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ARTICLE

Counter-imaging: myth-making and Americanization in Israeli Labor Party campaign ads, 2003

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ABSTRACT

For several decades, the United States has exported not only its particular definition of democracy to developing nations but also the style of modern televisual politics. As a result, the nature of televised commercials in election campaigns in many nations is designed by US-based, -trained or -inspired consultants. This article examines ads run in the 2003 Israeli elections by the Israeli Labor party. Findings show that the ads (a) are indistinguishable in style from American ads; (b) follow a particular American formula of counter-imaging, that is, creating images of candidates and parties contrary to stereotypes held by voters; and (c) obfuscate the actual issues that the embattled nation faced and still faces. The article thus argues that the 'American–modern' style of campaign ad damages substantive and constructive political communication in nations wrestling with intensely complex issues.

KEYWORDS

Americanization • associational juxtaposition • counter-imaging • election • globalization • Israel • myth • political advertisement • political campaign • political consulting

INTRODUCTION

Jeremy Tunstall, in *The Media are American* (1977), summed up the prevailing mood of the post-Second World War era that the American style of everything was taking over much of the world's folkways and media. This diffusion of American cultural products was and is regularly defined as a form of 'imperialism' and 'colonialism' (Schiller, 1992[1969], cf. Tomlinson, 1991). As Benjamin Barber (1998) put it, we now live in a 'McWorld', designed by America. Yet, it is also recognized by many scholars that native

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cultures, societies and political institutions could adopt American forms of media but filter, modify or reject the ideological norms that are attached to them in US contexts (Lee, 1979; Mowlana, 1995). For example, 'out', fringe or oppositional groups in societies may adopt western technology to express their dissent as much as governments might use it to enforce conformity (Dobson, 1998; Leonard, 1995; McDonald, 1996). Indeed, complexity abounds, as a cultural behavior that has no great media-spectacle value in America (e.g. soccer matches) can be 'Americanized' in a foreign land (Hoehn and Szymanski, 1999). Heterogeneity and homogeneity can exist at different levels of cultural production and consumption (Ram, 2004). As recent history suggests, groups can be both Americanized and also anti-American (cf. Berendse, 2003; Esman, 2002). Accordingly, researchers in a variety of fields are exploring what 'American' means when applied to industries and cultures (Hamilton and Krimsky, 1998; Negrine and Papathanasopoulos, 1996; Norris and Kalb, 1997; Ram, 2004).

Curiously, the last major export of American cultural production has been its style of political campaigning. Until very recently, election campaigns in Argentina, France and the Congo were run by natives and took on native forms and content. But political professionals and researchers beginning in the 1970s, and continuing through today, are increasingly documenting the Americanization of world-wide campaigns and elections, including political advertising (Butler and Ranney, 1992; Griffin and Kagan, 1996). Most overtly, private American political consultants are running major election campaigns throughout the world (Plasser and Plasser, 2002). Within the last decade, for example, American political professionals were major players in elections in Mexico, Russia and a host of African and Latin American countries – many of them with striking records of success in helping to elect their clients.

As a consequence, a new generation of native political managers and media and polling consultants has arisen. Almost all of them were trained by Americans, educated in American institutions or consciously adapt American methods. Their trade organization, the International Association of Political Consultants (IAPC), now boasts 100 members from more than 20 countries. Its mission, as defined by former IAPC President Bo Krogvig (Sweden), is to 'promote democracy throughout the world', which is partly defined as 'reinventing the communications process of governing' (International Association of Political Consultants [IAPC.org], 2003). In many countries, such as Israel, Americans are found in all political camps, although usually Democratic consultants work for liberal parties while Republican consultants work for more conservative native parties. Their presence has itself become a political issue: one Swedish prime minister promised voters: 'No more American PR consultants!' (Nord, 2001).

Debate continues on the normative meaning of the term 'Americanization' itself. Exporting campaign strategies, techniques and philosophies could be seen as an act of cultural imperialism. And indeed, there have been

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direct attempts by the US government to support political candidates overseas – which would be illegal for a foreign country to do in the United States – by funneling money, which in turn pays for American expertise; such was the case in the elections in Nicaragua that resulted in a transfer of power from the Sandinista regime. At the other end of the spectrum are those who define what is occurring as not an example of Americanization any more than the automobile is exclusively 'American'. American University's James Thurber, director of one of the most prominent political campaign management schools, argues that:

> Modern electoral techniques can be applied or adapted almost anywhere; the expertise happens to be clustered in the United States. Campaign consulting is simply another business sector experiencing globalization, a sector in which entrepreneurs and innovators can expand, compete and succeed. (quoted in Arterton, April, 2000)

Similarly, Nord (2001) offers:

> The basis of the changes could as well be technologic advances making it easier to administrate modern election campaigns or analyze voter segments and candidate positions. The concept of 'modernization' can thus be as relevant as the more often used concept of 'Americanization'.

In this article we focus on one particular reputedly 'American' (or 'modern') media campaign thematic and stylistic device and its prevalence in one crucial recent foreign election. Specifically, we examine *counter-imaging.* This process often begins with the selection of candidates, but is enacted most obviously in media presentations of them. The goal is to create an image of a candidate, party or cause contrary to the viewer's existing or potential negative stereotypes while retaining positive associations that the candidate or party may sustain.[1]

For example, after 1994 Congressional losses, Democratic Party leaders, especially in the South, felt that white male voters (then called 'angry White Males', now called 'NASCAR dads') had been disaffected by a stereotypical image of Democratic candidates as 'weak' or 'soft'. In response, the party set out to recruit candidates who looked and sounded Republican: white businessmen, often war veterans, who could sound like (if not physically resemble) 'Bubbas' or 'good old boys'. Campaign commercials featured these candidates 'talking tough' on crime and fiscal responsibility. Most recently, at the 2004 Democratic Convention in Boston, the theme was 'toughness' and the focus on the war service of the nominee, John Kerry. Republicans, in turn, noted in polling that swing and women voters perceive some Republican ideas and images as 'harsh', and have made a special outreach to find candidates who looked Democrat. As one Republican

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political consultant put it, 'You want the Democrat to look like a sheriff and talk tough on crime, and the Republican to come off as caring about the elderly and poor kids.'[2] It is hoped in such a strategy that voters will retain the better parts of the old image (e.g. they are already primed to think that Republicans are tough on crime) but be attracted to the anti-negative aspects of the new one. The result would be a more acceptable amalgam, e.g. the 'compassionate conservative'.

Here we investigate this phenomenon of counter-imaging in one of the most important foreign elections in recent years, the parliamentary campaign in Israel in 2003. Voters gave the current right-wing government of Ariel Sharon one of the strongest victory margins in the history of Israeli elections, and consequently confirmed Sharon's hard-line policies vis-à-vis the Arab–Israeli dispute. We sought to identify visual iterations of the candidate of the 'left' Labor Party and the juxtaposed scenes and objects that are brought into association with his body which have thematic meanings. We ask what are the 'images' potential voters were shown and what were they supposed to signify, but also what, in the context of Israel in 2003, critical issues and factors they may have altered or obscured in the service of mythologizing (cf. Griffin and Kagan, 1996).

BACKGROUND

On 28 January 2003, the citizens of Israel went to the polls for the third time in less than four years to elect a new prime minister. The election results were a major political victory for the Likud party. It doubled its number of seats from 19 to 38, while its chief opposition, the Labor Party, dropped from 28 to 19 seats. Commentators attributed Labor's downfall to several factors including: (a) the failure of the 1993 Declaration of Principles (popularly known as the Oslo Accords) which was largely attributed to the Labor Party leadership; (b) the escalation of the second Palestinian Intifada (which began in October of 2000); and (c) Labor not defining a brand identity after serving more than a year in a national unity government with its rival Likud (Verter, 2003).

Within the wide spectrum of Israeli politics, from Communist to extreme right wing, Labor and Likud have relatively clear party images of being 'liberal' versus 'conservative' (Edelist, 2003). Yet Labor, the founding party of the (mostly) liberal, progressive and socialist national leaders at Israel's birth in 1948, has gone through cycles of reinventing itself. Once a socialist party, then a more moderate liberal party, Labor seemed in the late 1990s to some political observers and polls of the electorate to be 'going left' (Edelist, 2003; Neubach, 1996). In particular, Labor established itself in the public mind as the 'peace through compromise' party based on the long-held platform that negotiations with the Palestinians would lead to a political solution that would end the historic conflict for good (Eldar, 2003; Peres, 1980; cf. Loshitzky, 1991).

The failure of Oslo and the second Palestinian Intifada that led to

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hundreds of terror attacks against Israeli civilians and claimed almost a thousand Israeli lives undermined this left-wing perspective. As a result, Israeli voters shifted away from the political left and towards the center (Bergman, 2002). Struggles ensued between moderate and left elements in the Labor Party that were temporarily settled in November of 2002 when dovish Amram Mitsna was elected as the party's new leader (Westcott, 2002). Unlike his more hawkish opponents, Mitsna supported the immediate resumption of political negotiations with the Palestinians and rejected the notion of a future national unity government with the right-wing Likud party.

The January 2003 election was thus seen as a referendum on which the party offered, in its own view, the most pragmatic and viable path to ending catastrophic violence against Israelis, if not offering a true path to peace for the region. Other issues existed, but polling seemed to confirm that 'ending the war' (with no clear definition of what that meant) with the Palestinians was the central and determining issue in the minds of most voters.

The 'American' perspective in these matters is crucial. Israel's close links with America have not just been diplomatic, economic and military but also cultural. Israel is having its own 'Americanization' debate, like most other countries (Avraham and First, 2003; Azaryahu, 1999; Ram, 2004). Prior to this last election, American campaign strategies and tactics had been imported into Israel since 1981, when Prime Minister Menachem Begin hired New York political consultant David Garth to help with his re-election campaign and his opponent, Shimon Peres, employed Davis Sawyer, then Democratic Senator Kennedy's chief campaign adviser.

American consultants proceeded to take on active campaign roles for several other election cycles in Israel, but none was more influential than the 1996 Israeli election. It was the first political contest in which Israelis would cast two ballots as a result of new campaign regulations, one ballot for the political party of choice and one for prime minister. The direct election of the prime minister seemed to intensify the need for American-style campaigning. Thanks to the campaign strategy of American consultant Arthur Finkelstein, underdog (and superhawk) Benjamin Netanyahu was able to pull off one of Israel's greatest political upsets when he beat heavily favored Shimon Peres by less than 1 percent of the vote.

The epitome of American campaign export of technology was seen in 1999 when the former Clinton campaign team of James Carville, Bob Shrum and Stanley Greenberg designed and implemented the campaign of Labor Party chief Ehud Barak. Carville's 'war room' approach was employed in Barak's campaign center. Bob Shrum was in charge of the campaign media strategy and Greenberg had a strong influence on all campaign decisions, as he was equipped with research from both surveys and focus groups.

The end result was the direct import of American campaign tools and strategies into the Israeli market. Israeli consultants and campaign professionals who worked alongside the Americans in many of the elections now possess, through practice, many of the campaign skills and tools that

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allow them to produce Americanized campaigns on their own. Such was the case in the 2003 elections as the campaign team of the Labor Party hired mostly Israeli campaign professionals to produce an American-style campaign.

THEORY: ASSOCIATED PICTURES AS MYTH-MAKING PRIMES

Ruling elites have always tried to associate their persons with actual or invented symbols and rituals to bolster their authority or raise their status (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983; Lincoln, 1989). These associations can be quite concrete: in ancient Rome, for example, the first tactical maneuver of a general who declared himself emperor was to seize a mint and stamp coins with his picture offset by heraldry, gods and slogans of imperial legitimacy (Grant, 1950: 8). Or, to take a modern example, President George W. Bush speaks to us from the Oval Office surrounded by potent symbols of power and authority (the presidential seal), patriotism (the flag), presidential greatness (the bust of Lincoln), family values (the picture of wife and daughters), and so on. Paul Messaris (1994) has called this technique of visual and symbolic persuasion 'associational juxtaposition', that is, a 'general strategy of pairing images in order to bring about an unconscious association between them – whether or not an implied causal link or other kind of logical connection is so intended' (p. 12). It follows that use of particular symbols can act as a focusing mechanism, encouraging the audience to concentrate on one set of issues but not on others (Patterson et al., 1992).

Some research has indicated that even though audiences are aware of the artificiality of some associations, they can still be influenced by them. For example, one study paired political candidates with associative symbols such as defense armaments (Ebong, 1992). Despite the fact that the viewers noted that the symbolic associative was an imposed manipulation, they still felt that a link existed between the assumed value and the candidate, i.e. 'strong on defense'. These themes can be cross-cultural universals (e.g. the association of size and strength) or tie into local consumption patterns, themes and myths (Domke et al., 2002; Griffin and Kagan, 1996; Liebes and Katz, 1996; Perlmutter and Wagner, 2004; Ram, 2004). The visualization of suggestive themes can of course also be subtle – not actually verbally stating what they imply, as is frequently the case in racial cues in political advertising in America (Valentino et al., 2002). Moreover, the use of camera style is often a determining factor in how audiences compare candidates, even in formally neutral settings like debates (Hellweg and Phillips, 1981; Kepplinger, 1982; Morello, 1988). For example, to shoot a photographic subject from a low angle is cross-culturally employed as a technique to create an impression of power or dominance of the subject (Perlmutter, 1999: 71–8).

A standard strategy of manipulation, familiar from all forms of advertising, is to create through arrangements within an image or editing between images specific associations that reflect positively upon the candidate,

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cause or product (Ewen, 1988; Marchand, 1985; Messaris, 1994; Thorson et al., 1991). In particular, campaign commercials are common vehicles for denoting which symbols the campaign managers and media consultants want to associate with the candidate. For example, in one famous campaign video ad, 'A New Beginning', pictures of Ronald Reagan's first inauguration as president were interspersed with a montage of 'breakfast commercial' type-images of people happily preparing for their day and going to work (Messaris and Nielsen, 1989; Morreale, 1991: 71–5). The suggestions to the viewers were clear: Reagan embodied the dawn of a new era after the unemployment, inflation, recession and international failures of the Carter years.

In effect, such associations are attempting to 'prime' an audience into making a circumscribed and evocative interpretation of the candidate in light of the denoted political or socio-cultural symbols. As Murray Edelman (1964) suggested, elites attempt to manipulate the public by providing tension-reducing symbols which may direct the public into 'political quiescence' that may serve the interests of the elites. Edelman categorized many objects associated with political candidates as 'condensational' symbols, which 'evoke the emotions associated with the situation. They condense into one symbolic event, sign or act patriotic pride, anxieties, remembrances of past glories or humiliations, promises of future greatness' (p. 6). Moreover, one of the primary messages that citizens process to make voting decisions is the candidate's 'image' that reflects the candidate as a person and as a politician (Abramson et al., 1988; Altheide, 1985; Berkman and Kitch, 1986; Hart, 1994; Geiger and Reeves, 1991; Nimmo and Savage, 1976; Shyles, 1984). Or, as a leading political consultant put it, 'The most important message in any campaign is the candidate himself' (Strother, 1999).

Campaign advertising, thus, seeks to *prime* voters to regard the candidate-as-symbol construct in certain ways. If many mental images, or schemas, are 'available' to drive our attitudes, opinions, and behaviors, those ones which are most frequent and recently excited are the most likely to be acted upon (Higgins and Bargh, 1987; Higgins and King, 1981). The political and media environment is full of such attempts to cue our attention to one kind of image about a candidate or cause (Shah et al., 1999; Watts et al., 1999). So, as Iyengar and Kinder (1987) put it, what we pay attention to 'depend[s] less on the entire repertoire of people's knowledge and more on which aspects of their knowledge happen to come to mind' (p. 64). Furthermore, experimental research suggests that media representations can drive our attention agenda (e.g. Domke et al., 1998; Goidel et al., 1997; Pan and Kosicki, 1997).

Yet, all campaign consultants know the old rule about the limits of persuasion, uttered with concise inarticulateness by Hollywood mogul Sam Cohn: 'If the public doesn't want to see a movie, nobody can stop them.' Associational juxtaposition and symbolic priming – however simply executed or cleverly packaged – can and do fail. Michael Dukakis and the M-1 Abrams tank is the signature exemplar of such uncertainty. The image

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originated, after all, from a Dukakis campaign photo-op primed to reassure voters that the candidate was 'strong' on defense by pairing him with a symbol of American military might. It flopped, and indeed backfired – perhaps, we may speculate, due to innate and contradictory candidate characteristics sensed by pundits and voters alike.

Political advertising thus can be best understood as a strategy and tool for inputting certain novel frames or priming preexisting frames in the minds of voters (Aldrich et al., 1989; King and McCombs, 1994; Parmelee, 2002; Schenck-Hamlin et al., 2000; Young et al., 1991). The degree of 'newness' of any information is relative. If novice political candidates have low public name recognition, what their advertising tells and shows voters about them, and what they learn from other media or extra-media sources, may be imprinted into a *tabula rasa* of expectations. But even in such cases, voters gather primes about most candidates that may excite previously existing frames. For example, a given voter might have preexisting beliefs about what a 'Republican' is: a candidate framed as a 'Republican' will thus automatically prime those associations, either positively or negatively. Wholesale repositioning strategies are more difficult. High name-recognition candidates find it hard to shift preexisting images in voters' minds because they 'know what Al Gore is all about', for instance. In short, the goal is to hold on to voters attracted by the perceived positive elements of the traditional type and message while attracting swing voters through employment of oppositional types and messages.

This article explores the prevalence of visual symbols in a set of campaign ads. In our case, we examine the 2003 Israeli Labor Party ads. We argue that these commercials attempted to:

- define (and mythologize) what were the issues in a campaign
- use counter-imaging to reassure 'swing' voters that the party's candidate, despite his 'left' and 'peace with compromise' reputation, was also 'tough' and 'strong on defense'
- distance Labor from any blame for bad economic and security conditions in Israel despite Labor having been part of the National Unity Government from 2001 until 2002.

ANALYSIS

Historically, the Israeli Labor Party has been accused of (or praised as) being socialist on economics. The party faced charges of corruption based on its historical alliance with the trade unions and a recent investigation into campaign finance violations during the 1999 campaign. In addition, Labor is often perceived as relatively weak on security issues. One final problem that Labor faced was its participation in a Likud-led coalition government just a year before the election. This lead many to believe that the Labor Party was as much to blame for Israel's problems as its chief rival, Likud.

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The current analysis indicates that the 2003 Labor Party advertising campaign attempted to answer all three of these criticisms by employing the counter-imaging technique. Using visual communication in addition to narrative, Labor tried to position itself as pro-economic growth, uncompromising on security and as a political party that was completely separate and ideologically independent from the Likud government.

Economic

The onset of the second Intifada (September 2000) brought Israel into harsh economic times caused by a significant drop in foreign investment and tourism. During this period of unemployment and economic distress, the image of Labor as a socialist anti-business political party hurt its chances of attracting votes from the economically disenfranchised and voters from the large Russian immigrant constituency who consistently oppose any political party with socialist orientations.

Using the counter-imaging technique, the Labor Party attempted to package itself as a pro-business, pro-industry political party with a plan for economic growth for the future. The commercials consistently show how images of people in unemployment lines and welfare offices were linked to Likud while visuals of highway construction and factory openings were linked to the Labor Party.

These pitta-and-olive oil economy ads include various subtypes. The first is exemplified by an ad, titled simply 'Economy', that cites how bad the economy is but claims 'things can be different' and that Labor can make it better. The visual/audio layout of the ad is as follows (see Table 1).

This ad has the traditional message: Labor takes care of the economy. It also juxtaposes the martyred Rabin with the current Labor leaders, creating a symbolic (but physically actualized on screen) passing of the torch from the sainted leader to the living ones.

Another ad, titled 'Economic Graph', also emphasizes economic woes (see Table 2).

Here the associational juxtapositions are more compact. Within shots, charts giving snap (and mock) abbreviations of the poor economy are paired with the opposition leaders. This is an important device because juxtaposition between shots presents a problematic issue for priming frames in the audience's minds. If shots of Likud leaders are followed sequentially by shots visualizing 'bad economy', then succeeded by shots of Labor leaders, the worry is that the audience mind will not be clear as to whom to juxtapose with what. By making the 'bad economy' and 'Likud' leader association *within* a shot, the negative-Labor association is, it is hoped, eliminated. 'A strong labor, a strong economy' is again thematically shown by emphasized past economic success and hard-sell slogans such as, 'If you choose Likud you will not have money to buy groceries.'

'We did it before and we will do it again' continues the promise to fix

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Table 1 Ad name: Baiga (38-second ad featuring former Labor Finance Minister Baiga Shochat)

Signage[a]	Visual picture	Audio narrator	Audio subject	Music and sound
Yesterday in the news, 300,000 unemployed	People in unemployment agency			Sounds of closing doors
Baiga Shochat former Labor Finance Minister	Labor Party speaker with Israeli flag in the background followedby visuals of Sharon and his Finance Minister		Shochat argues that the surge in unemployment was caused by the fiscal policies of the Sharon government.	
	Shochat with former Prime Minister Rabin cutting a ribbon followed by visuals of new roads and construction equipment followed by Shochat speaking on screen		In 1992 we had more than 220,000 unemployed and less than four year later we had less than 120,000 unemployed by following a responsible and prioritized fiscal policy	Campaign music – low
	Picture of Shochat shaking hands with candidate Mitsna, flag and picture of Rabin in the background		We can do it again	Campaign music – low
	Candidate Mitsna walking through government hallways shaking hands and then in military jacket		We can repeat our successful record	Campaign music – low
Campaign slogan – We believe in you Mitsna because only you can do it	Candidate sitting at his desk with Israeli flag behind him			Campaign music – We believe in you Mitsna because only you can do it

[a]In photojournalism 'signage' is a term used for printed words that appear within the screen image.

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Table 2 Ad name: Kalkali (economic, 68-second ad)

Signage	Visual picture	Audio narrator	Audio subject	Music and sound
Debate 2003 The topic is the restoration of the economy, candidate Mitsna and Sharon	Split screen with Labor candidate on left and Likud candidate on the right	Debate 2003 The topic is the restoration of the economy		Dramatic music
Economic graph increasing during Labor government years 1992–1996	Former Prime Minister Rabin juxtaposition to signage then candidate Mitsna speaking		The successes of Labor governments in building the economy were not accidental. They resulted from correct fiscal choices	Dramatic music
Economic graph plummeting during Likud government years 1996–1999	Prime Minister Sharon speaking		We are facing a situation where there are no investments in our economy and economic problems result from our security problems	Dramatic music
Restoration of the economy, investment in industry, creation of jobs	Mitsna speaking		Millions of dollars that Sharon gives to the settlements will instead go to investment in our economy, to create jobs and infrastructure, to our education and health care systems	Dramatic music
Split screen in blue Mitsna speaking, Mitsna shaking the hand of Shochat, economic index increasing and next to it the name Labor	Mitsna speaking		We did it before and we will do it again	Dramatic music
Mitsna will transfer money from settlements to the economy, Sharon will not		Mitsna will transfer money from settlements to the economy, Sharon will not		Dramatic music
Split screen in blue The positions are clear, Mitsna wins		The positions are clear, Mitsna wins		Uplifting music

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the economy damaged by Likud. But a new note is introduced that specifically differentiates Labor from Likud: settlements. Labor promises to use settlement monies for national economic investment, a transfer of funds that, it is promised, will help the majority of voters rather than the 5 percent minority that lives in settlements. Notably, the greater issue of what to *do* about settlements is not addressed. Settlements would of course be, and have been, a major issue in any negotiation between Palestinians and Israelis: one of those issues that most versions of peace plans have put off until a later date (a testament to the issue's intractability and complexity). As well, it is unclear whether this is a promise or a threat to cut off all settler funding. It could be both a substantive budgetary campaign promise and a strategic issue used to attract center-left voters.

Military/security

The reputation of Labor as a party that is weak on national defense and security is largely blamed on Labor policies of negotiating with the Palestinians during times of terror attacks. The 2003 Labor advertising campaign used counter-imaging as a method of reassuring voters of its commitment to security and emphasized the status of its leaders as former generals. The security issue was central to Labor's advertising campaign, accounting for 8 out of 21 of the produced ads. Labor's proposition of building a security fence between Israel and the West Bank was the central campaign theme.

First, the counter-imaging technique attempted to establish the party's military ethos: Labor leader Mitsna in uniform (Figure 1), in a

Figure 1 Labor leader Mitsna (bearded man in foreground) in uniform. Image from Mitsna election campaign.

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Figure 2 Israeli solders patrolling the border. Image from Mitsna election campaign.

helicopter and on patrol, along with historical footage of his military experience (Figure 2), symbolized that he and Labor as a whole were committed to security. The constant juxtapositioning of martyred Israeli hero Yitzchak Rabin along with countless military testimonials attempt to establish Labor as the party of strength. It ought to be noted that the majority of Labor leaders shown in the ads are indeed former generals in the Israeli army (see Table 3). On the other hand, most Oslo Accord-related Labor Party figures do not appear in any of the ads. This serves as evidence that in using counter-imaging, the Labor Party tried to distance itself from the unpopular Accords (at the time of the election) and to establish its place as a center rather than left-wing party.

Here, using visual techniques, Labor offers the voters a simple security concept: a fence will divide the West Bank and Israel – we will be on one side and they on the other (see Table 4). The visual implication is that Labor has a simple solution for the nation's terrorism problems. In addition, Labor's frequent use of the image of assassinated military hero and Prime Minister Rabin serves to counter Labor's problematic reputation as weak on security. This use of counter-imaging is also reinforced by the inclusion of visuals of Labor leader Mitsna in uniform, surrounded by former generals and by military equipment.

Coalition

After participating in a national unity government for more than a year, Labor leaders would have a difficult time criticizing the very government in which they sat. In addition, Labor was seen by many voters as a party that lacked leadership. The counter-imaging technique was used in the 2003 Labor ad campaign to attempt to manage this problem.

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Table 3 Ad name: Bio (military/security, 63 seconds)

Signage	Visual picture	Audio narrator	Audio subject	Music and sound
	Several old pictures of candidate in uniform acting as field commander, Israeli flag superimposed			Heroic music
	Prime Minister Rabin speaking about candidate Israeli flag in background		Rabin praises candidate performance in the 1967 war	Heroic music
1967 – The Six Day War, medal of honor	Pictures of Mitsna in uniform during war, tanks moving	Tales of how candidate won his medal of honor in the 1967 war		Heroic music
1973 – Yom Kipur War, medal of honor	Pictures of Mitsna in uniform during war, tanks moving	Tales of how candidate won his medal of honor in the 1973 war		Heroic music
	Pictures of Mitsna in uniform from war		Mitsna says – I enlisted at the age of 18 and I now once again am enlisting	Heroic music
	Mitsna in suit		I feel obligated to enlist for the fight for our country's future	Campaign music
	Prime Minister Rabin thanking Mitsna in a conference		Rabin and Mitsna we thank you for all that you are and all that you have done	Campaign music
	Mitsna heading what looks like a Labor government meeting with several key Labor leaders			Campaign music – We believe in you…

Tables 5 and 6 identify the use of counter-imaging coalition-related ads. A total of 5 out of 21 ads dealt directly with this issue. Displaying images of Labor leaders interacting as a well-organized political machine, the counter-imaging technique is aiming to show that Labor can govern. With candidate Mitsna as their leader, Labor parliamentarians are consistently shown as a very experienced group of leaders who can govern separately from Likud. Visual displays of American-style cabinet meetings and press

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Table 4 Ad name: border (military/security, 62 seconds)

Signage	Visual picture	Audio narrator	Audio subject	Music and sound
Gilbon (Palestinian village) to Beit Shean (Israeli town) 28.11.02, six dead		Gilbon-Beit Shean		Dramatic music
Schem (Palestinian town) to Tel Aviv 5.1.03, 23 dead		Schem-Tel Aviv		Dramatic music
	Candidate Mitsna in suit up on hill on the 'Green line' (1967 border)		If there was a security fence in the north, the terror attacks would have been prevented	Dramatic music
The negligence of the security fence	Footage of open space areas between Palestinian towns and Jewish cities	There is no fence to protect our people from Palestinian invasions		Dramatic music
An animated graph that shows that the government failed to build more than 5% of the proposed security fence	Footage of Mofaz (Minister of Defense) and Sharon	Mofaz tells us that the Sharon government is building a security fence, what fence is he talking about?		Dramatic music
Former General Ben Eliezer, former General Vilnai, former head of the Mosad Yatom	Ben Eliezer, Vilnai and Yatom, each speaking Pictures of Sharon wearing a yarmulka and footage of settlers watching Sharon speak	Sharon did not and will not build a security fence	Vilnai – Sharon does not build the fence based on political considerations. Yatom – Sharon is a hostage to the settlers' demands	Dramatic music
	Visuals of military jeeps and animation of an entire security fence around the whole West Bank	Labor candidate will immediately put up a security fence to protect our people		Dramatic music
	Mitsna with generals patrolling areas		We must prevent the terrorists from reaching our towns and our schools, only my government will separate us from the terrorists	Dramatic music
Sharon is committed to the settlers, Mitsna is committed to our security		Sharon is committed to the settlers, Mitsna is committed to our security		

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Table 5 Ad name: White House (political, 48 seconds)

Signage	Visual picture	Audio narrator	Audio subject	Music and sound
	Candidate car in between several security cars with sirens, 'Secret service' people securing the area and the crowds, candidate steps out of car with security service guard behind him			Presidential music
	Several frames of top Labor leaders and their staff working, looking over documents			Presidential music
	Cabinet meeting with close ups of leading Labor leaders, candidate Mitsna is leading the discussion and all are listening to him attentively, picture of Rabin in the background and Israeli flags on the sides			Presidential music
Campaign logo: We believe in you…	Candidate at desk in suite, Israeli flags at his side			Campaign music: We believe in you…

conferences as well as the imagery of Labor leader Mitsna displayed in presidential situations (limousine, secret service) are meant to send a message to the voters that Labor is strong enough and independent enough to lead the nation rather than Likud.

Government corruption

The salience of the government corruption issue in Israel has been brought to the forefront by several allegations against such prominent figures as former Likud Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and most recently against current Prime Minister Sharon. When confronted with Likud corruption, many voters simply rejected the issue, framing it as 'the way things are in politics', pointing to endless allegations of corruption against the Labor Party from its early days in government until the 1999 campaign finance scandal of the Barak campaign.

Labor's soft reputation on the issue of government corruption made it difficult for the party to capitalize on the fact that Sharon was facing corruption charges at the time of the elections (see Figure 3). Four out of the 21 Labor campaign ads were focused primarily on the issue of government

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Table 6 Ad name: Parliament members (political, 63 seconds)

Signage	Visual picture	Audio narrator	Audio subject	Music and sound
Press conference 14.1.03, Mitsna: Labor Party candidate	Press conference, candidate Mitsna speaking, flags behind		We will not be in a National Unity Government with Sharon, it's us or Sharon	Dramatic music
Former Labor leader Ben-Eliezer	Former Labor leader Ben-Eliezer speaking in press conference, press filming and Mitsna at his side		From my bitter experience with Sharon, I can tell you that there is a big difference between what he promises and what he does, that is why we will not sit with him in a unity government	Dramatic music
Matan Vilnai former cabinet member	Matan Vilnai speaking		The real alternative is the Labor Party	Dramatic music
Dalia Itsick former cabinet member	Dalia Itsick speaking		It is us or Sharon	Dramatic music
Knesset member Haim Ramon	Haim Ramon speaking		Anyone who wants change should vote for Labor headed by Mitsna, that is the only way to change	Dramatic music
We will not sit in a Sharon government, it's us or him	Candidate Mitsna speaking		Who ever does not vote Labor is essentially voting for Sharon	Dramatic music
Campaign logo: We believe in you…	Candidate at desk in suite, Israeli flags beside him			Campaign music: We believe in you…

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Figure 3(a) 'The Prime Minister knew exactly what was taking place' (Maariv newspaper quote).

Figure 3(b) 'The Prime Minister was warned that his son was involved in shady dealings but did not do anything to stop it' (Maariv newspaper quote).

corruption. The use of counter-imaging aimed to link corruption to Likud while displaying Labor as the party of lawfulness. Tables 7 and 8 display the use of this counter-imaging technique (complete with American popular culture allusions) in the corruption ads.

CONCLUSIONS: BEYOND AMERICANIZATION AND MODERNIZATION

The debate over 'Americanization' is often posited as a choice between extremes: nefarious imperialism vs constructive modernization. According to the first conception, American content, forms and norms of media conquer a culture-media landscape of another country, subverting or marginalizing native cultural traditions and expressions. In contrast, the modernization thesis is that the American way of media is not really 'American' as much as America happened to have invented it first, like the telephone or the hula hoop. High-tech convergence, consumer capitalism, seamless production values, infotainment news values, audience niche targeting: these are natural

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Table 7 Ad name: Sharon's sons (government corruption, 55 seconds)

Signage	Visual picture	Audio narrator	Audio subject	Music and sound
Sharon and his sons #1	Picture of Sharon that is morphed to make him look like Marlon Brando in *The Godfather*			Greek/Italian music reminiscent of *The Godfather* theme
Newspaper caption: The Prime Minister was warned that his sons were involved in illegal activities but did nothing about it	Newspaper caption, Sharon and then his son	The Prime Minister was warned that his sons were involved in illegal activities but did nothing about it		Greek/Italian music reminiscent of *The Godfather* theme
	Sharon speaking	My son had nothing to do with this matter		Greek/Italian music reminiscent of *The Godfather* theme
Newspaper caption: Omri Sharon involved in illegal activities, newspaper caption: Sharon knew all about what was happening	Newspaper caption, Sharon's son Omri, Omri whispering to his father	Omri Sharon was involved in corruption and Sharon knew all about it		Greek/Italian music reminiscent of *The Godfather* theme
Sharon and his sons # 2	Sharon speaking, picture of Sharon that is changed to make him look like Marlon Brando in *The Godfather*		I knew nothing about the matter	Greek/Italian music reminiscent of *The Godfather* theme
Newspaper caption: Businessman Apel who supported the Sharon campaign hired the services of Gilad Sharon for $3 million	Newspaper caption, picture of Gilad Sharon, Sharon speaks		I knew nothing about the matter	Greek/Italian music reminiscent of *The Godfather* theme
Sharon and his sons # 3	Picture of Sharon that is changed to make him look like Marlon Brando in *The Godfather*			Greek/Italian music reminiscent of *The Godfather* theme

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Table 7 *continued*

Signage	Visual picture	Audio narrator	Audio subject	Music and sound
Newspaper caption: The police are investigating how money was transferred from South Africa to personal accounts of Sharon's sons	Police station, newspaper caption	The police are investigating how money was transferred from South Africa to personal accounts of Sharon's sons		Greek/Italian music reminiscent of *The Godfather* theme
Newspaper caption: Omri and Gilad Sharon are suspected of receiving illegal funds	Newspaper caption, Sharon speaks	Omri and Gilad Sharon are suspected of receiving illegal funds	I knew nothing about the matter	Greek/Italian music reminiscent of *The Godfather* theme

developments in societies gestating a large middle class, democratic political institutions and the post-communist capitalist ethic. The modernist interpretation might hold that Israel – or Thailand or India – is one of these societies.

As is almost always true when the content and styles of media in other countries are analyzed, one could make a case for both explanations. Yes, American political consultants have exported campaign commercial norms abroad in the same way that 19th-century missionaries exported Easter to Hawai'i; the American 'look' is now dominant in a host of countries. But what does that Americanization really mean? As Chi Chuan Lee (1979) noted, such a 'victory' of the American 'look' often does not yield America any noticeable political gains: a poor outcome by colonial–political standards. The same styles that elected Ronald Reagan may be used to attack American 'arrogance' in a French election, for example. In a more recent case, a leftist candidate (who is no rhetorical friend of American foreign policy) won the presidency of Brazil by borrowing 'from the playbooks of Bill Clinton and British Prime Minister Tony Blair' (Varoga and Fornes, 2003). Or, as is the case in the analysis here, aspects of foreign country behaviors that American policy makers disapprove of, such as the Israeli 'security fence', may be propagated through American-style commercials. And indeed, American consultants can even run a foreign media election campaign – such as that of Vicente Fox in Mexico – while in the long run the candidate remains aloof from American political and economic interests, and even engages in as much America-bashing as his opponents.

The terms 'colonialism' and 'imperialism', accordingly, should be reserved for actual instances of direct interference or discussions of the

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Table 8 Ad name: Corruption (42 seconds)

Signage	Visual picture	Audio narrator	Audio subject	Music and sound
Confrontation 2003, the issue government corruption	Split screen of two candidates	Confrontation 2003 the issue government corruption		Dramatic music
Confrontation 2003, the issue government corruption	Split screen of two candidates, Sharon speaks		I am not involved in any corruption in any way	Dramatic music
	Close up of Sharon		I have no knowledge of any criminals who joined the Likud, I just heard about those things from the media	Dramatic music
Confrontation 2003, the issue government corruption	Mitsna speaking, split screen		Sharon is acting like the Godfather and the government as well as the nation is run by the family. I guarantee that I will fight to remove all corruption from government when elected	Dramatic music
Mitsna will fight corruption, Sharon will not		Mitsna will fight corruption, Sharon will not		Dramatic music
The positions are clear, Mitsna wins		The positions are clear, Mitsna wins		Dramatic music

propagation of commercial capitalism benefiting American trade and industries. We should, instead, talk about *what exactly the American–modern form of political communication means when adopted and applied in another country in a given time or context*. In our case study, we found the Israeli ads to be wholly modern. They are, in a word, 'slick': as technically and aesthetically perfect as any Reagan or Clinton campaign commercial. Several key messages are offered in words, sounds and images and serve to create counter-imaging, that is, counter imagery to prevailing public stereotypes of Labor. These may be defined as binary oppositions. They are summarized in Table 9.

The commercials, then, as commercials, not only 'look' good but actualize the counter-images sought. We offer two critiques, however, of both their conceptualization and operationalization.

First, it is clear that Israeli campaign ads seek to become the dominant

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Table 9 Binary polarities of image and counter-image

Issue as main topic of an advertisement	Preexisting public image	Counter image in ads
4 ads	Likud is a party of strength	Likud is corrupt and has provided neither economic prosperity nor security
5 ads	Labor was part of National Unity Government and thus bears part of the blame for country's problems	Labor is not to be blamed even though it was technically part of the government
4 ads	Labor is a party of old-style socialism	Labor will bring prosperity back
8 ads	Labor is weak, soft on security	Labor is tough – heirs of the military legacy

forum for the public sphere. Yet, a few years ago researchers could argue that 'national television no longer functions as the common public sphere and public debate has shifted to community media' (Liebes and Peri, 1998: 27); a former US ambassador to Israel could assert that for a country of Israel's size, US-style advertising was not necessary since: 'You can actually get out and talk to people and hope to have an impact' (Walker, in CNN 'Election 99'). Clearly, the national campaign ad serves as a purveyor of public issues and, as in America, may become the dominant messenger presenting political choices in the public sphere. Such a future seems inevitable.

But, does it have to be so? Should it be so? Israel has a population of 4.5 million eligible voters. The entire country's inhabited areas (excluding desert) make up no more than the size of a few counties in Iowa or New Hampshire. Israelis, of all ethnicities and faiths, are highly educated: they read newspapers. They are also politically aware. Quite simply we might ask whether Israeli elections need to be 'modern' at all. Do the people need television to know who is running for office and what they are saying? Do candidates and parties require television ads to make their case to the voters?

We ask too: How do the ads serve as a forum for disseminating knowledge about candidates and parties? As noted in our analysis, each of these messages, however well packaged, has logical flaws and begs many questions. Most notable among these are:

- How can you be part of a government but have no blame for anything it does?
- What exactly will be Labor's negotiating stance toward any 'peace' deals?
- Specifically: What will Labor do with the settlements?

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The interpretations the commercials offer the viewers are no more than visual platitudes. It is not a case of issue vs image, a typical dichotomy in political advertising (Christ et al., 1994; Garramone, 1983; Gauthier, 1994; Shapiro and Rieger, 1992). Rather, as shown in a previous study, what is occurring is the creation of mythic themes with little or no concretization (Griffin and Kagan, 1996). We might call these kinds of ads *issue as image*, rather than image vs image.

The obvious problem for the Israeli electorate in 2003 was gauging what would be done after the election. Labor was running on a series of juxtaposed images that defined what were the issues, but none of them, save the 'fence', translated into any *physical* plan of action. For a society in such a desperate situation as Israel, the big question is whether myth-making is functionally useless and indeed duplicitous. Myths certainly can set up the conditions for war or peace, but where in the ads is any preparation of the Israeli public for the traumatic concessions necessary for any peace deal acceptable to the Palestinians and the Arab world? (We believe that Arab media prepare Arab peoples for peace to an even lesser extent.) If all the imagery of the Labor Party is to 'out-military' the right, then what does the left have to offer? Or, in advertising terms, where is the brand differentiation?

In critical terms, we found that Edelman's tension-reducing symbols dominated the campaign, but no one's tension was or has been actually reduced.

The imagery and connotations about the 'fence' were the most glaring example of this 'substance gap' in the ads. As stated, the 'fence' cordoning off Palestinian areas from Israel was the only (literally and figuratively) concrete 'security' measure promised in the entire ad campaign. Even then it can be construed as a euphemism, and a vague one at that. The Hebrew word used in the ads is *gader*, which means anything from a wooden suburban fence between neighbors to a barbed-wire fence at an impounded-car lot. The visual of the fence as displayed in the Labor ads show security fences made of barbed wire resembling similar security fences used in the Israeli borders with Lebanon and Jordan.

But the ads do not tell us where the fence will go. Along the 1967 border? Not so, according to the Sharon administration's plans which, due to international pressure and internal debate, were changing when this article was written. Labor offers no maps, no blueprints. And will the fence work? Military historians might recall the 'McNamara Line' idea floated in the Johnson White House during the Vietnam War. That was to build a security fence to keep North Vietnamese infiltrators from South Vietnam – an improbability, indeed. Again, as this article was being written, the building of the fence was being associated with a drop in West Bank- and Gaza Strip-originated terrorist attacks in Israel. In any case, Labor was not promising anything tangible and was not specific about what it was promising.

We argue, thus, that the question of 'American vs. modern', while not irrelevant, must be posed differently. What election styles, content and media

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make sense within the geopolitical context of the given country? Counter-imaging may be a good branding strategy, but does the television commercial serve as the correct vehicle to carry it? In this case, of course, Labor lost the election, gaining 200,000 fewer votes than in the previous parliamentary contest. It was also an election with a record low voter turn-out (though still high by American standards). Notably, Israeli political analysts agree that Labor failed to articulate clear solutions to Israel's problems (Burston, 2003; Eldar, 2003; Gutman, 2003; Hoffman, 2003). These commercials, executing campaign strategy, did not present solutions. Instead, the issues were obscured with myths and symbols that, however slick as packages, offered no substance or succor. Such an American–modern form of political communication may be problematic in a mayoral election in Akron, Ohio; in the Middle East, it is disastrous. Israel cannot find its way out of its present troubles by incremental actions and empty assurances. Indeed, the region has been bound by too many myths: it needs more tangible and actionable realism. The American–modern form of advertising is not to blame for obscuring reality, but it is an identifiable agent for masking it. Understandably, difficult choices are a tough sell for any form of advertising. But in Israel, as in few other realms of political advertising, the fate of the world literally hinges on what is being sold and how it is being packaged.

NOTES

1. This is not a novel concept: Franklin Roosevelt, while his polio and debilitation were kept from the public eye, a subterfuge supported by the American media, emphasized in his campaign appearances and campaign imagery his 'vigor' and 'energy' and 'fitness' (Kiewe, 1999).
2. This latter characterization fits into what researchers previously called the 'female style' of political body image representation (Trent and Sabourin, 1993; see also Parry-Giles, 2000).

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