

Conceptualizing image of the United States in Pakistani Print Media: A Case Study of daily *The Nation*

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Abstract

Mass media in Pakistan generally portray a negative image of the United States when they comment on the “war on terror,” especially when the U.S. forces hit a ‘target’ inside Pakistan’s tribal areas bordering Afghanistan. This paper uses Norman Fairclough’s (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyze the discourse of daily The Nation, a conservative Pakistani English newspaper in the wake of the 2011 Salala incident. In this incident, the NATO helicopters in Afghanistan hit two check posts of the Pakistan Army inside Pakistan in which 25 Pakistani troops were killed. This research has found that daily The Nation, while commenting on this incidents in its editorials portray a negative image of the United States by using different linguistic and discourse techniques. The newspaper attempts to build a case for Pakistan to pull out of America’s “war on terror,” but at the same time cautions Pakistan not to pick a battle with the ‘only’ super power. This image creation has serious consequences for Pakistan’s foreign policy and its alliance with the United States in it war against terrorism.

Key words: Pakistan, America, “war on terror,” terrorism.

Introduction

Mass media in Pakistan generally portray a negative image of the United States when they comment on the ‘global war on terror,’ especially when the U.S. forces hit a ‘target’ inside Pakistan’s tribal areas bordering Afghanistan. For example, Pakistani newspapers wrote a string of editorial comments when the U.S.-led NATO forces hit two military check posts in tribal areas on November 26, 2011 in which 25 Pakistani troops were killed. In this paper, I analyze editorial comments of daily *The Nation* to address how this newspaper conceptualizes image of the United States and Pakistan as its ally in the “war on terror.”

I also examine hegemonic and counterhegemonic discourses about terrorism in editorial comments of daily *The Nation*, a conservative English newspaper, which “is against the so-called war on terror, and American presence in the region” (Mezzera & Sial, 2010). English newspapers in Pakistan have small circulation, but they are considered far more influential than the mainstream press, because they cater for policy-makers, elite and educated middle class (Dickson & Memon, 2011).

Laclau and Mouffe (1985) argue that hegemonic discourses try to establish a “closure” by excluding other discourses competing in the same social terrain. However, alternative discourses exist that try to expose the contingency of the hegemonic discourse. I primarily focus on the production of anti-American discourses in daily *The Nation*, with the understanding that texts can be intertextual because these “draw on earlier texts and thereby contribute to historical development and change” (Kristeva 1986 as quoted in Fairclough 1992). Therefore we can find competing, or differing, discourses within these discourses.

Jorgensen and Phillips (2002) argue that discursive practices are an important form of social practice which “contributes to the constitution of the social world” (p. 61). I

argue that *The Nation*, in its editorial comments, constructs social realities by interpreting the November 26, 2011 incident in an ahistorical manner to produce meanings that absolve the terrorists that have safe havens in Pakistan's tribal areas of causing terror and Pakistani state of any responsibility for terrorism.

The construction of this discourse is primarily done by filling meanings into nodal points such as 'terrorist,' 'terrorism' and 'war on terror' because they have conflicting meanings in various discourses. A nodal point, according to Laclau and Mouffe (1985), is a privileged sign around which other signs are arranged. These other signs acquire their meanings from their association with the nodal point. This partial fixation of meaning has real life implications: what constitutes 'terrorism' and who qualifies to be a 'terrorist' form and deform the image of a country or a nation. The production of these meanings is directly related to power as these meanings struggle to create different social worlds and different ways of looking and talking about the world (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002).

Methodology

For this research, I use Fairclough's research methodology for the analysis of text because it represents "the most developed theory and method for research in communication, culture and society" (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). Critical Discourse Analysis, or CDA, aims at identifying a problem with a view to help solving it by making an "explanatory critique" (Jorgensen & Phillips 2002). One of the techniques researchers can use is identifying a misrepresentation by pointing out a mismatch between reality and the view people have of this reality. This can be achieved by bringing to the fore the alternative discourses that a particular newspaper tries to exclude or suppress.

Fairclough (1995) posits that "discourse is socially embedded" (p. 78) and that discursive practice both reflects, and actively contributes to, social and cultural change. A discursive practice in a particular institution [newspaper in this case] can be analyzed in the light of the spread of an extremist culture in Pakistani media system. This research explores how extremist discourse contributes to the spread of negative sentiments against certain American policies in the context of the social practices of Pakistani society.

For analyzing discourse, Fairclough (1995) has proposed a three-dimensional model comprising discursive practice, text and social practice. Discursive practice focuses on processes relating to the production and consumption of the text; social practice looks into the wider social practice to which the communicative event belongs (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002); while textual analysis deals with the linguistic features of the script such as the use of grammar, choice of words and metaphors. In this paper, I focus only on 'text' analysis.

Two grammatical elements, "transitivity" and "modality" can be used for analyzing newspaper texts. Transitivity focuses on how subject and object relate to (or do not relate to) event and processes; modality shows the speakers' degree of affinity with or affiliation to their statements. Jorgensen and Phillips (2002) emphasize that the mass media often use part categorical modalities and part objective modalities to offer interpretations as facts.

It is argued that one of the aims of CDA is to promote an egalitarian and liberal discourse for the promotion of democracy. Critical language awareness can give people and media organizations insight into the discursive practice in which they participate with aim of effecting a social change.

Methods

Many things determine, or dictate, the choice of material, including the type of research question(s), the researcher's knowledge or familiarity with the material, and access to the material. *The Nation* has an online edition, with an archival record dating back to 2008. The newspaper claims to have a "strong political commitment to Islam as Pakistan's state ideology" (Akhtar, 2000); this commitment reflects in its content, especially editorials.

Daily *The Nation* was established in mid-1980s as part of the *NawaiWaqt* group of newspapers, one of the oldest in Pakistan. In the first five years of existence of Pakistan, *NawaiWaqt*, an Urdu newspaper established in 1940, "had hunted and pursued a remorseless campaign against all liberal trends and progressive forces in the country" (Mezzera&Sial, 2010). Editorially it claims to be sympathetic to 'Islamic causes', including Palestine and Kashmir. It is supportive of right-wing discourse in Pakistan.

There is a clear divide between Urdu and English media in Pakistan. Urdu newspapers are widely read by the masses – mostly in rural areas. The English media is urban and elite-centric; it is more liberal and professional compared to the Urdu media (IMS, 2009). English newspapers have smaller audiences than their Urdu counterparts, but have greater leverage among opinion makers, politicians, the business community, and the upper strata of society (Mezzera&Sial, 2010).

My data comprises of editorial comments published in daily *The Nation* on November 26, 2011 through April 15, 2012. I limit my data to those editorials that were published between November 26, 2011 and April 15, 2012 and concern the United States, the Afghanistan war, the "war on terror," terrorism, and Pakistan-U.S. relations. I selected this time frame because on November 26, 2011, NATO helicopters attacked Pakistani military check posts in Salala, a mountain ridge between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Hereafter I refer to it as the Salala incident. After this incident the Pakistan government announced that the national Parliament would frame new 'rules of engagement' with the United States. On April 15, 2012, the Parliament passed a unanimous resolution outlining new 'rules of engagement.'

During this period daily *The Nation* wrote 127 editorial comments, which discuss the United States in context with 'terrorism', the "war on terror," 'Pakistan-U.S. relations,' 'the Afghanistan war,' 'NATO', and 'drone attacks' etc. Since these editorial comments were written in the backdrop of the Salala incident, it was more likely that daily *The Nation*'s discourse would center on the United States and its image in relation to Pakistan and the Muslim world.

In analyzing the data I looked for themes or patterns (and the exception to these) while coding it. I regarded any conceptualization that appeared more than once as a separate theme. To identify multiple themes in the text, I paid attention to transitions such as new paragraphs or words that indicate a shift in content. For example, 'however,' 'nonetheless,' 'moreover,' 'thus' and 'yet' etc. Multiple themes in the data were coded separately. I found the following themes:

1. Pakistan suffers from terrorism because of a 'war on terror', which is USA's war. [This theme appeared in six editorials; twice in a single editorial.]
2. The U.S. is using Pakistan for its own war. [This theme appeared in 10 editorials.]

¹The online issues of the newspaper and its archives can be accessed at www.nation.com.pk

3. The U.S. has no regard for Pakistan's sovereignty [This theme appeared in nine editorials.]
4. There is a disconnect between Pakistan's government and its people [This theme appeared in three editorials.]
5. Public sentiments are against any alliance with the U.S. [This theme appeared in six editorials.]
6. Therefore, NATO supply to Afghanistan through Pakistan 'must' stop, and [This theme appeared in 10 editorials.]
7. Pakistan 'must' disengage from alliance with the U.S. [This theme appeared in nine editorials.]
8. Pakistan and U.S. have common objectives in fighting terrorism. [This theme appeared in one editorial.]

For my analysis, I then chose six editorial comments as *exemplars* and another six as *exception* that conceptualize an image of the United States. I chose them because they contain ideas, vocabulary and construction of sentences which can be textually analyzed.

Data Analysis

The editorials, which I use as exemplars, were published on November 27, 2011, December 13, 2011, December 26, 2011, January 4, 2012, January 26, 2012, March 15, 2012. These editorials discuss the Salala incident in the context of so-called war on terror, which they argue is the United States' war, and try to build a case for Pakistan's "disengagement" from its alliance with America. The relevant excerpts have been reproduced from the editorials below:

- 1 The crisis in Pak-US relations continues and has spread to the rest of NATO, when a
- 2 NATO helicopter attack on a Pakistani checkpost, Salala in Mohmand Agency,
- 3 martyred no less than 25 Pakistani troops, including two officers. The rest of the
- 4 40 soldiers posted there were wounded, in the wee hours of Saturday. As a result,
- 5 NATO supplies, which come through Pakistan, were shut down by the Pakistan government.
- 6 Thus the government found itself forced to take a step it had taken last year after
- 7 NATO helicopters had killed two troops, but which it reversed after NATO apologised
- 8 for the incident, after 10 days. At that time, there had not been incidents such as the
- 9 Abbottabad raid, the Raymond Davis affair or Memogate. Not only are the casualties
- 10 much higher, and involve some of very high ranks, but relations with the USA are
- 11 now bound to worsen. The initial doubts about the location of the border are not
- 12 enough to explain the incident, for the checkpost is no less than 2.5 kilometres
- 13 inside the border.
- 14 It would be a mistake for the government even to contemplate the withdrawal of the

15 ban. It should also be noted that the militants, whom the USA holds responsible
16 for
17 the tension in the region, have fought the Pakistani armed forces because they are
18 on
19 the American side of the War on Terror, but have never inflicted such heavy
20 casualties on them in a single attack. For the USA, or NATO, to expect that an
21 apology would serve, as before, to wash away its crime, and allow supplies to
22 flow as
23 usual, will be an error. To contemplate a restoration would be to invite an even
24 bigger
25 disaster. It would also show to NATO that the government does not care for the
26 lives
27 of its soldiers. It has already shown a supreme indifference to the fate of its
28 civilian
29 citizens, but such casualness towards its military forces would be unprecedented.
30 The stopping of NATO supplies should be a starting point, with a swift movement
31 to
32 disengagement from the USAs so-called War on Terror, the logical next step. The
33 government thinks that adherence to the USA would cause it to continue in office,
34 but it should disabuse itself of that notion. It is up to Pakistan to show that it
35 regards
36 its own citizens lives with importance equal to, if not greater than, some other
37 states.

Jorgensen and Phillips (2002) emphasize that a chosen modality has consequences for the discursive construction of both social relations and knowledge and meaning systems. In the above text, *The Nation* newspaper uses strong categorical and objective modalities giving an impression that its editorial conclusions are logical and rational (Line 25); it does not ground its claims in rationality. This discursive practice is referred to as “pseudo-rationality” (Jorgensen & Phillips 2002), which the newspaper uses to prove that the so-called war on terror is the “United States’ war on terror” (Line 25) and that Pakistan suffers from terrorism and violence because it is an ally of the United States. (Line 16-17).

In line 6, the newspaper uses the word “thus” as a *false rationality* for the Pakistan government’s decision to stop NATO supply in the wake of the Salala incident. In the same sentence the newspaper uses “transitivity” by saying “the [Pakistan] government found itself forced ...” by omitting *agency* and implying as if Pakistan’s reaction is something natural; that Pakistan government’s reaction could not be otherwise. Here the newspaper omits any reference to the presence of militants in the tribal areas of Pakistan, which cross into Afghanistan and attack NATO forces.

In lines 10 and 11, the newspaper again uses strong modality by committing itself completely to the statement that “... relations with the USA are now bound to worsen.” Here the newspaper also tries to assert that there is no alternative to worsening relations between the United States and Pakistan because of what the former is doing and that ties between the two countries cannot be salvaged. It also tries to create an impression that

Pakistan has no role in the worsening of relations; what is happening is a natural and logical outcome of what the United States is doing.

The newspaper also uses pseudo-rationality, the modality of “truth” and moral judgment in lines 24 and 25 by asserting, “The stopping of NATO supplies should be a starting point ...” and to disengage from the so-called war on terror is the “logical next step.” Here again the newspaper commits itself completely to its statement or assertion. Similarly, in lines 14 and 15, it again uses strong modality of “truth” and suppresses any alternative and non-jingoistic discourse by trying to posit that “it would be a mistake for the government even to contemplate the withdrawal of the ban” (Line 15) on supply of goods and reinforcements to the U.S. forces in Afghanistan. We also see a “closure” of discourse in this sentence, because any alternative amounts to a mistake, even if the government happens to contemplate; a closure is established by successfully excluding other discourses competing in the same social terrain (Jorgensen & Phillips 2002).

In lines 15-16, the newspaper is *politicizing* the discourse by arguing: “...the militants, whom the USA holds responsible for the tension in the region ...” Laclau and Mouffe (1985) argue that *politicizing* is a discursive struggle involving the effort to question the naturalness of the discourse by exposing the contingency of the dominant discourse. Here the newspaper implies that militants have not created tension in the region; they are just blamed by the United States, creating a negative and jingoistic image of the United States.

It also implies that violence in Pakistan and in the region is the consequence of Afghanistan’s occupation by the U.S. and NATO forces. In line 19, the newspaper makes a conclusion before any enquiry or investigation by the United States, Pakistan or any other country/organization, that the Salala incident was a crime, which the United States committed. Similarly, by using the term “apology” (Lines 7 and 19), the newspaper is trying to invoke the metaphor of a “criminal” for the U.S (Line 19) and implies that it is irrelevant to expect apology from a criminal; criminal can only be punished.

As an example of *exception*, I analyzed *The Nation’s* editorial entitled “Positive vibes from U.S.,” which appeared on December 16, 2011. This editorial was written after then U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said in an interview that it was “essential for Washington to maintain workable ties with Pakistan.” It was written in the backdrop of a flurry of diplomatic activities between the United States and Pakistan to salvage their relations, and when the United States announced to investigate the Salala incident. The newspaper says there were also reports in the media that the United States might formally apologize to Pakistan for the incident. I reproduce part of the editorial in which *The Nation* conceptualizes Pakistan-U.S. relations and the so-called war on terror in a new light when the Pakistan army reacted to “speculations” that Pakistan might lift ban on NATO supplies, calling them “unnecessary”.

- 1 But things cannot be left here, and there is a dire need for the two sides to realistically
- 2 find a way to an amicable solution of the prevailing tension. Positive gestures being
- 3 made by the American military commanders should be taken in correct perspective while

4 making important decisions. There is hardly any doubt that there is a great deal of
public
5 anger against Nato attacks, yet, dealing with the superpower needs a lot of
wisdom.
6 Both Pakistan and the United States have common objectives of fighting the
menace of
7 terrorism. Therefore, Washington needs to be told, in clear terms, that it will have
to
8 respect Pakistan's sovereignty and territorial integrity failing which it would be
difficult for 9 its allies to proceed further to achieve its targets. We must plead our case
effectively.
10 Otherwise all sacrifices offered and efforts made would fail.

After giving a background of tension between Pakistan and the United States in the backdrop of the Salala incident, *The Nation's* editorial begins with transition word "but" in order to show a contrast between two situations: continuing tension between the two countries and working towards a resolution. However, it omits agency by using a construction of sentence without any subject: "But things cannot be left here ...". The newspaper does not place responsibility of the situation on any country. It qualifies its statement with adjectives like "there is a dire need" (Line 1) "to realistically find away to an amicable solution" (Lines 1 and 2). As against the tone of earlier editorial, here the newspaper advises the two sides to normalize relations implying that no single party or side has greater or lesser responsibility.

In line 5, the editorial shows a concession to the United States by using transition word "yet" while discussing "public anger against NATO attacks." In the same line, it also invokes the metaphor of "superpower" for the United States and calls for "wisdom" in dealing with it, which implies that America being a superpower can get away with violence against a non-superpower like Pakistan. By invoking this metaphor, the newspaper implies that the relationship should not be seen as relations between equals but one between a stronger and a weaker force. In such a situation, the weaker force or country needs to be more responsible or conciliatory. Such a discourse suspends the usual discourse of national honor *The Nation* makes in the earlier editorial. In line 9, the newspaper exalts the image of the U.S. to a monarch when it says: "We must plead our case effectively ..."

This editorial identifies the United States and Pakistan as "allies" (line 9) that have "common objectives" of fighting "terrorism". It also calls for a continued alliance between Pakistan and the United States to achieve their "targets". The newspaper, however, does not distance itself from the term "terrorism", which is a discourse/perspective that has been—and is—constructed subjectively.

After building a case for salvaging the alliance between the United States and Pakistan, the editorial ends with a passive sentence: "Otherwise all sacrifices offered and efforts made would fail." This leaves it ambiguous that who sacrificed and who made efforts. This may be due to the newspaper's need to emphasize the importance of Pakistan-U.S. coalition while maintaining the discourse of Pakistan as a victim who is doing more than its share in curbing terrorism.

Discussion

In the exemplar editorials, daily *The Nation* tries to build a negative image of the United States by blaming it for repeatedly violating sovereignty of Pakistan and fomenting violence in the region. It also implies (in Line 15) to absolve militants of violence in the country. By calling the killing of Al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden by the U.S. Navy SEALs as “the Abbottabad raid” (Line 9), the newspaper presents Pakistan as a victim of American excesses. In the process it absolves Pakistan or its security agencies of failing to locate and apprehend bin Laden who lived close to Pakistan’s military academy for five years. These excerptstry to suppress and undermine the alternative discourse about collusion between elements in Pakistan’s military establishment and Al-Qaeda. It also paints a negative image of the government of Pakistan, focusing on its “disconnect” with public sentiments (Line 22).

In the exceptional editorial, the newspaper invokes the metaphor of superpower for the United States and calls for wisdom on the part of Pakistan in dealing with it. Here it emphasizes that Pakistan and the United States, being allies, have common objectives of fighting terrorism; for which they have made sacrifices. As Gibbs (2007) argues people’s actions are guided by the way they interpret events and derive meanings from them (p.47), the newspaper construes the Salala incident as something unpleasant that happened between two allies. The newspaper invokes the symbol of super power for the United States and that of a junior partner/ally for Pakistan, who has to be careful and wise in dealing with Washington.

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