

## Representing the 2006 Palestinian Election in New Zealand Newspapers

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### Abstract

This study investigates the news and editorial representation of the 2006 Palestinian election appearing in three New Zealand newspapers—the *Otago Daily Times*, the *Press* and the *New Zealand Herald*—and finds that the attention of these newspapers is consistent with some elite Western nations' policy towards the Middle East. These newspapers identify Palestine's ( Hamas-led) government as a threat, an identification that parallels the Western policy line. In addition, Hamas's attack on Israel was prominently reported but nothing was said about the killings perpetrated by Israelis in the context of coverage of the 2006 Palestinian election.

**Key words:** Hamas, Palestine, Israel, newspaper, election, elite agenda, New Zealand

## Introduction

This study aims to examine the news and editorial representation of the 2006 Palestinian parliament election in three mainstream newspapers published in New Zealand—the *Otago Daily Times (ODT)*, the *Press (Press)* and the *New Zealand Herald (NZH)*<sup>1</sup>. This study is important because of the prominence of news coverage of the Palestinian election which links the ‘Islamic group’ Hamas, ‘Islamic terrorism’ and the future of Palestine under an ‘Islamic radical group’. The examination of the coverage is worthy as there is no national election held in Palestine since 2006. The election was held on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2006. This issue was prominently focused upon in these newspapers. For example, within a three-week time frame— January 22, 2006 to February 11, 2006—the *ODT* published 21 news reports and one editorial, the *Press* published 41 news reports and two editorials, and the *NZH* published 48 news reports and two editorials. In other words, these newspapers published 115 items in 21 days— an average of 5.48 stories per day. The election may have received such coverage because Hamas, a designated ‘terrorist organization’ in ‘the West’, participated for the first time in the Palestine parliamentary election. This study attempts to elucidate the construction of the policies of Western elite nations and their ally Israel towards the Palestinian election in January 2006. It argues that the construction of the Palestinian election in these newspapers legitimates Western elite interests.

Hamas refused to take part in the legislative election in Palestine in 1996. However, almost a decade later, Hamas declared, and “respected, unilateral ceasefires towards Israel in 2003 and in 2005-2006” and decided to participate in the 2006 Palestinian election (Hovdenak 2009: 60). In this election Hamas won a landslide victory— winning 76 out of 134 parliamentary seats—and took a majority control of the Palestinian Parliament. Fatah showed no cooperation with its rival Hamas (International Crisis Group 2006) and instigated violence including killing and kidnapping (Milton-Edwards 2008: 1589). However, the Palestinian political future in many cases depends on the movement of Hamas (Hovdenak 2009: 59; Colombo 2010); but some Western nations continually reject Hamas in Palestinian politics. Thus, the victory of Hamas in 2006 has “thrown up difficult questions” for those nations regarding their Middle East political strategy (Akbarzadeh 2006: 201). Both the election and victory of Hamas were significant internally, regionally and globally. This was also a subject of prominent focus in New Zealand newspapers.

Hamas is seen as a fundamentalist, dogmatic entity in some Western nations. In Palestine, however, it is regarded as a “religious national movement” (Klein 2009: 881). Hamas represents an alternative movement of Fatah leaderships (Brown 2008) with an image of honest and “modesty” to the Palestinian people (Israeli 2013: N/P). At one point Hamas was a close ally of Israel and countered Fatah, an aim that mirrored Israeli policy (Akbarzadeh 2006: 202; International

Crisis Group 2006: 16), but today's Hamas is the 'enemy' of Israel. In many cases, however, 'the West' and Israel supported 'Islamists' to counter liberal politics across the Muslim world (Milton-Edwards and Farrel 2010; Bramhal 2012). In current political discourse, Fatah's policies are identified 'moderate' to those of Israel and 'the West' (Israeli 2013), and thus, Israel and 'the West' tend to promote Mahmoud Abbas and Fatah, while sidelining Hamas (Asseburg and Perthes 2009: 20; Israeli 2013). However, Hamas has a strong political root inside Palestine and Israel recognizes that without Hamas leadership Palestine will see a mass chaos inside the territory (Rabinovich, 2015)<sup>2</sup>.

Hamas has been subjected to closer observation in the US especially since September 11, 2001. These Western nations also consider Hamas to be a "spoiler" of democracy (Brown 2008: 73). In contrast, some scholarly documents (Aljamal 2014: 40; Colombo 2010) argue that Hamas needs to be considered as a political group for Palestinian liberation. Some Western nations support the exclusion of Hamas in political negotiations (Brown 2008; Aljamal 2014) and refuse to cooperate with a Hamas-led government (Zanotti 2014: 3). They argue that, in order for them to cooperate with Hamas, Hamas must comply with three demands: the recognition of the existence of Israel; the renunciation of militancy; and an agreement to abide by all past agreements between the Palestine Authority and Israel. Hamas rejects these demands. However, with regard to the democratization process in Palestine, the US and EU seem to hold double standards (Hovdenak 2009: 75) as, on the one hand, they seem to advocate for democratization and, on the other hand, reject the people's choice in the democratic process. Said (2003) argues:

Americans are sufficiently blind that when a Middle Eastern leader emerges whom our leaders like -- the shah of Iran or Anwar Sadat -- it is assumed that he is a visionary who does things our way not because he understands the game of imperial power (which is to survive by humoring the regnant authority) but because he is moved by principles that we share.

Therefore, this study also verifies the position—i.e. 'the West' exclusively supports those "who does things our way"—in the context of the 2006 Palestinian election.

Islamist political activists are the subjects of "brutal suppression" (Knudsen 2003: iii; Cooke 1994: 13)<sup>3</sup> and their politics, including the politics of Hamas, are identified as the main obstacle in the Middle East policies of the Western elite nations (Eickelman 1998; Milton-Edwards 2000). The suppression of Islamist political activists occurs throughout colonial, post-colonial (Kumar 2010; 2014; al-Anani 2013: 41) and 'modern' Arab rule (Milton-Edwards 2014: 261). For example, in Morocco, "Islamists often have unfair trials" and are the subjects of serious human rights abuses (Storm 2009, N/P)<sup>4</sup>. In current 'Western' narratives, in many cases, the 'Islamists' are imposed with an image of a threat—threat to the world civilization. The narratives, produced by politicians and 'experts',

continuously provide support towards suppressive but ‘Western-friendly’ leaderships in Muslim nations such as Pakistan former President Pervez Musharraf and the dictatorial leaderships in Egypt. Interestingly, the Western leaders and ‘experts’ accept a dictatorial rule ignoring the ruler’s serious human right abuse such as the human right abuses of Egypt Military dictator Abdel Fattah el-Sisi (Hasan 2015)<sup>5</sup>. Nevertheless, these nations failed to stop ‘Islamist politics’ such as Hamas (Kumar 2010). The “political Islam” in Palestine can be perceived as a repercussion of the military defeat of Arab nations by Israel in 1967 (Milton-Edwards 2000: 123) and the economic and political crises within Arab nations (Knudsen 2003: 2). Nonetheless, despite its apparent “Islamist” character and strong opposition of Israel<sup>6</sup>, Hamas is ideologically flexible (Usher 2005; Shikaki 2007) regarding the interests of Palestine. Furthermore this organization believes in political pragmatism (Milton-Edwards 1992), which indicates that Hamas’ ideology may in future change towards Israel<sup>7</sup>.

### **Media frame the issue to set the agenda**

The way an image is constructed in a media-frame and the narrative pattern of an issue can affect the understanding of its reader (O’Shaughnessy 1999: 106; Loto et al. 2006; Miller and Peake 2013). Robert M. Entman (2008: 90) argues that media frame an issue through “selecting and highlighting some aspects of a situation to promote a particular interpretation”. Under this process media fabricate, modify and exaggerate information to promote elite agenda (Karim 2000: 121; Ramji 2003: 65; Kellner 2007; Taylor, 2008; Entman 2008: 93). Media construction of an issue helps to understand how a particular group is dehumanized or favoured through media texts (Loto et al. 2006: 101). However, media frame influences the audience through covering an issue from a particular angle (Miller and Peake 2013: 482; Entman 1993). Media construct and shape ‘reality’ (Kim 2002: 431), and in many cases how the audience perceives an issue depends on how an issue is framed (Cammaerts 2013: 529-30; Entman 1989). However, in shaping the reality, journalists do not challenge the dominant perception (Entman 2008: 93). Entman argues:

Frames [...] *define problems*— determine what a casual agent is doing with what costs and benefits; usually measured in terms of common cultural values; *diagnose causes*— identifying the forces creating the problem; *make moral judgments*— evaluate casual agents and their effects; and *suggests remedies*— offer and justify treatments for the problems and predicts their likely effects (1993: 52 [original italic]).

This study argues that all the (above mentioned) framing elements can be found in these newspapers’ coverage of the Palestinian election 2006. For example, they determined civilized and uncivilized group: that Hamas is against of world civilization; they defined ‘terrorists’ and ‘peaceful’, ‘villain’ and ‘victim’; identified that Hamas would create problem in democratization process,

and the winning of Hamas would be of equivalent to winning a terrorist group; and therefore, they suggested the Palestinians not to vote for Hamas.

Media set the agenda for public attention (McCombs 2005; McCombs and Valenzuela 2007, 45; McCombs and Shaw 1972) and the “priorities of the media agenda influence the priorities of the public agenda” (McCombs et al. 1997: 703). The agenda can be set through repetition, selection and imposing a particular angle. Media do not simply cover an issue; they do more than that. McNair (2011: 11) argues that media are not “neutral and impartial” while covering an issue and thus, one might see generalization, sidelining, overshadowing in media text. Media produce their ideology through assessing the value of an event, providing interpretation (McNair 2011: 43) and promote hegemonic ideology that legitimates the authority of the dominant group (Berry 1990; Curran, Gurevitch, & Woollacott 1982; Graber 1993; Oktar, 2001; Herring and Robinson 2003: 554-6; Halim and Meyers 2010: 86). Media come to legitimate the elite ideology and cover an issue from a particular angle that parallels the elite political agenda (Kellner 1995; Ottosen, 1995; McNair 2011) but “undermine democracy” (Herring and Robinson 2003: 555). The agenda by constructing the ‘reality’ helps to change the audiences’ perception (Weaver, McCombs and Spellman 1975: 459; Oktar 2001; Green-Federsen and Stubager 2010; McNair 2011). Media are successful in telling their audiences what is the issue and how to think about an issue (Cohen 1963; McCombs and Shaw 1972; McNair 2011). Media cover an issue from a particular angle that helps us to perceive the ‘salient issue’ of ‘the world’ and the way we need to think about ‘the world’ (White 1973; Weaver, McCombs and Spellman 1975: 460; McCombs and Valenzuela 2007). In other words, readers perceive the importance of an issue through the importance imposed by the media (McCombs and Shaw 1972; Shoemaker 2006; Walgrave and van Aelst 2006: 89; McCombs and Valenzuela 2007). Their construction of reality sets the agenda that legitimates elite authority (McNair 2011; McCombs 2007; Kaid et al. 1991). However, how an issue is given preference or importance for social consumption and the way an issue is focused upon depends on a particular media outlet (Shoemaker 1991; Shoemaker, Chang and Brendlinger 1986; Shoemaker and Vos 2009).

### **Media and mediated discourse**

This study uses critical discourse analysis to examine the issue. Critical discourse analysis identifies “the ways power abuse, dominance and inequality are being (re)produced by ideologically based discourse” (van Dijk 1995: 243). It also discusses how a group legitimates their authority over others through their text and talk (van Dijk 2001: 352). Such analysis helps to uncover how a media-text represents one’s ideology (Kress 1985/2002; Ottosen 1995) and it examines how different texts—for example, news reports and opinion stories—construct the meaning of a particular issue (Fairclough 2003). Media text, as a social

production, represents the view of a particular group towards other groups (Fairclough 2003; van Dijk 2000: 92; Thetela 2001). The ideology of a particular media outlet can be understood through examining media-texts as media-discourse does not occur in a vacuum; rather, it is a product of a social system within which journalists and media outlets work (Thetela 2001: 348). “Ideologies have the cognitive function of organizing representations (attitudes, knowledge)” and it represents the perception of a particular group or institution towards any social events (van Dijk 1995: 248). One can identify how media functioning in a particular society construct the image of an issue through producing texts—for example, news and opinion.

### **News agencies as information suppliers**

All news reports appearing in New Zealand newspapers are retrieved from international news agencies (e.g. Agence France Presse [AFP], Associated Press [AP], Reuters). News agencies are the “wholesalers of [global] news” (Giffard and Van Leuven 2005: 3) and through their information, international news agencies make an “impact [on] news frame choice” (Camaj 2010: 636). They focus upon a particular angle of a specific issue in setting a particular agenda (Giffard and Van Leuven 2005: 4). The agenda, however, constructs a parallel frame in favor of their ideological and cultural interests (Sampson 1993)—‘Islam versus the West’. For example, Muslims’ issue may be seen through the Orientalist perception of ‘good versus evil’ in which Arabs, Muslims and Islam are depicted as ‘evil’—equivalent to the ‘Islamic Other’ (Said 1997; Maira 2008; Achugar 2004; Poole 2002). Readers can perceive an imagined boundary between ‘Islam’ and ‘the West’ in the Western mainstream media that promote a perceived Islamic threat (Said 1978 & 1997; Achugar 2004; Kabir and Hamid 2015). The ‘Western media’ and politicians alike, in many cases, depict Arabs within two discriminatory components—they “distinguish between “good” Arabs (our allies) and “bad” ones (our enemies)” (Maira 2008: 321).

There was no correspondent of these newspapers stationed on the spot to cover the issue. Thus, one may perceive that the news construction of the issue is not a responsibility of these newspapers per se. However, in cases when the newspaper’s editorial parallels the framing pattern of an international news agency, then one might also conclude that a particular media outlet ideologically supports the international news agenda (Paterson 2003: 1). Another aspect, the gate-keepers that set the agenda and frame the issue from a particular angle (Shoemaker 2006), needs to be considered. For example, agenda setters of the media have the power to decide how to cover an issue—they impose importance, assess news values, provide headlines to prominence the issue, and repeat the information for public attention and consumption and memory (Hartley 1982: 5; Bennett 1988 & 2005; Shoemaker, Johnson, Seo and Wang 2010: 56). Overall, media construct the reality for public consumption from their point of view. In

this case, the international news agencies are the information suppliers only but the decision is up to the media outlet that receives raw materials and decides what news is and what is not; and how the ‘news’ would be focused upon for social consumption (Cox 1989: 39; Entman 1993; Richardson, 2006: 115; Shoemaker and Vos 2009: 22) without challenging the elite agenda (Gitlin 1980: 253; Huang and McAdams 2000: 59; Richardson 2006: 35). Thus, the responsibility of covering an issue should not be the only nuance of a particular news agency. This study is important from two points of view. First, it aims to examine how New Zealand newspapers that heavily depended on international news agencies (Kabir and Bourk 2012; Kabir 2014: 124) frame issues relating to the 2006 Palestinian election and whether these newspapers’ own opinion stories (i.e. editorials) frame a parallel schema to stories received from outside such as news agencies. Second, this study examines whether the narratives of news stories and editorials construct a dichotomy of ‘good’ versus ‘bad’ Arabs in the context of the Palestinian election.

## Methodology

All news and editorials appearing in these newspapers during the time frame—i.e. January 22, 2006 to February 11, 2006—will be examined. Through examining news reports, it is possible to identify how a social group is perceived in a particular society, as news-texts are involved in the “diagnosing [of] social relationships” which imposes a character onto a group and provides suggestions on how to deal with the “social concern” relating to the group (Loto et al. 2006: 100). News texts, by shaping the image of the issue, also construct public attention and suggest which issues are of concern to society (Schramm 1949: 269; Loto et al. 2006: 104). Similarly, the editorial assesses and evaluates people or an event (Lihua 2009: 63). The stand of an editor towards an issue can be identified in editorials (Crawford 2009: 455).

The timeframe, January 22, 2006 to February 11, 2006, is selected to understand the perception of these newspapers on what, why and how they define the issue. For example, the election was held on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January. The pre-polls perception of a particular media outlet can be understood from their pre-election coverage—January 22 to January 25, 2006. Similarly, more than two weeks—January 26 to February 11, 2006—in an after-election period are considered to understand these newspapers’ evaluation towards various actors and aspects.

At this stage it needs to be mentioned that New Zealand newspapers’ market can be divided into two major sections such as newspapers publish under local ownership and newspapers publish under foreign ownership. For example, the *ODT* is a publication of local ownership, Allied Press. The other two newspapers in question are published and controlled by foreign owners—APN and Fairfax.

Further, New Zealand newspapers' market mainly is controlled by foreign ownerships. Kabir and Bourk maintain:

The New Zealand newspaper market is essentially a duopoly divided between the Australian media conglomerate Fairfax Limited and APN News and Media newspapers, an Australian company which is controlled by Tony O'Reilly's family company, Independent News and Media of Ireland (2012: 326).

The *NZH* is a publication of APN and the *Press* is published and controlled by Fairfax. The APN controls 48% and Fairfax controls 43% of the New Zealand newspapers' market (Robie 2008). Thus, the market is actually controlled by foreign duopoly. New Zealand media promote state policy and mainstreaming ideology while focusing an issue (Day 1990; Phelan 2009: 223). However, in doing so these media marginalize the Other (Walker 2002: 223; Philan 2009).

## Discussion

### Hamas: a proposition against a peace deal

The importance of a particular interpretation that comes through the perceived news value of consequences (Shoemaker 1991; 2006) can in many cases be a cause of simplified media framing (Entman 2004) and serves an elite political agenda by focusing not only on what to think but also how to think about an issue (Marchionni 2012: 151 [original italic]). Media selectively produce and reproduce symbols and metaphors when constructing their perceived reality. The media also produce multiple interpretations, but one interpretation becomes prominent (Ismail 2010: 88). In this process other interpretations are downplayed and marginalized (Hall 1980; Kitzinzer and Wilkinson 1996). Such marginalization of other interpretations can be demonstrated in the case of the 2006 Palestinian election. As this study will show below, Hamas's electoral victory in Palestine is represented in such a way that it appeared that the Palestinians had voted in a "terrorist group", thus aggravating relations with Israel and its allies in 'the West'. These newspapers' reports identify Hamas as an "Islamist militant group"<sup>8</sup>, "Islamic fundamentalist group"<sup>9</sup>, and as a "Palestinian militant group"<sup>10</sup>. These newspapers, in fact, further report that the Palestinians have chosen a terrorist group to "rule them" (e.g. Political rout of Fatah stuns disgruntled Palestinian voters: January 27, 2006 [ODT]). The way in which these newspapers downplayed Hamas's victory in the election, as well as the reaction in 'the West' towards Hamas's victory, can be understood from some illustrative excerpts. The *ODT* report says:

The Islamic militant group Hamas captured a majority of seats in Palestinian legislative elections, [...] – a dramatic upset that is sure to throw Mideast peacekeeping into turmoil.

Israel and the United States have said they would not deal with a Hamas-led Palestinian government (*Huge upset as Hamas claims poll win*: January 27, 2006).

The *NZH* reports:

The prospect of Hamas gaining political power has triggered an urgent appraisal in the West and Israel over the handling of an organisation they have long proscribed as “terrorist” (*Hamas: New dawn or nightmare?* January 24, 2006).

The *Press* report conveys:

The Islamic militant group Hamas swept to victory over the long-dominant Fatah faction last night in the Palestinian parliamentary election, a political earthquake that could bury chances for peace-making with Israel (*Hamas win shock for US, Israel: January 27, 2006*).

The above excerpts’ main focus is that a ‘group’ has won the election, that this group is defined as ‘Islamic’ and ‘terrorist’, and the consequences of the victory is also defined. For example, the news reports said that the victory could “bury” the peace process. These newspapers’ reports argue that Hamas is against the peace process; thus, their victory is also identified as a “political earthquake” because Hamas has won 76 seats and 50 per cent of the total vote<sup>11</sup>, a fact that is also noted as the Palestinian people had voted in huge numbers for this “terrorist group”. Responsibility for the victory is also noted—the Palestinian people voted for them.

The reports parallel the view of some Western nations and their ally Israel in focusing on Hamas; and thus, reports frequently imply that Hamas is a “terrorist group” or an “Islamic militant group” while Palestine President Mahmoud Abbas is a “moderate leader”. According to this description and in accordance with the expectations of “the West”, it was expected that Hamas, a foe to Israel and “the West”, would be defeated, and Fatah, an acceptable party of “the West”, would win. Mahmoud Abbas is therefore identified as ‘our man’ inside ‘them’ and Fatah as ‘our party’. As a result, ‘we’ are upset as ‘our man’ is in difficulties. The cause of “the Western” upset is identified in several stories—“the West” cannot “trust” this “Islamic group” Hamas that has taken power (*Huge upset as Hamas claims poll win: January 27, 2006 [ODT]*). These reports maintain the perception of untrustworthiness found in Orientalist perception of the Other— that is, that Islam is the ‘threat’. The reports also establish the perception that, since Fatah has been defeated, “the West” has subsequently lost interest in dealing with Palestine. For example, both Israel and the US President George Bush say they would not deal with a Hamas-led Palestine government<sup>12</sup>. Throughout the discussion of the election it can be inferred that if the US and Israel had been happy with the result of the Palestinian polls, there would have been no perception of an ‘upset’ and the “peace agenda” could continue. This suggests that the Western elite choice must be established and indicates a predetermined position of political elites that legitimates ‘our’ authority over ‘them’.

## Aid politics

The reactions of political actors—for example, President Bush; and their bureaucrats were frequently presented in covering the Palestinian election. These actors categorically reject Hamas's victory. Israel has “halted the transfer of money” to Palestine, and the US and EU will “withhold aid” (*Israel halts payments to Palestinians*: February 21, 2006 [ODT]). Furthermore, these newspapers' reports support the elite Western view regarding cutting aid, as this will “isolate the new Hamas government and lay the ground for a political crisis that would lead to fresh elections”. The Palestinian vote is devalued by describing this victory as “an aberration thrown up by the vote system rather than the will of the people” (*Hamas takes hot seat in Parliament*: February 20, 2006 [NZH]). It is implied that, through the victory of Hamas, the “will” of the people is not reflected in this election; rather, the win is “thrown up”—delegitimizing the will of the people. Bush wanted a “push for democracy” in the Middle East (*Hamas victory leaves Bush in quandary*: January 28-29, 2006) but the result of such democracy led to a party being voted in that he did not agree with. ‘We’ glorify the generosity of ‘our’ leadership towards democratization process in the Middle East but dehumanize the ‘Islamic Other’ by rejecting their rights in negotiation process to democracy. So democracy itself is dangerous to ‘our’ perception. The reports appearing in these newspapers accept the consequent recommendation from “the West” to “cut aid” in response to the victory of this “terrorist group”<sup>13</sup>. When the news devotes particular attention to terms like ‘Islamic terrorist’, the sensationalism surrounding these terms and these topics is magnified. This also helps to uphold one group’s ideology over another. The elite agenda is conveyed successfully through the perceived news value of consequence that frames the ‘Islamist group’ as a perceived ‘threat’, which in fact is identified as an obstacle to the Western elite policy.

## Withdrawal of ‘our’ troops

Hamas is repeatedly perceived as anti-democratic and as an obstacle to peace in the Middle East, and its “militancy” and “terrorism” are also continually emphasized. Fatah’s participation is identified as being “against the Islamic militant group Hamas” and their victory will ensure the win of “democracy” (*US backs Fatah to keep extremist put*: January 24, 2006 [NZH]). However, Israel chose to reject peace talks with Palestine, even with a pro-democratic Palestinian President, because of Hamas’ victory. The reason is spelled out—the Palestinian government is now a “hostile entity” (*Israel to cut ties with Hamas-led Palestinian authority*: April 11, 2006 [ODT]). Thus, Israel sealed the Gaza Strip (*Gaza in front line of Israeli sanctions*: February 18, 2006 [Press]) and Israel said that it can withdraw its soldiers from the occupied land but to do so the Palestinians also needed to vote for a “preferred” group that Israel could recognize

(*First step to a new future*: January 26, 2006 [NZH]). However, throughout the history Israel never shown any sign of withdrawing its troops from occupied land (Zunes 2001; Stephan 2003) and ‘the West’ provided their lip service only in establishing peace between Palestine and Israel (Zunes 2001; 2009: 136). These aspects are never considered in these newspapers’ coverage but they provide responsibility to Hamas as a spoiler of the Palestine-Israel peace negotiation. This once again implies the ideological choice of a particular group. The perceived problem is defined: Fatah is defeated. These newspapers’ reports<sup>14</sup> say, however, that Fatah is suffering from an image crisis because of its corruption, and Hamas is corruption-free. The framing of the politics of this region implies that a party or a leader is acceptable in ‘the West’ even though it/he is corrupt and rejected by the people. This legitimates the ideology of elite Western power at the cost, however, of devaluing people’s rights.

### **Editorials**

With regard to the 2006 Palestinian election, the *Press* published two editorials, the *NZH* published three editorials (two of which were retrieved from foreign newspapers), and the *ODT* published one editorial.

The *ODT* editorial brings a different view: this editorial asks for “pragmatism” which will “win in the end”, and asks the US to accept Hamas’ victory (*The politics of despair*: January 28, 2006 [ODT]). This editorial observes that Hamas has maintained a peaceful co-existence with Israel since 2004: Hamas “has not carried out a suicide bombing since August 2004”. It argues that Hamas “seems to have substantially maintained a truce for the past year”. All these arguments reinforce that this editorial does not maintain a typical Western elite view of Hamas consisting only of irrational terrorists. It rejects an Orientalist perception of the Islamic Other, that is, Islam is a threat that eventually opposes the international news framing effort of the issue.

The *NZH* editorial identifies Hamas as a “terrorist” group and perceives that having an Islamist group in power is an “affront to human rights and civil liberties” (*Voters can elect who they wish*: January 25, 2006). It maintains that this “Islamic militant organization” does not respect human rights and specifically women’s rights; for example, the editorial refers to “their treatment of women”—that is, Muslim women are suppressed in their society. The generalization that this newspaper’s editorial presents upholds the ideological and cultural superiority of ‘the West’ and reminds the reader that Islam is a threat against humanity. While generalizing about the issue it seems to indicate that the *NZH* perceives Islam, Islamists and Islamist politics similarly. However, the *NZH* repeatedly overlooks the issues such as the political position of Hamas and their contribution to Palestinian history. Rather, it focused upon the ‘suppression’ of women in Muslim and Islamic society while constructing the image of Hamas. In other words, it

promotes the Orientalist view of Islam and perceives that Islam is a sexist religion.

The editorial appearing in the *Press* (*Uncertain future*: January 27, 2006) praises the voting environment as being “reasonably fair and honest”. However, it argues that the victory of the “radical Muslim terrorist [group] Hamas” makes the future for the Middle East “extremely cloudy”. This newspaper’s editorial describes Hamas as being comprised of “suicide bombers”. Furthermore, when discussing the IRA (Irish Republican Army), this editorial does not describe this group according to any other identification (e.g. as ‘Catholic terrorists’), but in the case of Hamas, they are identified as “Islamic militant”. The term ‘Islam’ is manipulated—‘Islamic militant’, for example. Furthermore, the term ‘Islam’ is continually linked with terrorism such as leading to use of the term ‘Islamic terrorism’. The second editorial (*Horror at Hamas* [*Press*]) comes a week after the Palestinian election (on the 31<sup>st</sup> of January 2006), and the editorial perceives that this period of time is enough to “confirm” that a Hamas-led government cannot be viewed with “anything less than grave trepidation”, because this “terrorist group”, does not have a “consolatory approach” to a peace deal in this region. It perceives that Hamas is ‘untrustworthy’ and a ‘threat’ not only for Palestine but for ‘world civilization’. The Orientalist perception of Islamic threat is clearly spelled out and this perception ideologically upholds the superiority of ‘the West’.

## Conclusion

The dominant ideology of the Western elite nations is followed in New Zealand newspapers’ news framing. They legitimate the elite policy towards Israel, Palestine and the Middle East. The elite policy agenda is unchallenged, the Orientalist view of cultural clash is promoted; and the ideological superiority of ‘the West’ is established by framing the issue against an ‘Islamist political group’. The elite Western policy is legitimated through international news framing that frequently questions a corruption-free political ‘group’ but accepts a corrupt but ‘Western friendly’ political party. These newspapers become each other’s counterparts regarding elite ideology in terms of news coverage. In the context of editorials, the Orientalist identification was not perceived in the *ODT*. It challenges the dominant Western view towards Palestine, the Middle East and Hamas. The editorial appearing in the *Press* legitimates the elite policy agenda towards Palestine, and produces a counter frame to the *ODT*. The *Press* maintains the idea of a civilizational clash between Islam and ‘the West’. The *NZH*, as with the *Press*, maintains the ideological superiority of ‘the West’. These two newspapers—the *NZH* and the *Press*—repeatedly question Islam, Muslims and Muslim culture through generalization despite the issue was concerned to Hamas and Palestine only. They, however, never challenge the Western elite policy

towards Hamas, Palestine and the Middle East in general. Even they accept corrupt political leadership in opposing 'Islamist' Hamas. Overall, the political elite group is successful in framing their agenda through the foreign news agencies and the success of their agenda is reflected in most cases in editorials appearing in New Zealand newspapers. The ownership pattern of New Zealand newspapers can be a factor that provides prejudicial perception of Islam, Hamas and Palestine. For example, the *ODT*, the locally owned newspaper, has taken a constructive nuance—in its own voice (i.e. editorial) it does not construct a prejudicial image of Islam, Palestine and Hamas. It constructively praises Hamas' attitude towards Israel. The other two newspapers published under foreign ownerships, in contrast, construct a prejudicial image of Islam, Hamas and Palestine in their editorials. The framing pattern of Islam, Hamas, Palestine and Israel once again shows that the locally owned newspaper respects Islam and Muslims' issue; and played a watchdog role not to fall inside the pitfall of Western elite agenda. However, the other newspapers in question that published under foreign ownerships could not overcome their prejudicial position in covering the issue. In terms of news coverage, the legitimating perception regarding Western elite policy in Palestine may be caused by two factors. Firstly, these newspapers legitimate and accept some Western nations' authority over the Middle East without questioning it; this is also an argument of Said (2003), as mentioned above. The agenda—that Islamists are against humanity, are a threat to the Middle East peace process, and are killers—appears to provide the message that what the Western elite nations are doing by supporting Israel is, in fact, supporting world civilization and they are given the authority to define what is good and what is bad for the world. This study argues that in covering the 2006 Palestinian election these newspapers in many cases fail to question the Orientalist view by paralleling international news agencies that leave the Western elite agenda unchallenged.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The *ODT* is the oldest, the *NZH* is the highest circulated and the *Press* is the third circulated newspaper published in New Zealand. The *ODT* published from Otago, the *Press* from Christchurch and the *NZH* published from Auckland city. These are mainstream, broadsheets and quality newspapers and have monopoly in circulation in their respective regions.

<sup>2</sup> This reference is based on a news report of Abraham Rabinovich published in the *New Zealand Herald* on May 14, 2015. In this report Rabinovich coded Israeli Major General Sami Turjeman.

<sup>3</sup> For a direct explanation of the colonial and post-colonial power used against 'Islamists' see the well-cited writings of Zainab al-Ghazali, for example, "Days from My Life" (in Arabic *Ayyâm min hayâtî*) translated in English as *Return of the Pharaoh* by Mokrane Guezzou. Al-Ghazali wrote this book during her imprisonment under Gamal Abdel Nasser

<sup>4</sup> See also the trail procedure and punishment imposed against the Muslim Brotherhood leader and former Egypt President Mohamed Morsi. For this reference one may also have a quick look on the *Guardian* editorial published on April 22, 2014: 'The Guardian view on the sentence just passed on Mohamed Morsi'. Available online (accessed on May 6, 2014): <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/apr/22/guardian-view-sentence-mohamed-morsi-west-should-protest>. In this editorial the *Guardian* questions the trail procedure against Morsi. In a latter development, the Egypt Court has imposed a verdict of sentenced to death against Mr. Morsi. See news report for the evidence: 'Ousted Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi sentenced to death' (*NZH*, May 17, 2015). Available online (accessed on May 18, 2015): [http://www.nzherald.co.nz/world/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=2&objectid=11450119](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/world/news/article.cfm?c_id=2&objectid=11450119)

<sup>5</sup> Mehdi Hasan constructs his arguments on the basis of the current Western narratives that reject Islam and perceive that the current Abdel Fattah el-Sisi Government in Egypt is working for human rights, social reformation and world civilization. El-Sisi is identified similar to Martin Luther in the current 'Western' narratives simply to reject the 'Islamist Brotherhood'.

<sup>6</sup> For example, in its charter, Hamas maintains that Israel is a "Nazi-like enemy" for the Palestinian people (Yonah 2002: 61).

<sup>7</sup> For example, Hamas maintains that it may leave behind its arms resistance against Israel if Israel promises that "it will end its policies of assassination, incursion, and (in the case of Gaza) reoccupation" (Usher 2005: 51-52).

<sup>8</sup> See the news report, for example, *Leaders say Hamas could negotiate*: January 25, 2006 (*ODT*).

<sup>9</sup> See the news report, for example, *Calls for Abbas to quit*: January 23, 2006 (the *Press*).

<sup>10</sup> See the news report, for example, *Hamas on the political warpath*: January 16, 2006 (*NZH*).

<sup>11</sup> According to the final count, Hamas won 76 of 134 seats, and Fatah won 43 seats (*Fatah surveys wreckage after shock Hamas win*: January 28-29, 2006 [*Press*]).

<sup>12</sup> See news reports, for example: *Huge upset as Hamas claims poll win*: January 27, 2006 (*ODT*); *One-year plan to oust settlers*: March 31, 2006 (*NZH*); *Rice ruled out US aid to Hamas government*: January 31, 2006 (*Press*).

<sup>13</sup> See for example: *Threat to end aid to Palestinians*: January 31, 2006 (*ODT*); *Israel chokes Hamas cash*: February 2, 2006 (*NZH*); *Donors' threat to chop aid*: January 30, 2006 (*Press*).

<sup>14</sup> E.g. *US backs Fatah to keep extremist out*: January 24, 2006 (*NZH*); *Hamas win shock for US*, *Israel*: January 27-28, 2006 (*Press*); *Leaders says Hamas could negotiate*: January 25, 2006 (*ODT*).

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