during the press trip, media reports surfaced of soldiers refusing to serve due to fear:

Military officials confirmed last night that four women soldiers were sentenced to prison yesterday for refusing to serve in the territories because they were scared. … Strongly supported by their parents, the four refused to report for duty in the territories. (O’Sullivan, 2001)
Such complications of the intra/intercultural dialectic of ‘normalcy’ constantly arose, embodied in Jewish Israelis admitting to being afraid, in lamenting losing decent intercultural relations with Israeli Arabs and Bedouin, and in facing a rise in an array of violence and violent reverberations within their own borders. Thus, whereas more formal representations of ‘normalcy’ by Israeli officials to foreign journalists were largely cohesive, and whereas foreign journalists largely cohesively reproduced these messages for intercultural audiences, face-to-face and intraculturally mediated accounts consistently served to complicate and transgress the dialectic of ‘normalcy’.

**Discussion**

In considering future directions for critical intercultural communication scholarship, Halualani et al. (2009) argue that among important questions to be asked of dialectical investigations of culture is ‘how might such historically and ideologically produced categories work in line with particular state administrative mandates and classifications toward pursuit of unquestioned political aims and interests?’ (p. 31). This study of the intra/intercultural dialectic of ‘normalcy’ helps reveal the multi-layered paradoxical complexity of answering such a question and point to ways that such dialectical constructions implicate intra/intercultural security of being, intercultural interpretive mismatches, international economic and ideological interests, and the complicit and resistant roles of foreign and local media. In examining ways those in power communicate a national image of ongoing crisis that seeks to encourage international tourism exchange, this study reveals ways tourism as an intercultural activity constructed within and through language is often a dialectical and multi-scaled international endeavor. This case study points to ways intercultural notions of tourism as a quest for a participatory set of interactions-in-the-world must be critically expanded to illustrate tourism as a discursive site of historical, normative, ideological, and emergent struggle over cultural meaning that is intertwined with state ontological and economic security.

In locating and analyzing uses and significations of the term ‘normalcy’, I identified a recurring dominant dialectic in Israel that subsumed multiple seemingly contradictory meanings. First, Israeli officials who used ‘normalcy’ in their talk with outsiders not only had the complexities of Israeli ‘normalcy’ in mind but also the ‘normalcy’ they imagined these outsiders experienced, often envisaged as an accented state of stability, security, and peace that stands in contrast to Israeli ‘shigra’. In this way, officials’ public-relations-informed talk about ‘normalcy’ was dialectically interculturally strategic, tactically using an interpretive mismatch to signify different meanings to different listeners.

This finding enhances Craik’s (1998) argument that interpretive mismatches are, in fact, the linchpins of tourism, by illustrating official strategic uses of such mismatches. In referring to Israel’s intracultural sense of ‘normalcy’, or ‘shigra’, and concurrently referencing ‘normalcy’ as cultural outsiders were presumed to understand the term, officials reflected multiple mismatched meanings and, at the same time, attempted to divert attention from perceptions of Israeli–Palestinian day-to-day violent conflict in order to attract outsiders to strengthen state economy and national ideology. This study’s illustration of strategic interpretive mismatch, mediated in multiple conflicting ways against the backdrop of intercultural crisis, serves to further challenge the assumption and promotion within the tourism industry, and at times within intercultural communication scholarship, that the practice of tourism is a force for international peace and understanding via intercultural communication (Craik, 1998).
Second, the use of an intra/intercultural dialectic of ‘normalcy’ may do more to discourage potential visitors and disturb their own senses of ontological security by, respectively, stirring up both understandings of possibly unsafe embodied experiences in Israel and of their own more or less overt postcolonial situations at home. As day-to-day ‘normalcy’ in Israel has always meant ongoing conflict, officials’ discursive attempts to encourage international tourism during a heightened time of discord also may interculturally communicate that ‘normalcy’ in Israel is synonymous with violent conflict spikes and their associated dangers. At the same time, as Ministry of Tourism officials worked to construct physical and conceptual separations between Israel and the Palestinian Territories, and as journalists largely complied with, and were complicit in, these separations, such a picture obfuscated the abnormalcy of daily life for Palestinian and Israeli populations.

Third, official and unofficial uses of ‘normalcy’ simultaneously signified something quite the opposite of shigra, or routine daily tension and conflict. Political uses of ‘normalcy’ also referred to a desired or normative state of affairs, in which peace, stability, and open borders are the norm. Taking into account historical, economic, and political flows and contexts, it is clear that even as such significations of ‘normalcy’ may serve the purpose of promoting foreign tourism and economic investment in Israel, the dialectic stands in tension with an Israeli internal exceptionalist discourse of ‘emergency’ and ‘danger’ that positions Israel as the perennial victim state. As such, the desired normative signification for ‘normalcy’ is in conflict with the other overriding notion of Israel as under fire, a construction promoted for internal consumption and with an eye to gaining international sympathy and support, as well as philanthropy within the international Jewish world. As states of emergency are no more given than states of normalcy, both are constructed in official discourses in ways that promote particular self-projections and actively intercept one another.

Further, the study has demonstrated that, even as officials strive to achieve and preserve the ontological security of the state via international and intercultural communication strategies such as reframing or denying violent conflict or hosting journalists in hopes of swaying public opinion (Avraham & Ketter, 2006), private individuals and officials themselves offer interceptions to the maintenance of a sense of continuity and order. Yet such face-to-face examples of intercultural interceptions to dominant messages were often tempered by the co-construction and reframing of foreign media journalists. Noy and Kohn (2010) point to the frequent argument that tourism is a ‘media-induced’ activity. They argue that during times of danger or conflict the media can function as a sort of buffer zone, where security and institutional discourses meet the civilian and public discourses, and the two clash and intermingle using familiar iconic grammar of tourism spaces. The role the press plays in its gatekeeper position (Greenberg & Hier, 2001; Volkmer, 2007) of reproducing certain cultural constructions that uphold state ontological security is shown at a reflexive scale in this study to be often both echoer of strategic intercultural regimes of truth and filterer of interceptions.

This study also offers a critical intercultural communication view into international media that suggests that ambiguity, and dialectic complexity, may be difficult to reproduce in news reporting, and that foreign news media may tend toward reductionist practices even when journalists have direct access to on-the-ground cultural complexities and interceptions. In contrast, continuous local Israeli media coverage can offer intracultural interceptions in the form of multiple perspectives in multiple articles from multiple local sources targeting an audience steeped in the socio-cultural tensions, contradictions, and complexities of their home country. Similarly, in reviewing a range of Israeli media regarding a momentous Israeli–Palestinian event, Milstein and Manusov (2009) found an array of dialectics that revealed a complex negotiation of views as well as competing...
versions of collective Israeli cultural identity that were not reflected in international media.

The schnitzel joke at the start of this article can be seen as an ironic interception of state ontological security, offered and circulated by private Israeli citizens. In indirectly acknowledging the absurd facets of a tourism industry ‘isolation strategy’ and communication of ‘normality’, the joke brings components of the paradoxical nature of ‘normalcy’ and ‘isolation’ to light. Gilo, of the schnitzel freezer, continues to be a flashpoint where intensive political discursive work is done to sway the world to certain political positions and geographic imaginations of Israel, more recently about Gilo’s expansion. For instance, three weeks after Israel agreed to a US call for a freeze on Israeli settlements in 2009 in order to promote Palestine–Israel peace talks, Israel approved a plan to build an additional 900 houses in Gilo – expansionist development continues as do discursive attempts to stake claims to land and the public imagination (Goldin, 2010).

Further study might comparatively explore how similar intra/intercultural dialectics are produced, reproduced, and intercepted. An important comparative study might use similar approaches to examine counterpart Palestinian significations in the state of continuous modes of occupation – such a study would likely locate illuminating similarities and powerful differences in experiences and constructions of ‘normalcy’. Such a study would be especially cogent at this time when the intersection of tourism with the ongoing tensions in Israel and the Palestinian Territories can be seen as shifting. For instance, the emergence of border-tourism attractions in Israel illustrates increasing touristic interest in such sites. Gellman (2008) has found these border observation sites have grown to signify dialectic spaces of simultaneous fear and hope, conflict and peace – a sort of material–symbolic touristic visit to the tensions at work in the intra/intercultural dialectic of ‘normalcy’. In an eschewing of the light pole of the dialectic of ‘normalcy’, another consideration afoot is to promote ‘dark’ tourism in the Occupied Territories, a strategy that hinges upon a long touristic history of being drawn to sites linked with death, suffering, or violence (Isaac & Ashworth, 2012). This approach in the Palestinian Territories would focus on social justice, akin to environmental justice aims of the toxic tourism movement (Pezzullo, 2007), and would potentially function to turn ‘normalcy’ on its head.

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Notes

1. Schnitzel is breaded fried chicken.
2. Stein (2002) describes this momentary experience of ‘peace’ as less about the hopeful emergence of two equal states and more about the Israeli Labor administration’s security arrangement with the Palestinian Authority to collaborate in the work of the Israeli occupation to ensure the safety and integrity of the Jewish state.
3. I note that this account reproduces notions of divided Israeli–Palestinian realities and provides an asymmetrical view of violence occurring during data collection.

References


