Chapter 7

The gaze of US and Indian media on terror in Mumbai: a comparative analysis[1]

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To contribute to growing knowledge of how journalists fail to contribute to global reconciliation and peace and move outside the dominant scholarly focus on Western media, this chapter critically analyses and compares editorial commentary about the 2008 terror attacks in Mumbai, India, in leading newspapers in India and the United States. Examining how media of a dominant Western and a dominant non-Western nation represent terror events, this chapter explores distinctions in the embedded ideology of terrorism and the (mis)alignment of the two nations' media commentary with the tenets of war or peace journalism. Since the terror event occurs outside the geographic and ideological West, a concept utilising a binary of the 'West and the Rest' to emphasise European uniqueness and non-Western inferiority, this chapter illuminates the representation of terror events from two opposing ends of this constructed binary.

Our findings suggest that media in both India and the US perpetuate global ideological discourses around terror that reify social identities, promote nationalistic support for government actions, and call up religious and political divisions between India and Pakistan as a primary cause for the terror attacks. The newspapers differ, however, in their proposed solutions to terrorism and their proximity to the

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1 A different version of two short sections from the Background and Method section in this chapter appear in the Sudeshna Roy and Susan Ross co-authored article titled 'The circle of terror: strategic localizations of global media terror meta-discourses in the US, India and Scotland' in *Media, War & Conflict*, 4(3).

practices endorsed by peace journalism. Commentaries in India are heavily critical of the role of the Indian state, indicating how internal corruption and politics are contributing factors for the attacks and arguing for a self-reflexive response to terrorism. Only rarely does the US newspaper challenge its dominant post-9/11 construction of terrorism as the product of the evil 'other.' Critiques of the power elite in the US are too few and far between to create real discursive seams in its overarching schema of war journalism.

Background

On 26 November 2008, ten armed men coordinated attacks across Mumbai, India, damaging the iconic Taj Mahal Hotel and killing more than 250 people. This chapter compares and scrutinises media editorial commentary about the attacks in Mumbai in the *Hindustan Times,* an English-language newspaper with the largest Mumbai readership and the second-highest readership (6.3 million people) in India (National Readership Studies India 2006), with that of *The New York Times*.

The Mumbai attacks have been deemed a terror event by the media in India and around the world. Terror events have long been considered a global phenomenon with news of the events accessible worldwide through media coverage. In the past decade, diverse scholars have focused on the nexus of terrorism and the media. Post-9/11, media discourse on terrorism around the world changed dramatically (Ross & Bantimaroudis 2006). Around the globe, the meaning-making powers of media engaged the 'affective potential' of audiences in the construction of a polarised view of terrorism as absolutely evil and generally ignoring the systemic forces that drive terrorist acts (Chouliaraki 2004; Simmons & Lowry 1990). Hatfield (2008) examined the media construction and deployment of iconic images to create a culture of terror. Lazar and Lazar (2004) identified the recurrent pattern of Western media to toe the line of their respective governments with regard to constructed 'enemies' within the context of the 'war on terror'. Graham et al. (2004) found that the US media's 'war on terror' discourse consistently constructed terrorism victims as inherently good; terrorists as the evil Other; public support of national government as necessary, and government actions

and policies as both legitimate and benevolent. Studies of media text and talk about 9/11, both in the United States and around the world, found that media relentlessly demonise terrorists in ways that distort and inhibit the free and fair flow of information (see, for example, Hackett 2007).

Yet seams in media's hegemonic discourse of terrorism provide instances of relief from this oppressive system of representation of terrorists through opportunities for effective social action (Ross 2009). Viewing discourse as fluid and shifting, Aly (2010) identified a 'series of critical points' through which terrorism discourse evolves in a meaning-making interplay between the audience and media outlets. Similarly, Ross and Bantimaroudis (2006) defined events as the locus of 'critical discourse moments' that permit shifts in media discourse.

While post-9/11 studies of the media have provided significant insights in the area of critical media studies, very few studies have focused on how media of different countries represent terror events that have occurred outside the geographic and ideological West. In examining the media commentary about the 26 November Mumbai attacks both in India and in the US, we address this gap in literature. By examining the Indian and the US media coverage of the non-Western terror event in Mumbai, we intend to explore any distinctions in the underlying ideological messages they convey about terrorism.

Studies have shown that terrorism/conflict coverage by Western media has predominantly grazed Galtung's (1998) four identified fields of war journalism practices. The coverage has often embraced a we–they orientation (Leudar et al. 2004); contains systematic 'blind spots' (Hackett & Gruneau 2000) about 'our' ideologies and mistakes; produces monologic discourses and non-reflective echoing of elite rhetoric (Bennett 2003; Billeaudeaux et al. 2003; Carruthers 2000; Hackett 2007; Lazar & Lazar 2004; Steuter 1990) and fails to provide solutions to problems like terrorism (Lynch & McGoldrick 2005). Western media consistently cast the beliefs and visions of identified 'enemies' as radical, oppressive, fanatical, irrational and antithetical to Western values as they normalise Western values and beliefs, making Western ideas appear devoid of politics and ideology. The discursive strategies of

normalising the West and fanaticising the rest, taken together, construct binaries that naturalise divisions and undermine informed deliberation of the causes of and solutions to terrorism.

Terror events/conflicts in India have been an unfortunate but consistent part of society for a long time. India and Pakistan have fought three wars since 1947, the year of their independence from the British. Two of the wars were fought over the contentious Kashmir territory, which both countries claim to be theirs. Lee and Maslog (2005) found that Indian and Pakistani media coverage of the India–Pakistan conflicts had strong war journalism framing, with little attention to long-term solutions to religious and nationalistic frictions between the countries. Siraj's (2008) examination of US media coverage of the India–Pakistan conflicts revealed that the majority of media sources also adopted the war journalism frame. The overdependence on the war journalism frame is not unusual, as noted by Ross and Bantimaroudis (2006), mainly because journalists fail to break away from trained and deeply entrenched professional patterns; constantly face structural and financial constraints; seek drama to engage the audience; adopt 'logical' storylines to resonate with the human need for narrative; and are deeply invested in the socio-psychological drive to react to events in ways that reinforce their 'rightful' place in a nation.

Some studies found that Indian media's coverage of the terror attacks in Mumbai unsettled the public and increased negative images of the nation and the effectiveness of its government (Shekhar 2009). Kattarwala (2010) found that media coverage of terrorism in India exposed the nation's deep, societal schism between Islam and Hinduism, increasing tensions among people but making visible the hegemonic force of global media discourse linking Islam with terrorism. Indian media deployed the phrase 'India's 9/11' within their coverage of the attacks, thereby diminishing and deflecting harm to national identity raised by domestic threats to national security. This deployment served to align India discursively with the US and to build public demand for Indian policies and actions similar to those of the US government following September 11, 2001: striking hard and fast against 'the terrorists' (Rajagopal 2009; Chakravartty 2002).

Few studies have examined the media coverage of these terror attacks from a war or peace journalism perspective. Advocates of peace assert that more reflective, less polarised news texts can open public discussion to the root causes and sustainable solutions to global terrorism (Howard 2003; Lee & Maslog 2005). But scholars have found that media discourses often fail to provide solutions to problems like terrorism (Lynch & McGoldrick 2005). Using the case study of the attacks in Mumbai, this chapter attempts to address this gap in scholarly studies in the field by exploring the extent to which the contemporary media discourses of terrorism complement or challenge the tenets of peace discourse.

Method

In this chapter, we employ a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of media commentary on the Mumbai attacks in the *Hindustan Times* in India and *The New York Times* in the US. Analysis of similarities and differences among the media's discursive treatment of the attacks adds to the literature on media's global construction and utilisation of terrorism discourse, its ideological functions, as well as its alignment with war or peace journalism. Editorials and op-eds in the leading newspapers of the two countries are juxtaposed to expose terrorism discourses that are constituted by and constitutive of a global media response to a terror event that occurs in a non-Western country.

Media commentary in the US was chosen for the purpose of comparison because the US is the locus of one of the world's most-publicised terror events, the 9/11 attacks, and the US media have long been understood to sculpt and lead global media discourses on international issues, including terrorism. Moreover, the mediated, discursive position of the US as a global superpower aligned with the ideological West will highlight any discursive tug-of-war between culturally embedded handling of terrorism-related events in one Western and one non-Western nation.

Critical analysis of media commentaries requires attention to the social, cultural and historical contexts from which these texts arise and in which they perform their meaning-making work. In this study, we

employ CDA to identify the structure of mediated terror discourses employed by domestic and international media, acknowledging fully that this discourse structure is neither closed nor stagnant. Rather, the particular deployment of this discourse is deeply acculturated within specific national settings and shifts in response to dominant ideological forces. CDA uncovers the processes within media discourse that systematically link distinct types of talk and text into 'intertextual chains' of meaning (Fairclough 1998). The explicit and subtextual interplay of language, image and symbol across temporal and geographic space that constitutes the fluid intertextuality of media discourse both obfuscates and normalises the implicit ideological messages of the powerful. As the site of co-existence and struggle among various local and global social actors within and between nation-states, media discourse articulates, structures and delimits the nature of these interactions in harmony with hegemonic processes of power and politics (Fairclough 1998).

Van Dijk (1995, 2006) has documented the particular usefulness of CDA in studying ideological polarisation between 'us' and 'them'. Using van Dijk's approach to ideological discourse analysis, we therefore examine media text at the levels of structure, syntax, word choice, local and global semantics, schematics, and rhetoric. The analysis also includes critical examination of linguistic binaries and floating and sliding signifiers that consolidate the representation of the world in terms of dichotomised absolutes, and create and reinforce unequal relations of power in Western discourse (Altman & Nakayama 1991; Derrida 1978). Burke (1945) defined antithetical constructions in discourse as 'the placement of one thought or thing in terms of its opposite' (p403), that has the power to represent Others without explicit mention. Barthes (1957, 1977) and Derrida (1978) have both shown how the construction of discursive imprecision, instability and incessant deferral and sliding of meaning can undermine the relationship between the signifier, signified and referent. These strategies work together to obscure the hegemonic work of discursively separating the dominant and the dominated, the powerful and the powerless.

We also analyse the editorials relying on the observations of Hackett and Gruneau (2000) who identified how systematic media 'blind spots' can be recognised through careful attention to the content, sourcing

and depth of coverage; dominance of influential players; impartiality in including and representing various viewpoints, and significant omissions about the other. Finally, borrowing from Galtung's (1998) categorisation of war and peace journalism, the authors utilise CDA to identify we–they orientation; (a) historicity and self-reflexivity, reactive and proactive rhetoric, and non-zero-sum solutions in the texts.

Editorials long have been the site of discourse analysis because they express both institutional and elite group opinions, perspectives, ideologies, positions and interests (Bolivar 1994). Moreover, editorials are widely circulated in society and play a significant role in shaping public opinion in alignment with government policy, especially during periods of crisis (Billeaudeaux et al. 2003; Zaller 1992, 1994). While created by contributors rather than newspaper staff, op-eds (commentary generally placed on the page opposite the newspaper's editorial) are selected by the newspaper (generally without review of specific column content) and placed in the influential locus of the newspaper's own opinions. Op-eds thus contribute to the ideological work for and of the newspaper, albeit with the nuances of an 'external voice'. Moreover, op-eds provide opportunities for intertextual dialogue within the newspaper through counterpoint to as well as amplification of the newspaper's own voice.

One month of editorials and op-eds from the *Hindustan Times* and *The New York Times* form the basis of this study. We have examined all editorials and op-ed commentaries related to the terror events for the month following the Mumbai attacks,[2] which yielded seven editorials and seven op-eds from the *Hindustan Times (HT)* and three editorials and five op-eds from *The New York Times (NYT)*.

Findings

The editorials and op-eds of the two countries show considerable similarities as well as differences in their approach to the Mumbai attacks.

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2 To capture immediate editorial and op-ed response to the events in the *Hindustan Times* and *The New York Times* between 27 November and 26 December 2008, we used the LexisNexis database and keywords such as "terror***," "India***," "Mumbai w/3 attack," etc.

The interplay of the local and global is captured by four identified categories: us vs them identity construction; nationalism is what the doctor orders; playing the India–Pakistan religious difference card; and giving peace a chance. The discussion illuminates distinctive local and global discourses that serve to complicate, contradict, strengthen and substantiate terror as well as peace discourses.

Us versus them identity construction

The examined newspaper editorials and commentaries demonstrate that terror discourses function to construct identities for 'Us', the citizens of India and, through alignment, those of the US, and for 'Them', the terrorists. The editorials and op-eds of both countries identify Us as civilised, open, democratic, superior, peaceful, and so on, while the terrorists are repeatedly labelled as dangerous, shape-shifting, noxious, barbaric, backward, volatile and tangled.

In the *HT* editorials, the discursive identity construction of 'Our' moral, ideological, cultural superiority supersedes that of the terrorists. One *HT* editorial claimed that 'Mumbai is held hostage by *marauding terrorists*, with its *citizens forced to cower in fear* under a *fog of utter helplessness …*' (*Hindustan Times* 2008a, emphasis added). The juxtaposition of 'marauding terrorists' and cowering citizens distinguishes Us from Them. The terrorists are identified with vigorous specificity, pinning 'their' identities to a few, debilitating terms and affording Them no discursive latitude in the process. 'They' are the 'marauding terrorists,' akin to pillaging and raiding pirates with no conscience, wielding 'fear' as 'their' weapon of choice on unsuspecting, 'helpless,' good citizens. The Others, the marauders, are socially constructed through alienation and association with violent, raw power over the helpless, nonviolent citizens of Mumbai. The commentary works to simultaneously bestow and remove power from the Others, giving them illegitimate power to terrify and chaining them to the narrow identity of a terrorist.

The 'fog' metaphor projects an amorphous and pervasive power onto terrorism, shrouding its operation in fear-inducing mystery and enhancing the association of terrorists with the dislocation, confusion and figurative obliteration of (civilised) society. The commentary evokes

scenes from Hollywood and Bollywood movies where the 'enemy's' moves are dramatically shielded and rendered impenetrable through 'fog' that accentuates the terror and blinds good citizens to the source of their trauma.

The reference to the savage raider metaphor continues to appear in subsequent *HT* editorials describing the '*senseless terror* and *barbarity* unleashed on *innocent lives* of late' (*Hindustan Times* 2008b, emphasis added). The use of the term 'barbarity' contributes to the consistent discursive identification of 'terrorists' as less than human, less than thinking, sensible beings; closer or equal to uncivilised beings or even inhuman beasts. At the same time, citizens of India are bestowed the identity of the 'innocent' and their characters imbued with a sense of purity and clarity, childlike and free of blame. Indian citizens are innocent of provocation, innocent of all wrongdoing, and innocent of any and all of the actions the terrorists are blamed for as well as all similar acts of violence.

Ideologically, the terrorists' actions are rendered as stand-alone instances of rage by uncivilised savages upon the civilised, guilt-free people of Indian society. Terrorism is not presented as one of many forms of violent action against policies of injustice, inequality, and ideological, political, and religious alienation from mainstream society. It is presented as an aberration in society, which robs acts of terror of any ability to deliver an ideological message. The blatant discursive omission in this case is the ready and blameless employ of power and dominance by many of the citizens and the government of India through domestic and international policies embodying an ideology of force. Any correlation or cause and effect relationship between military and police violence by the legitimised powers and the acts of mass violence by illegitimate terrorists is strategically omitted from these texts.

The *NYT* commentaries employ similar discursive construction of Us vs Them. However, these constructions are given a global hue, with the people of the US alongside the people of India as inherently 'good' and terrorists worldwide as unequivocally 'evil'. Kristol (2008) observes that in Mumbai 'jihadists kill innocents'. The nature of this assertion is telling in its power to assign identities. The Mumbai attackers are

'jihadists,' only, unquestionably, unproblematically, undeniably and singularly that. The connotation of 'jihadists,' or Islamic militants, is far reaching, calling up age-old images of Oriental extremism and vengeful violence, people ready to destroy themselves for irrational religious causes that border on fanaticism. The evocation of the Islamic religion, as a given, is a taken-for-granted characteristic of all terrorists, expands and reinforces global discourses of the Islamic terrorist Other rampaging across the face of the earth. The construction of the attackers as 'jihadists' is made indisputable through the well-established, global authority of the *NYT*.

The Indian editorials use generous reference to the 9/11 attacks to align the Mumbai attacks with the attacks on the Twin Towers. The recurrent use of this strategy firmly establishes a deep connection between the US and India, providing an implicit justification for the appropriateness of a US-style response to the terrorist Others and constructing an idealised global citizen network united oppositionally to the 'terrorists'. One representative *HT* column said, 'the American nation stood united at that most critical moment of history … After the Wednesday attack, the Indian nation is united in condemning the dastardly attack on our soil' (*Hindustan Times* 2008c). The identification between the two nations is explicit.

Editorials in both nations adopt discursive strategies to close the membership of Us and Them. We are the people who stand united against a common enemy, the people who support their government against Others threatening the security of the country, the citizens aligned with their global friends, partners and allies from powerful nations through unified collective action against the 'terrorists'. They, those Others, are the people who help Us define 'our' shared identity.

This sentiment of solidarity is echoed in *NYT* editorials where the citizens of the US are constructed as standing steadfast with Indians during this time of crisis. Claiming that 'We share the horror, the pain and the disbelief that Indians are feeling as they absorb the appalling details of the terrorist attacks in Mumbai that left nearly 200 dead' (*New York Times* 2008a), the *NYT* explicitly constructs US identity as connected to, and 'shar[ing]' in the suffering of the people of India. Here

'we' also connotes the global, law-abiding Us of virtuous victimisation, the people stricken by sorrow, standing together in 'horror', 'pain' and 'disbelief' at the 'appalling', senseless attacks upon Us. Yet it is 'they', in this case the citizens of India, who must absorb the reality and the dead. Thus, while 'our' horror is shared, our loss – and the resulting necessary action – is not. Second, through the implicit evocation of 'our' 9/11 sufferings, 'we' are rendered both valiant and empathetic; 'we' understand and feel their pain; our compassion makes Indians, who are suffering now, a part of Us. Finally, this identification of/with Us makes clear through oppositional omission that the terrorists are *not* Us; they are distinct from the US, the Indian, and the collective 'we'. This distinction reifies the divide the *NYT* and the *HT* articulate between the terrorist Other and Us.

The collective construction of both countries' editorials and op-eds of terrorists as uncivilised, cruel and fanatical conveys a number of hegemonic and ideological messages. First, by presenting all terrorists as pillaging, heartless jihadists, any legitimacy of 'their' political and ideological argument is erased discursively. As extreme outliers, the perspectives of these Others are voided of credibility, respectability or rationality in modern society. Through opposition, then, 'our' ideologies become legitimate and appropriate as the taken-for-granted guide to a normal and secure world. Second, the *NYT* construction of Us welded together in the moment of suffering inflicted by 'terrorists' facilitates the conceptualisation of terrorism as a unitary global problem. The implied mutuality of/between the US and India initiates a subtle move toward public persuasion of the Indian Government to ally itself with the US-directed global response to terror, to conceive of the Indian national response to the Mumbai attacks *as part of* India's support of the US in the global 'war on terror'. However, India has, in the past, been critical of the US invasion of Iraq and has refused to send soldiers to participate in that war.

The identification of solidarity between the two nations constructed through the commentaries works strategically to forge a bond between the US and India to facilitate global collaboration motivated from the Western ideological standpoint. In these ways, media discourses work

to promote a deep underlying sense of who 'we' are and who 'they' are, producing, amplifying and maintaining social identities through strategic Othering processes deeply infused with the ultimate goal of promoting Western ideological and political solutions to curb terrorism.

Nationalism is what the doctor orders

The terror attacks in Mumbai also brought to the forefront the ways in which media discourse works to call up nationalistic and patriotic fervour amongst the people in order to hegemonically unify disparate factions of society. Other political goals, such as the formation of international alliances and chalking specific regional objectives to curb terrorism, are also crafted and sustained through the nationalistic rhetoric. Media intertextuality, particularly the strategy of comparison (Fairclough 1992), helps build an argument for the proper understanding of these terror events in India and abroad.

For example, the *HT* uses discursive strategies to bolster the patriotic argument by comparing the Mumbai attacks intertextually to the 9/11 attacks. The recency of the terrorist attacks in the US renders 9/11 highly salient in the Indian public memory, but reference to 9/11 also symbolically links India to this other great nation through subtle identification. One editorial states:

> After September 11, 2001, *America came together* to fight a *common, shape-shifting enemy*. Can *we as a nation* that has known terrorism for far longer – and with far more wounds to show – *come together* to face this nation-crippling assault? (*Hindustan Times* 2008a, emphasis added)

The unified, collective support of Americans for their government following the 9/11 crisis is represented as an ideal response to terrorism. The notion that the 'American nation stood united' is repeated almost as a choral refrain to discursively highlight and recommend a unified national Indian response as *the* proper response to their own terror events. Unification and 'coming together,' in the case of India, is represented as collective condemnation of the terrorists, mourning the victims and praising the work of the government forces that defeated

the Mumbai terrorists in the end. Oppositionally, we are made unlike the 'shape-shifting,' intangible, deliberately diffused and formless images of the 'terrorists'; 'we' have shape and character and symbolic unity in the form of our actions. The Indian editorials' reliance on the US response to terrorism as a core of its argument illustrates and enacts an elite Indian desire for political and cultural alignment with the US, even while rejecting some of its policies (like the invasion of Iraq, for instance). The discursive reference to the 'common' enemy prompts both international and local alignment and unification – alignment with the terror-fighting tactics of the US and unification through the 'coming together' of the Indian people in support of both US action and the home government's plans in response to domestic terror attacks.

In the *NYT*, there is explicit reference to the need for activating the nationalistic fervour in the people of India and in other terror-stricken nations in order to reduce terrorism in the world. For example, one op-ed states:

> But if terror groups are to be defeated, it is *national governments* that will have to do so. In *nations like India (and the United States)*, governments will have to *call on the patriotism of citizens* to fight the terrorists … *Patriotism is an indispensable weapon* in the *defence of civilisation against barbarism*. (Kristol 2008, emphasis added)

This statement, at once, makes the response against the Mumbai attacks both local and global. The interchangeable position constructed when referring to 'nations like India' and then putting '(and the United States)' within parenthesis, shows that India and the US have the same terror experiences and hence their responses could justifiably be the same (meaning military). The strategic use of the parenthesis functions as an equating device (equating the US with India) and garners special attention to the model nation: the US. The use of the comparative 'like' to equate Indian and US terror experiences also functions for US audiences in terms of simultaneously lauding the US citizens' nationalistic and patriotic support of their government in response to 9/11, and providing encouragement for future, uncritical support of the 'war on terror'.

The call to patriotism is problematic in this context because patriotism implies positive love for and pride in one's own country and its symbols, including a healthy questioning of national policies and procedures (Bar-tal & Staub 1997). But that is not what is being summoned here. Instead, what is being termed 'patriotism' is actually xenophobic 'nationalism' in disguise, where the love of one's country takes the form of unquestioning allegiance to jingoistic national government policies. The comparison of patriotism to a 'weapon' further adds fuel to the nationalistic agenda and fervour.

The juxtaposition of the binaries 'civilisation' and 'barbarism' deepens the chasm already in place between Us and Them and exacerbates the ideological incongruity of the two sides. In fact, the discourse restricts the possibilities to only two sides, whereas there are multiple sides and perspectives in the complex, geopolitical nature of terrorism. Finally, the discourse pitches the argument for unity against the backdrop of 'defence' of our way of life and our security. This approach implies that our unity against the 'terrorists' is a reaction to 'their' provocation, that our actions are justified because 'we' are defending ourselves. The discursive approach strategically removes our accountability and participation in the global, geopolitical crisis called terrorism. It is as if we played no part in the enactment of global policies that are now culminating in acts of terrorism.

Collectively then, these findings suggest that, within media discourse, terror attacks function as a locus for gathering together the in-group in order to satisfy specific local and global political goals identified by social elites and institutions as evidenced through overt promotion of uncritical 'patriotic' support for domestic government actions as well as the global US-led 'war on terror'.

Playing the India–Pakistan religious difference card

India's history is fraught with tensions emanating from religious differences between those following Hinduism and those following Islam. The creation of the Islamic country Pakistan in 1947 made these religious differences explicit and overt for the entire world to recognise. These tensions still exist in India today and have flared up time and

again due to various agendas of social and political actors and groups in India as well as Pakistan. As it became evident in the days following the Mumbai attacks that those who conducted the attacks were Pakistani nationals, the terror attacks became a reminder of these longstanding tensions between the two religious groups as well as the two nations.

HT commentaries discursively employed the political and religious differences between the two countries to make ideological arguments in the debate on terrorism. Thus, after Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari said that 'non-State actors operating from its soil perpetrated a horrendous carnage' in Mumbai, an *HT* op-ed dismissed the comment and the credibility of the president. 'Pakistan is *not going to get away* with the *usual smoke and mirrors game*' (*Hindustan Times* 2008d, emphasis added). The subtle intertextuality of the word 'usual' implicitly references and *establishes* past obfuscations and disingenuous attempts by the Pakistan government to allay suspicions of support for terrorist training on its soil. The threat that Pakistan will not 'get away with' attempting to disavow its role in the attacks, represents the Indian government as strong willed and capable of doing what is necessary to counter Pakistan's stance. This discourse positions India as truthful and decisive and opened space for *HT* commentaries to represent India's ongoing political problems with Pakistan as one of several issues contributing to the Mumbai terror attacks.

In contrast, the *NYT* discursively positioned the political differences between India and Pakistan, particularly as played out in Kashmir, as a much more salient and prominent contributor to the Mumbai attacks. This discourse highlights the interplay of global and local political strategies within the complex discursive arena of geographically specific mediated terror events. Two separate columns serve to illustrate this point:

> We fear that whoever was behind it, the carnage will unleash dangerous new furies between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan. And we fear it will divert even more of Pakistan's attention and troops away from fighting extremists on its western border with Afghanistan. (*New York Times* 2008a)

and

> The idea that the road to stability in South Asia goes through Kashmir is as persuasive as the notion that the path to peace in the Middle East goes through Jerusalem. (Mishra 2008)

The *NYT* discourse focused on the tensions between India and Pakistan in the context of the Mumbai attacks specifically in terms of their global consequences (and implicitly in terms of the US led war on terror). The concern was that Pakistan would be drawn away from fighting the Taliban and al-Qaeda in its western borders with Afghanistan, where US troops were engaged and where, in addition to Iraq, the US was spearheading its anti-terrorism efforts. In the context of proffering advice on how India should respond to the attacks, the *NYT* strategically employed its discourse to support initiatives of the US Government. The *NYT* also zooms in on the Kashmir problem, making comparisons with complex land-occupation issues facing Israel and Palestine. Yet again, this focus serves to bring to the fore political strategies in alignment with US military policies in the region, policies that were put in place in order to wage the 'war on terror' post-9/11.

In contrast, it is noteworthy that none of the Indian editorials and op-eds mentioned the Kashmir issue, a deeply contested region along the border of India and Pakistan. The strategic omission of this issue potentially serves to obscure any Indian contributions to terrorist activities springing from the region and to divert public attention from this intractable political problem.

Pursuing its self-interested globalised discourse, *NYT* commentaries on the Mumbai attacks highlighted the religious backgrounds of the attackers to discursively connect Islamic fundamentalism with terrorism. Other issues that fuel terrorism – such as poverty, injustice, political and ideological differences and ambitions, social and cultural oppressions, etc – are absent from discourses in which Islam is tied intrinsically and singularly with terror.

Indian editorial commentaries, however, make only rare references to the religious background of the Mumbai attackers. The absence of this discursive focus, a dominant media focus in post-9/11 Western

media discourse, may reflect a true ideological split between India and the US. Alternatively, this omission may be a strategic local inflection at once expressing sensitivity to the 150 million Muslim citizens of India and eliding religious sources of terror as a mechanism to fuse fragile national unity across religious divides in India (which prompted riots in Gujarat as recently as 2002). For the *NYT*, these nuances are too distant from the physical, nationalist and political centre of its readers to require attention in the post-9/11 discourses on terrorism that erase such 'subtleties'. Such realities apparently pose too inconvenient a truth, challenging military and political goals of the US in Afghanistan, Iraq and the region. Such distinctions between US and Indian media discourse also serve to maintain and reinforce the superior position of the US in terms of defining terror, whether at home or abroad.

Giving peace a chance?

In another unexpected discursive turn, the *HT* commentaries were highly critical of the way in which the Indian government and politicians handled the Mumbai terror attacks. Time and again, frustration about the country's internal politics and corruption and mud-slinging amongst politicians came to the forefront of the discourses. Derogatory and sarcastic terms expressed and fuelled internal discontent with the government, diverging from the rallying that typically dominates post-crisis media discourse (Entman 2004). An *HT* editorial stated, 'The fact of the matter is that cynicism and laziness have been the hallmarks of our politicians' (*Hindustan Times* 2008e). The absence of nationalistic bravado, machismo or vengeance towards those threatening the security of the country and its people is striking. Indeed, this discourse shows the government of India and its political leaders as weak, incompetent, and pessimistic in nature.

There is disparity between the usual unifying nationalistic media discourses that rally citizens in support of domestic government policies and actions following crises, and the Indian commentaries that demonstrate the cultural and contextual use of the terrorism discourses in support of localised strategies. The frequency with which *HT* texts highlighted public frustration with the party in power and the more

general status quo of politics in India opened up discursive fissures in the hegemonic discourse of elite societal institutions. The discursive distance between the media and the government represents what one scholar identified as infrequent yet rich 'seams' in which resources of resistance can be mined (Ross 2009). Such discourse becomes possible within a democracy of shifting power in part because the media must always equivocate their political alignment and provide a platform for dissent *within* that enables change without violence. Consequently, media remain always capable, if reluctant, of criticising rather than merely amplifying power.

In other examples of discursive divergence from the oft-beaten path of upholding the status quo in society, the *HT* editorials and op-eds took a path less travelled. The *HT* discourses presented negotiation, understanding, solidarity, commitment and peace as effective means of combating terrorism in India and the world:

> In such a situation the peace loving Indian patriotic citizens will have to combat terrorism with a commitment in order to create a terrorism free society rather than leaving it to the politicians alone or listening to the advice of the super power with [a] bad track record on terrorism. (*Hindustan Times* 2008f)

Surprisingly, some *NYT* commentaries showed similar discursive shading, though less frequently and prominently. The *NYT* too was critical of the US government's 'war on terror,' referring to it as 'America's so-called war on terror' and labelling it 'a catastrophe' (French 2008). Such criticism – although it appeared seven years, not weeks, after the 9/11 attacks – complemented and may potentially have encouraged a different Indian response to terror. This reading is supported by another commentary that said India had shown 'extraordinary restraint' and would need 'to continue to do so as the investigation moves forward' (*New York Times* 2008b). The *NYT* also critiqued the too-quick application of stigmatising labels, recognising that 'what you call someone matters. If he is a terrorist, he is an enemy of all civilised people, and his cause is less worthy of consideration' (Hoyt 2008).

These instances of discursive counterforce against the dominant current of terror discourse post 9/11 bring to the forefront media's role in opening the public sphere to alternative resolutions to terrorism. Such discourse calls on the people, rather than directly on governments, to be thoughtful and vigilant, not violent. It calls up understanding and empathy, not escalatory rhetoric that exaggerates and exacerbates differences. These media discourses present a refreshingly different perspective to the majority of discourses on terrorism. The fact that these discourses arose most prominently inside the country that suffered the terror attacks suggests that media are capable of a critical response that embraces human solutions to global problems.

Discussion and conclusion

Our findings suggest that media in both India and the US contributed to global ideological discourses around terror that produced social identities, promoted nationalistic support for government actions, and invoked religious and political divisions between India and Pakistan as a cause for the Mumbai attacks. The similarities, more or less, ended there. The *HT* commentaries took a very different route when it came to suggesting solutions to the problem of terrorism. They were heavily critical of internal corruption and politics and were self-reflexive in their search for an appropriate response to terrorism. While the *NYT* too, displayed instances of discourses that went against the grain of the very terror discourse it had helped to construct post 9/11, such divergences from the leitmotif were too few and far between to appear to be anything more than the exception to the rule.

There are three important threads of discussion here that need elaboration. First, the Indian commentaries employ ideology that differentiates between Us and Them, Othering those who engage in terrorism. The differentiation works at the level of ostracising terror tactics and those who employ them. Apart from the discursive distancing of Us from people who employ terror to get their message across, however, the Indian texts also acknowledged economic, social, cultural and religious causes of terrorism. Recognition of these contributing factors mitigated judgments, opening the door to self-recognition

within the Other and possible rapprochement as a means to reduce violence. In a way, the delineation of multiple causes of terror, in some of which the Indian nation might perceive itself to be complicit, served to bridge the distance between Us and Them, even affording Them an opportunity to see good within Us to which they might aspire. Even alongside recurrent Othering, discourses recognising social causes of terror enable the national media to be critical of their own nation and to provide a sphere for more productive exploration of complex issues. Such a discursive path must be opened further in order to encourage media to gradually abandon the well-worn trail of apocalyptic Othering.

Second, each country's media constructed unquestioning patriotic support of the national government as an ideal, driving the actions of Indian citizens to counter terror after the Mumbai attacks. The *NYT* discursive construction specified and prescribed particular qualities held to embody the patriotic. In fact, it represented patriotism as a weapon against the terrorists. The *HT* commentaries similarly upheld the desirability of patriotic fervour in Indian citizens, but a patriotism inflected with nonviolence that represented Indians as peace-loving people, and that could bring about social and political change through commitment and resolution – not through violence.

Third, the *NYT* commentaries focused on demonstrating to India and the rest of the world what a proper and swift response to terror should be. They unhesitatingly took it upon themselves to present strategies to/for India that were directed by the US political agenda in that region (as evidenced by the forceful inclusion of Pakistan and Islam in the coverage). *NYT* columns consistently and with little deviation supported US policies and constructed the unchallenged military, economic and political supremacy of the US. For India, however, the more self-critical stance, especially with regard to corruption and politics, reflected and refracted the numerous divisions of language and cultures across the vast nation.

The discourses observed in both India and the US reflected and maintained the unequal power distribution between the two nations and positioned the US as the dominant and controlling nation on issues of terrorism. However, both relied heavily upon antithetical constructions,

implicit oppositions and explicit Othering to align themselves with each other against a common enemy: terrorism. While the *NYT* discourse displayed (with rare exception) all the familiar markings of media's monologic post-9/11 (anti)terrorist meta-discourse – complete with strategic ambiguities; unequivocal binaries; identification of terrorism with Islam; invocation of the global 'war on terror,' and calls for rapid, decisive military response – the *HT* discourse displayed cracks.

By calling up the specific and the local within the global discourse of terror, *HT* commentaries recognised complexities within and among the ideologies and practices of the terrorists and the Indian nation, and rejected a unitary identification of terror with Islam. Contextualising the Mumbai attacks within the global and the particular, the religious and the political, the structural and the systemic, *HT* commentaries shed light on some of the root causes, and potential long-term solutions, to terror. They softened the dehumanisation of the enemy Other and advocated thoughtful self-reflection and dialogue as an alternative to military attack. In this way, *HT* editorials and op-eds moved away from war journalism and toward peace journalism in ways not evident in the *NYT*. In so doing, the *HT* began to expose the hegemonic work of discourses that separate the dominant and the dominated, the powerful and the powerless. Lest we overstate this, however, it should be clear that alternatives to war journalism, even in the *HT,* were but fleeting shadows and narrow fissures in the dominant discourse that embraced manifest characteristics of war journalism. In the end then, both newspapers functioned far too often as the tools of global(ising) Western power elites who continue to wage war to obtain peace.

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