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The Influence of Framing on the Reduction of Anti-Semitic Attitudes[2]

Abstract: In German media, as well as in German society as a whole, there is increasing criticism of Israel. Some observers attribute this to a rising tide of anti-Semitism, but empirical studies of this development have been both limited and contradictory. Moreover, a reanalysis of existing data indicates that many Germans are actually peace-oriented. Consequently, the partly harsh criticism of Israel may have to be explained in terms of much more complex attitudes than was previously assumed.

The mass media have been assigned at least some responsibility for the posited development of anti-Semitic attitudes in Germany. If they do play a role, then we should look for the mechanisms at work. The Peace Research Group of the University of Konstanz therefore plans to do a framing study of this anti-Semitism. Its main questions will be: what motivates criticism of Israel? Can different forms of anti-Semitism be identified and how can they be reduced? Will people embrace a peace frame for the Near East conflict if one is offered?

1. Introduction

"The still growing purely Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories are probably the incarnate expression of this will for peace of the majority of the Israeli population?" (Barbara 23) – "How can something be destroyed that is in people's heads? Hamas is the reaction to a cause. As long as this cause persists, there will be a 'Hamas'. Be its name Hamas or something else, the contents will be the same" (Xmark) – "Viva Palestine, and Zionists are fascists" (GGG) – "not acknowledging them but getting one's knickers in a twist when being called a Zionist entity" (paule) – "The Palestinians are the fastest growing segment of the population, perhaps we will just wait and see" (paule) – "Dreadful, the Palestinian territories resemble an open-air concentration camp!" (paula – For a detailed identification of the quotes in the order of their appearance, cf. the blog sources listed at the end of this paper.)

One could go on quoting responses to news articles on diverse aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but this would not answer a fundamental question: Are these responses motivated by anti-Semitism? Some of them are, of course, and they make no secret of this. Such comments are not quoted here, as it is quite evident that there is anti-Semitic criticism of Israel. The more interesting questions, though, include the following: Is it conceivable that these comments were inspired by motives other than anti-Semitism? Are some of the writers possibly motivated by a human rights orientation? Is it conceivable that there is something like non-anti-Semitic criticism of Israel which could be mistaken for anti-Semitism? And, finally, what is the role of the mass media in the transmission of news about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? Do they contribute to fanning anti-Semitic attitudes?

This paper will start with a brief overview of the present state of discourse on anti-Semitism, its prevalence in Germany and its postulated role in the increasingly harsh criticism of Israel. Since it has repeatedly been said that the mass media repeat anti-Semitic stereotypes, thus contributing to an increase in anti-Semitism, the role of the mass media will be discussed. Thereafter, a framing experiment will be outlined which is intended to explore the influence of media coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the mental models of recipients. Subsequently, some hypotheses and likely outcomes will be discussed.

2. Background of the research project

2.1 Anti-Semitism in Germany

Anti-Semitism is not and never has been an exclusively German phenomenon (Bergmann, 2002; Henschel, 2008). What is specifically German, though, is the historically unparalleled genocide against millions of Jews. It is therefore not surprising that research on anti-Semitism should place a particular emphasis on the German populace.

In the early years, much of this research was theoretically motivated, seeking to explain the anti-Semitic crimes of the National Socialist era (e.g. Arendt, 2003 [1951]; Fromm, 1980 [1941]; Horkheimer & Adorno, 2006

[1947]). Some empirical studies, made to survey the actual extent of anti-Semitic attitudes in the German populace, found that such attitudes were indeed widespread. In 1946, an Allied study concluded that 18% of the populace consisted of hard-core anti-Semites, 21% were anti-Semitic and 22% were racists. It was not until the 1950s that anti-Semitism slowly started declining in Germany. With the unification of Germany in 1990 it became possible for the first time to examine anti-Semitism in the former GDR. With 8% of the populace it turned out to be low. However, this only refers to the "traditional," manifest form of anti-Semitism. In the meantime, specific facets of anti-Semitism have been identified (Bergmann & Erb, 1997). *Manifest* anti-Semitism refers to rather openly expressed antipathy, to attributions "with which non-Jews try to vilify Jews as Jews" (Frindte et al., 1999, 120; cf. Zick & Küpper, 2006). The other, more "modern" facets of anti-Semitism are thought to have developed because the open expression of anti-Semitism was increasingly frowned upon in German society (Zick & Küpper, 2006). The original prejudice underwent a transformation into different forms, including latent and secondary anti-Semitism. *Latent* anti-Semitism involves the avoidance of the topic of "Jews" and reluctance to make any statements at all about Jews (Bergmann & Erb, 1991). *Secondary* anti-Semitism is specifically German, insofar as it leans on the discontent about belonging to a "nation of perpetrators." It refers to ways Germans deal with the National Socialist past and their own responsibility and involves reversing the blame, demanding an end to discussions of the past and relativising this past (Frindte et al., 2005; Zick & Küpper, 2006). Additionally, modern anti-Semitism is assumed to have developed a new form. What is "new" is that it centres on Israel, is global and is supported by the political left (Bergmann, 2005; Harrison, 2006; Rabinowitz et al., 2004). New anti-Semitism can be defined as criticism of Israel motivated by anti-Semitic attitudes. It has several sub-facets: *Anti-Zionism* refers to a rejection of Israel's right to exist, the demand that the Jews should leave Palestine and the redirection of anti-Semitic attitudes at the state of Israel (Frindte, Wammetsberger & Wettig, 2005; Kempf, 2009). *NS-comparative criticism* of Israel employs comparisons of Israel's policies with those of the NS-regime, thus disposing of the German past, and insinuates that Israel exploits the Holocaust to gain political advantages (Kempf, 2009; Zick & Küpper, 2006). Besides these two facets, *anti-Semitic criticism* of Israel, which uses criticism of Israel to disguise and legitimate anti-Semitic attitudes, has become a focus of attention (Frindte et al., 2005; Kempf, 2009). Finally, there are critical stances on Israeli policy which appear free of anti-Semitism (Pfahl-Traughber, 2007; Zick & Küpper, 2006).

Owing to normative proscription after the defeat of National Socialism, openly expressed anti-Semitism has decreased. By examining the above mentioned facets, it became possible to trace changes and shifts in anti-Semitic attitudes (Bergmann & Erb, 1997). Still, it is difficult to determine the extent to which anti-Semitism has developed over time, because in different studies a variety of different questionnaire items have been used to identify it. Bergmann (2003) found as many as 678 different items employed in studies between 1949 and 1998. Moreover, most of these items have not been used consistently over time. They were either substituted for other items, or they differed only slightly in wording. Bergmann (2003) explains this with gradually changing frames that reflect changing understandings of anti-Semitism. This permits neither comparisons of countries nor time series for Germany. Beginning in 2002, Heitmeyer (*Deutsche Zustände*, 2002, the latest edition appeared in 2010) has started editing surveys on a regular and systematic basis. The problem persists, though, that different surveys offer different figures. To name just one example: According to Zick & Küpper (2006), the percentage of participants exhibiting secondary anti-Semitism lies between 45% and 64%. In contrast, Bergmann (2005) gives figures between 15% and 20%.

At any rate, in order not to play down the problem, and as there is a trend toward accepting the numbers provided by Heitmeyer et al., their findings are reported here. The percentage of participants exhibiting manifest anti-Semitism is reported to be between 19% and 21% (depending on the respective item), and of those exhibiting secondary anti-Semitism, between 45% and 64%. Between 51% and 68% agree with items on NS-comparative criticism of Israel; between 32% and 64% agree with items on the anti-Zionism scale. In contrast, only 11% of those taking a critical stance toward Israel do not agree with any anti-Semitic item (Zick & Küpper, 2006, 2007). Generally, they do not find an overall increase and point out that the figures are no different from those for other European countries.

Why Israel? First of all, it could be assumed that Israel, as the only officially Jewish state, tends to attract anti-Semitic sentiments, whose open expression is, however, politically incorrect. The question remains, though, of why this has begun to happen only somewhat recently and why it is supported by an increasing number of "the left and left-influenced sections of the media and 'cognitive elites'" (Harrison, 2006, xiv; cf. Bergmann & Erb, 1997). Harrison notes the development of a general moral indignation about injustice, combined with a watchdog-attitude. "A person so motivated will often feel that the very moral urgency of what he has to say compels him to cleave to the central substance of his message and not to waste time quibbling or entering caveats concerning interpretations of his words which distort what he perceives as their intention" (Harrison, 2006, 5). Therefore, subdued and slumbering anti-Semitic attitudes awaken and start to turn against Israel. The chief responsibility is assigned to the mass media.

2.2 The Role of the Mass Media

The emergence of the mass media has been accompanied by speculation about their impact on recipients. Media are our window on the world (Bläsi, 2006). Most, if not all, of what we "know" about other countries and their conflicts depends, first, on *what* the media choose to report (agenda-setting), and, second, on *how* they do this (framing). Both concepts were introduced in the 1970s by McCombs & Shaw (1972, on agenda-setting) and Goffman (1986 [1974], on framing) and have since then proved tremendously influential in research on the mass media. In our research, the concept of framing is of particular interest. Framing refers to the way information is presented, the context in which it is embedded and the highlighting of specific aspects by means of metaphors, words and other linguistic elements. "Framing essentially involves *selection* and *salience*" (Entman, 1993, 52; italics in original).

In the context of anti-Semitism, it has often been pointed out that the way the media report about Israel, and specifically about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, is tainted with anti-Semitic references, allusions and innuendos, thus offering recipients ways to link in with according stereotypes (Jäger & Jäger, 2003; Wistrich, 2004). Such stereotypes are posited to be deeply rooted in German society, constituting an entrenched cultural mentality, a kind of "cultural code" (Volkov, 1978; cf. Rensmann, 2004, 45). Therefore, the media are hypothesised to attach to a more or less dormant anti-Semitic psychic infrastructure, thereby contributing to the rise of the new anti-Semitism.

There are two points to be made here. First, neither the media nor the recipients function as simply as has been assumed. Second, the cultural mentality may contain far more elements than has been supposed so far, thus constituting a set of partly conflicting frames and values. As regards the media, there is some evidence that their influence on recipients is limited. Although in a well-known framing experiment Kahneman & Tversky (1984) found great influence, these effects could neither be replicated nor can they be transferred to the fields of attitude formation and politics (Simon, 2001). Frames suggest ways to interpret events. If any one frame were readily accepted by everyone, we would not have such a plethora of different media to contend with. Moreover, the recipients of print media differ in the way and the amount they read, as well as in the intensity with which they try to understand what they have read. Many different variables are crucial for the assimilation of information (Donsbach, 1992; Kosicki & McLeod, 1990; Scheufele, 2001). Consequently, recipients and their characteristics strongly determine whether they take note of media-provided information, how much they absorb and what aspects of a frame they retain. We can therefore differentiate between individual or recipient frames and media frames (though the differences are limited by collectively shared interpretive patterns and cultural repertoires; cf. Zald, 1996). Media frames thus initiate creative processes of information assimilation in recipients (Matthes, 2007, 44; Scheufele, 1999).

Anti-Semitism is the "most ancient of hatreds," as Alvin H. Rosenfeld of the American Jewish Committee writes in his foreword to Harrison's *The Resurgence of anti-Semitism: Jews, Israel, and Liberal Opinion* (2006), and it is thus surely an integral part of man's psychic infrastructure. Still, it would be too easy to rely solely on this insight when reflecting on the effects of news coverage containing anti-Semitic allusions. It is not clear to what extent certain expressions are quasi-automatically linked to anti-Semitic stereotypes. Jäger & Jäger (2003, 26-27) list several such allusions, many of which can easily be transferred to any group or person. To date, there is no study exploring the nature or closeness of association of words like "plump," "arrogant" or "revenge" with anti-Semitic attitudes. It can be expected that inveterate anti-Semites know all the allusions and deeper meanings of a great variety of different anti-Semitic expressions. The same holds for researchers who specialise in studying anti-Semitism. Beyond these two groups, it may be questioned whether a range of expressions is indeed linked with corresponding attitudes. Therefore, the wording of items used in questionnaires may at least partly provide non-interpretable answers (Kempf, 2009). This implies that even when people read certain expressions potentially supportive of anti-Semitism it does not necessarily follow that they will develop the corresponding attitudes. Conversely, even when people make use of these expressions it does not necessarily follow that the expressions are rooted in an anti-Semitic world-view, insofar as it is not clear whether they are linked in users' minds with anti-Semitism. Heyder et al. (2005) have pointed out that several expressions, including NS-comparisons, are used in the media coverage of other conflicts, too. Such terms, expressions and comparisons thus indicate negative connotations, but no more than that. Their usage in criticising Israel might therefore have other meanings than those assumed by researchers.

Being tired of war and later the struggle to come to terms with the past has, among other things, resulted in the rise of human-rights movements, civil courage movements, peace movements, etc. (e.g. Nobis, 2001). This indicates the existence of potential motivations different from anti-Semitic attitudes, namely a peace orientation and/or a human rights orientation. As Kempf (2009, 3-4) points out, the lessons of the past include two conflicting messages: "never again fascism, never again war" vs. "never again fascism, therefore war." It was this inherent conflict which emerged as the dominant factor in the Gulf War discourse in 1990 and 1991 (Kempf, 1994; Schwab-Trapp, 2002). Furthermore, there is a general trend to increasingly frame topics in terms of morals

and values, in the media as well as in politics. Especially the media have been employing "[a]n often-strident language of rights and morals" (Shah, 2001, 55; Iten, 1995). Shah found this to increase the argumentation of recipients in corresponding terms. Consequently, it might become more likely that existing morals and values will be expressed by using inappropriate expressions and comparisons. The crimes of the NS-era provide an example of historically unparalleled malevolence and brutality. This has not only contributed to the emergence of a wide range of laws and conventions intended to prevent such crimes in the future, it has also provided an example of what could be called "evil incarnate." Therefore it should not be surprising if – especially as the NS-era recedes farther into the past – politicians, journalists or the general populace increasingly make inappropriate comparisons. Again: Why Israel?

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict appears in many ways well suited to provoke criticism. It is an asymmetrical conflict. A democratic country of Western character occupies territories outside its original borders. This country pursues an ongoing settlement programme in these occupied territories, thus infringing on international law. Residents of the occupied territories are displaced without compensation. The delivery of supplies to the occupied territories is almost completely dependent on the occupying country. This is greatly complicated by walls, fences and border controls. Human rights organisations and the media are granted only restricted access to the occupied territories. These and similar policies can stimulate criticism of any democratic country on "our" side, i.e. the Western world. This is likely to be true especially for anyone "fighting" for human rights.

As regards the media, it is characteristic of every escalating or escalated conflict that the opposing parties will seek outside support and try to form coalitions (Glasl, 1994; Kempf, 2010). This also holds for the Israelis and Palestinians. The media play an integral role in this competition for support. In reporting on a conflict they not only inform people about the existence of the conflict, but also provide frames as proposals for how to construe the events, their background, the reasons for the conflict, etc. The opposing sides therefore try to drum up support for their respective views. The media thus become an additional weapon in their arsenal. This weapon employs words as well as pictures, whereby images play an especially crucial media role. Hence, this conflict is also a "fight for the eyeball" (Hall, 2001, 12, own translation; Bauer, 2006).

2.3 Open Questions

To what extent criticism of Israel is motivated by anti-Semitism is a matter of dispute. Heyder et al. (2005) did not find any significant correlation between criticism of Israel and anti-Semitism, while Kaplan & Small (2006) reported a relationship (for an overview of further relevant research cf. Kempf, 2010). These inconsistent results may be taken as an indication that other research methods might have to be applied. This is the subject of a current project by the *Peace Research Group* at the University of Konstanz. Furthermore, it is debatable whether and to what extent the media actually influence anti-Semitic attitudes. To date, there is no research that examines the manner and impact of potentially anti-Semitic allusions on the different facets of anti-Semitism. How do the different media frames of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict influence recipients' perceptions? To what extent and in what ways do these frames shape the mental models recipients may hold of this conflict?

3. Methods and Operationalisation

3.1 Questionnaires

In order to explore the impact of German media discourse about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the perceptions of recipients, we plan to conduct a framing study. It is to be carried out with a quota sampling of n=180 participants from a federal state in the western part of Germany (Baden-Württemberg) and n=180 from a federal state in the eastern part of Germany (Thuringia). Since the samples will be selected from the larger sample of participants in our survey study, each participant will already have completed a questionnaire including scales measuring

- manifest, secondary, latent and Israel-based anti-Semitism
- political criticism of Israel and political anti-Zionism
- anti-Muslim sentiments
- knowledge of the conflict and the involved parties
- affective nearness to the conflict parties
- positioning in the conflict
- affective ambivalence (war frame or peace frame in relation to the respective conflict party) as regards the conflict

- human rights orientation, pacifism/militarism, moral disengagement
- socio-economic data

This already completed questionnaire will serve as a pre-test. A few days after filling it out, participants will be asked to read a news article on an incident in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Afterwards they will be asked to summarize in writing what they have read and to specifically address the background of the incident, as well as those aspects which appear important. They will then be asked to evaluate the article in regard to intelligibility, possible partisanship, objectivity or information content. This will be followed by items measuring positions to the conflict and affective ambivalence. Furthermore, some items will be employed to measure manifest, secondary and latent anti-Semitism, as well as Israel-based anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiments.

3.2 Frames

The articles presented to the participants will report on an incident in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Altogether, six articles have been constructed. Each participant will be presented with only one article. Three respectively differently framed articles report about a Palestinian suicide attack, whereas the other three deal with an Israeli military attack. Both stories vary as regards partisanship, i.e. the attribution of responsibility, the emphasis on victimhood and neutrality. They further respectively vary in terms of the use of anti-Semitic or anti-Islamic stereotypes. While one frame condemns the perpetrators and focuses on the victims, the second frame justifies the attack and emphasizes its reactive character. The third frame is neutral in that it refrains from taking sides, tries to arouse empathy for both sides' situation, challenges a win-lose perspective and respects both sides' rights and intentions. The frames have been constructed according to the (de-)escalation-oriented aspects of news coverage as worked out by Kempf (2003).

The articles are based on real incidents, thus avoiding the problem that subjects who are familiar with the conflict and its history could identify stories that have been made up. To find suitable stories, large circulation quality German newspapers and magazines were surveyed for reported incidents. These were the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Süddeutsche Zeitung, Welt, Spiegel, Focus, Stern, Handelsblatt* and *Tagesspiegel*. It was conspicuous that Israeli military operations apparently have to exceed a certain threshold level before they are newsworthy. Consequently there were fewer incidents, but those covered were more serious. In contrast, it was rather easy to find reports of Palestinian attacks.

The first incident chosen for framing was a Palestinian suicide attack in Tel Aviv in April 2006, with ca. 10 dead and 60 injured. The second incident was an Israeli military operation called "Hot Winter," which took place in the Gaza strip at the end of February/beginning of March 2008. As this lasted several days, just one day was chosen. The frames were then created by compiling and collating frame-compatible information, citations and interpretations from all the consulted newspapers. That way the escalation-oriented frames not only reflect prevalent discursive elements and threads in the German media (cf. Jäger & Jäger, 2003), but also represent a qualitative style which might enhance their credibility. Additionally, each frame is backed by a photograph containing emotion-charged, though not exaggerated, content underpinning the contents of the respective article. After construction, the frames were coded using the ASPR coding scheme (2003) and parallelised to ensure that they were quantitatively compatible.

4. Analyses and Hypotheses

Two questions are to be answered by this experiment. The first is how news coverage is processed by recipients. To reconstruct this process, recipients' initial mental models can be determined by applying latent class analysis to the data provided by the scales measuring positions to the conflict, affective ambivalence, affective nearness to the conflict parties, knowledge about the conflict, human rights orientation, pacifism and the assessment of the article. From the participants' quantitatively coded narratives, their post-test mental model can be worked out, and by applying multi-level analyses, their information-processing can be reconstructed.

To answer the question of how this information-processing results in either an increase or a decrease in anti-Semitic attitudes, the pre-test mental model and the respective frame are used as the independent variable, whereas the post-test mental model and anti-Semitic attitudes serve as the dependant variable. Again multi-level analyses will be applied.

What results can be expected?

In general, we expect that pro-Israel frames will have far less chance to gain agreement in comparison to pro-Palestinian frames. This is owing to the "David versus Goliath" frame predominant in the German media. Furthermore, reactions to the frames will be dependent on the recipients' affective closeness. Affective closeness, i.e. having visited the region, having made friends there, etc., includes sympathy for and understanding of the

situation of a respective side, as well as a positive attitude toward the people involved in the conflict. As "[i]t is generally hypothesized that attitudes bias information processing and memory in favor of attitude-consistent material" (Ajzen, 2001, 41), this should also entail a previous selective assimilation of information about the conflict and its protagonists. A frame favouring the respective opponent will therefore tend to be dismissed. However, these frames might be capable of arousing anti-Islamic or anti-Semitic attitudes. Those who feel affectively close to both sides will probably dismiss any frame demonising one of the protagonists. Such frames can arouse resentments which might instead turn against the news source. Where there is no affective closeness to either side, previously acquired knowledge will become more relevant. Participants with little knowledge will probably accept the presented frame, whereas participants with average or much knowledge will rather tend to dismiss the pro-Israel frames. Because participants with a more or less good knowledge base will not only know more about the situation of the Palestinians, but will most probably also have been exposed to the widespread criticism of Israel, we expect that they will already have formed corresponding norms, beliefs and expectancies. A pro-Israel frame might then sound rather like an exculpation attempt that is to be rejected. Participants with little or no knowledge, on the other hand, may be concerning themselves with the conflict for the first time. Not having developed corresponding norms and expectancies, they should thus rely to a greater extent on spontaneously forming affective responses (for a general treatment of social cognition cf. Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2000).

The deescalation-oriented frames should generally be suitable to reduce the condemnation of the respective perpetrator. An exception may occur when participants feel affectively strongly attached to one of the opposing sides. Moreover, these frames should not fan any negative attitudes toward either side. They are thus suitable to create empathy with both sides' problems, fears and intentions, thereby contributing to a better understanding of the conflict parties. Should this prove true, it will have important implications for journalistic practice.

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