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Dissociation as a Lexical Choice
in Mediating International Conflicts

Introduction

The paper investigates the use of the concept of dissociation as a discursive technique in the argumentation used by the participants in an international conflict. A brief discussion of the theoretical notion of dissociation is necessary in order to be able to identify it in the fragments of texts that are submitted for analysis. They belong to the international context of the Middle East conflict, namely the situation in which Jimmy Carter, the American President mediates the negotiations between Egypt (represented by President Anwar al Sadat) and Israel (having as a representative the Prime Minister Menachem Begin).

The purpose of this analysis is to establish some concluding remarks regarding the role of dissociation as a device strategically used by the mediator to help the parties minimize the disagreement space and come to conflict resolution. In order to achieve his aim, Carter plays three major roles (cf. Touval and Zartman, 1985), which determine the use of a particular type of vocabulary. This is mainly characterized by words that depict the atmosphere of peace, thus emphasizing the advantages of peace as opposed to the context of war. On the one hand, Carter is a facilitator of decision-making (playing the roles of communicator and formulator), engaged in pure mediation, thus displaying an attitude of neutrality. On the other hand, the American president is engaged in negotiation sessions, exercising his role of manipulator by the use of leverage, or by eliciting concessions and suggesting compromise.

2. The theoretical framework of dissociation

The concept of dissociation has been approached differently by various scholars. It was introduced by Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca in *The New Rhetoric* (1969), being treated, similar to its complementary part – *association*, as a scheme that characterizes "all original philosophical thought" (1969: 190). The *dissociation of notions* implies a certain change in the conceptual data at the basis of argument, which entails a modification of the "very structure" of the respective independent elements. This change implied by the dissociation of concepts is generated by "the desire to *remove an incompatibility* arising out of the confrontation of one proposition with others" (Perelman and Tyteca, 1969: 413).

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca introduce and discuss the notion of *philosophical pairs*, which result from a dissociation of concepts. The pair "*appearance – reality*" is considered the "prototype of conceptual dissociation" (1969: 415) due to the multiple incompatibilities that exist between appearances. The two concepts that make up the philosophical pair are called *term I* ("*appearance*") and *term II* ("*reality*"). Term II can only be defined in relation to term I, being both "normative and explanatory" (1969: 416). The fact that term II provides a criterion, a norm, enables us to make judgments with regard to the presence or lack of value of the aspects of term I. Therefore, in term II, "reality and value are closely linked" (1969: 417).

Although now considered by some scholars outdated, this theory provides background for the other subsequent theories. The latter, thus, preserve certain concepts (e.g. the notion of philosophical pairs) that are enlarged upon and linked to other notions, such as 'persuasive definitions' (Schiappa 1985, 1993; Walton, 2005; Zarefsky, 2006) or 'distinction' (Goodwin 1991, 1992).

The pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation (van Rees 2002, 2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2006; Grootendorst, 1999) brings a new perspective on the understanding of dissociation, in the sense that it is no longer considered an argumentative scheme, but an argumentative technique whose "argumentative potential is based on the fact that the two concepts resulting from the separation of the original notion are portrayed as non-equivalent: the one is represented as more important or more essential than the other" (van Rees, 2005a: 383).

M.A. van Rees (2003) provides a comprehensive definition of dissociation in terms of three features:

> 1. *from an existing conceptual unit, expressed by a single term, one or more aspects are split off; 2. through this operation a contradiction or paradox is resolved because now a proposition can be considered true in one interpretation of the original term and false in the other; 3. the reduced and the split off concept are assigned a different value.*

A set of clues that trigger dissociation corresponds to each of these three features, namely, *separation*, *negation* and *value*. The author adds that none of these clues are clear indicators that unambiguously lead to the use of dissociation. Still a combination of the various classes definitely indicates the presence of this argumentative technique.

3. Mediation of international conflicts

Generally, mediation is viewed as the process in which a third party – ideally neutral – assists two or more parties in conflict, facilitating communication and offering some guidance in order to help them solve the

dispute by themselves. (van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Jackson and Jacobs, 1993; Jacobs and Aakhus, 2002). It is considered that "[T]he origin of mediation is the interaction between two or more parties who may be disputants, negotiators, or interacting parties whose relationship could be improved by the mediator's intervention" (Wall, Stark and Standifer, 2001: 371). Therefore, the usual mediation phenomenon refers to a triadic relationship that involves the participants' interaction under a spoken or written form.

Viewing dissociation at an abstract level, we may claim that peace (as we believe the good is the basic genuine value) may be split off into two other terms. On the one hand, there is peace in the pure sense of the term, which involves a state of calmness and tranquility and the absence of hostilities and war. On the other hand, there is another kind of peace that cannot be attained without a state of war, that is, war is viewed by some cultures as necessary in order to obtain peace. Therefore, we may say that the value scale is imbedded in the culture of a people. This means that what is perceived as valuable for some people may prove not / less valuable to other people, to put it in Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's (1969) terms.

The discourse of mediation involves two types of relations in which argumentative roles shift: (1) the two parties act, in turn, in the argumentative exchange, as protagonist and antagonist – each proposing his own definition of peace in accordance with the corresponding system of values and believes; (2) there is the third party, acting on the one hand as a mediator, in the sense of maintaining neutrality and objectivity, as in allowing the parties to come to dispute resolution on their own, and, on the other hand, as a negotiator, in the sense that, he, sometimes tries to force an outcome and sets the things towards imposing a resolution. Each of the three parties strategically maneuver linguistic and extralinguistic situations, in the sense of resorting to the three elements of topical potential, audience orientation and presentational devices.

As the concept of strategic maneuvering refers to the balance between dialectic and rhetoric, on a more abstract level, in this particular case under analysis, I propose to associate Carter's mediating potential with the idea of dialectical reasonableness / soundness, and the negotiating potential with the concept of rhetorical effectiveness. This means that in the former case, the third party has to maintain objectiveness, neutrality, lack of involvement for personal gain, that is, with no other reason than that of conflict resolution, and, at the same time, to structure the parties' conception of reality.

4. An instance of the use of dissociation in mediating the Middle East conflict

The discourse of international mediation necessarily involves dealing with the concepts of peace and war, which imply the existence of some value scales – positive and negative values, inherent in the meanings of words and expressions grouped around these two semantic fields. Therefore, of the three types of indicators mentioned by van Rees (2003), the value scale indicators are the predominant ones.

As stated in the beginning of this paper, different types of indicators may be used with reference to the same dissociation pattern. This "combination of clues" for application of a value scale and of clues for opposition of synonyms, functions, according to van Rees (2003: 891), as a strong indicator of dissociation.

The value scale involves pairs such as essential / incidental, real / pseudo, in defining the major concepts of this type of discourse that involves the problem of war: peace, security, relations, autonomy, and democracy. Different values are assigned to the terms involved in this process of dissociation, which gives this technique a highly argumentative potential.

There are clear indicators such as "*true*", "*truly*", "*real*" or "*really*", used by the three speakers – Carter, Begin and Sadat, with the aim of stressing the positive value the treaty of peace is invested with, and to emphasize their attitude of commitment to the resolution of this conflict. Therefore, according to the very definition of dissociation, the new term obtained by dissociation represents the criterion, the norm, and it is valued the more – "***true** peace*", "***permanent** peace*", "***real** and not **just** a **sham** peace*" (negation expressing the idea of opposition: *Like you, they want this peace, and like you, they want it to be real and not just a sham peace.* From Address to the Knesset by President Carter on March 12, 1979), "***comprehensive** peace*", terms formulated by the mediator. Other types of indicators mentioned by Perelman and Oblrechts-Tyteca (1969) are present in Carter's discourse to signal dissociation: the definite article – "***the** peace*", or the demonstrative – "***that** peace that is so ardently desired by the people whom they serve*", "*no goal is higher than **that** of **genuine** peace*", "*we may work together successfully to make **this** peace*".

The same dissociative patterns are used by the parties as well, which emphasizes their common goal for peace. On the one hand, the value indicators are present in Begin's discourse, corresponding to the terms in the pairs apparent / pseudo/ real, or the pair theory / practice: "*bring peace to our nations – **real** peace*", "*…if we achieve peace, **true** peace…*", "***true, full** peace with **absolute** reconciliation between the Jewish people and the Arab People*", "***Really** the contents are already agreed on.*", "*…the chance is*

practically in our hands" (theory / practice pair), "*the **full** right to settle / the **absolute** right to settle in all parts of Eretz Israel*", "*The **simple** truth is that president Sadat looked for **no** ruse*", "*I believe that **this** is the **right** choice...*".

By the use of these value scale clues, the parties define their starting points and the positions in the agreement settlement. Thus, for Begin, "*the **true** meaning of the Camp David agreement is this: Autonomy for the Arab inhabitants of Judea, Samaria and the Gaza district, Jews and Arabs living together in Eretz Israel, and security for Israel and all its citizens.*", while Sadat resorts to rhetorical questions that resume the problems to be dealt with in order to define peace: "*How can we achieve a **durable** peace **based on justice**?*", "*As we **really** and **truly** seek peace we **really** and **truly** welcome you to live among us in peace and security*".

By an extended structure of dissociation, Sadat establishes a difference between "***interim** peace*", or "***partial** peace*", and between "***permanent** peace*", "***durable** and **just** peace*" "*based upon justice*", the norm or criterion being represented by the latter series of terms. The Egyptian president uses the technique of dissociation to strategically maneuver the situation. He reasonably argues that a peace achieved without coming to a "*just solution of the Palestinian problem*" does not bring "*durable*" peace. Thus, from the topical potential he chooses the argument of rightness invoked by the use of '*justice*' or '*just*', which weigh heavier on the value scale, and the rhetorical devices, such as the repetition of the words "*partial*", "*permanent*", "*durable*" peace "*based on justice*", which precisely serve his rhetorical and dialectical aim. Therefore, the rhetorical effect is to induce the same belief on the part of the audience, while, dialectically, he wants to move the situation towards reaching a resolution that involves solving the Palestinian problem as well, and implicitly the whole conflict.

> How can we achieve **permanent** peace based on justice? Well, I have come to you carrying my clear and frank answer to this big question, so that the people in Israel as well as the entire world may hear it....
> […] An **interim** peace between Egypt and Israel, or between any Arab confrontation state and Israel, will not bring **permanent** peace based on justice in the entire region.
> Rather, even if peace between all the confrontation states and Israel **were achieved in the absence of a just solution of the Palestinian problem**, never will there be that **durable** and **just** peace upon which the entire world insists.
> Second, I have not come to you to seek a **partial** peace, namely to terminate the state of belligerency at this stage and put off the entire problem to a subsequent stage. This is not the **radical** solution that would steer us to **permanent** peace.
> Equally, I have not come to you for a third disengagement agreement in Sinai or in Golan or the West Bank.
> For this would mean that we are merely delaying the ignition of the fuse. It would also mean that we are lacking the courage to face peace, that we are too

weak to shoulder the burdens and responsibilities of a **durable** peace **based upon justice**.

I have come to you so that together we should build a **durable** peace **based on justice** to avoid the shedding of one single drop of blood by both sides. It is for this reason that I have proclaimed my readiness to go to the farthest corner of the earth.

    (President Anwar Sadat's Address to the Israeli Knesset, November 20, 1977)

As mentioned before, Carter's role as a mediator is that of defining starting points, and in order to do this he resorts to the use of dissociation, defining peace as well.

We believe that there are certain principles, **fundamentally**, which must be observed before a **just** and a **comprehensive** peace can be achieved.

First, **true** peace must be based on **normal** relations among the parties to the peace. **Peace means more than just an end to belligerency.**

Second, there must be withdrawal by Israel from territories occupied in <u>1967</u> and agreement on secure and recognized borders for all parties in the context of **normal** and **peaceful** relations in accordance with U.N. Resolutions <u>242</u> and <u>338</u>.

Some flexibility is always needed to insure **successful** negotiations and the resolution of **conflicting** views.

        (President Carter Addresses Palestinian Rights, January 4, 1978)

What is important to notice is that in order to define 'true' peace, the mediator resorts to other dissociations, as well, such as that in which he speaks of the type of relations prerequisite to reaching peace, the norm being the peaceful relations as they appear defined in the U.N. Resolutions 242 and 338.

Carter also, uses the question strategy, but, this time, a rhetorical one, in order to elicit a response from the parties. He defines peace in an ideal way, under the form of a reported answer, paraphrasing Spinoza, therefore invoking a philosophical authority. This is a strategic, rhetorical move in the sense of wishing to turn Israeli to his favor, as he confesses the Americans pursue the same goal for peace, invested with positive values only.

What kind of peace do we seek? <u>Spinoza</u> said that peace is not an absence of war: it is a virtue, a state of mind, a disposition for benevolence, for confidence, for justice.

Americans share that vision and will stand beside Israel to be sure that that vision is fulfilled.

        (Address to the Knesset by President Carter, March 12, 1979)

According to Walton, in order to persuade, we attribute a term positive values, see it from a different favorable perspective, and thus reformulate it, giving sometimes the impression that our new perspective does away with the negative properties that the respective term may imply. Walton argues that when there are interests at stake, there is an obvious battle over

the definition or the key term at issue, where "the rhetorical aspects of the persuasive definition are visible" (2005: 169). Such happens with these terms involved in the context of international mediation – '*true peace*', for example. In our case, the parties offer a new definition of a term that already has an established lexical meaning, trying then to defend the definition as representing the "true" meaning or "real essence" of the term (see Walton, 2005: 168).

As Zarefsy suggests, there are "essentially contested" (2006: 405) terms, which acquire meaning only dialectically, in relation to their opposites, that is, they do not have fixed meanings. This makes possible the use of persuasive definitions. Such happens, for example, with the term "*normal*" as in "*normal relations*", used by both the mediator and the parties to define the relations once the peace treaty is concluded. The fuzzy boundaries of meaning of the term "*normal*" allow the speaker (the mediator in our case, as in the example above) to actually negotiate its meaning and take advantage of its favorable connotations in the context of this particular situation.

Another concept used by Zarefsky is 'rhetorical depiction', which refers to the terms that are used to mostly impress the audience. But, in our case, I suggest that this rhetorical depiction, which is powerful and effective indeed in the sense of stirring the soul, is nevertheless used as a strategic maneuvering by all three parties, that is, both dialectically and rhetorically. For example, in the context of international conflict, a persuasive definition would be that of the state of war in opposition to peace. In defining war, lexical elements such as *injuries*, *death*, *decay*, *sorrow, victims, disaster* are notions that fall within the semantic field of war. Nevertheless, this proves to be a powerful argument also in the dialectical sense, as it moves the situation in favor of concluding the peace treaty.

> Sadat (November 20 1977): And with the reality of the Israeli existence, the struggle that took us from war to war, from victims to more victims, until you and we have today reached the edge of a horrible abyss and a terrifying disaster unless, together, we seize this opportunity today of a durable peace based on justice. […]
> Any life that is lost in war is a human life be it that of an Arab or an Israeli. A wife who becomes a widow is a human being entitled to a happy family life, whether she be an Arab or an Israeli.
> Innocent children who are deprived of the care and compassion of their parents are ours. They are ours, be they living on Arab or Israeli land.

A relation of dissociation is involved here, between life and human life, which, together with the appeal to children's innocence is used with the same purpose of minimizing and reducing the differences between the

parties, the common goal being the concluding of a peace treaty and conflict resolution in a reasonable way.

5. Conclusion

The mediator resorts to dissociation as a technique for resolving the incompatibilities in the meaning of concepts such as peace, war, security, borders, differently understood by the two conflicting parties. Thus, the mediator's role is that of a formulator in the sense of clearly defining these concepts, with the purpose of reaching a common ground and common starting points in order for the parties to come to dispute resolution.

The vocabulary he uses distinguishes itself by elements that clearly indicate the use of dissociation, which Carter resorts to with the aim of creating an opposition between the states of peace and war. The intended purpose is to persuade the parties to choose the signing of a peace treaty instead of starting a war again. The examples bring evidence in favor of this idea, the atmosphere of peace being attributed positive value, in contrast with the negative side effects the war causes.

An important remark is that the linguistic elements that function as indicators of dissociation are rather abstract words, such as *true*, *normal*, *successful* which cannot be exactly defined, as they have fuzzy boundaries. Therefore, they are metaphorically used, rather than being assigned clear-cut meanings. This is an argument that enhances the rhetorical effectiveness of the concept of strategic maneuvering, which brings evidence in favor of the fact that the emotional argument creates that balance with the logical side, with all the three representatives of the parties.

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Rezumat

În contextul unor relaţii internaţionale caracterizate printr-un comportament conflictual al părţilor implicate în dispută, în cazul în care aceasta nu poate fi rezolvată prin încheierea unui acord rezonabil, este necesară intervenţia unei a treia părţi – mediatorul. Unul dintre rolurile acestuia este acela de a facilita luarea unei decizii, fiind astfel cel care înlesneşte comunicarea între părţi şi formulează În exercitarea acestui rol sunt folosite anumite strategii lingvistice argumentative care pentru a fi eficiente implică alegerea celor mai potrivite elemente lexicale, favorizând astfel înţelegerea între disputanţi. Disocierea este o tehnică argumentativă la care mediatorul recurge în formularea punctelor de plecare cu scopul de a reduce spaţiul dezacordului dintre cele două părţi. Acest lucru se realizează printr-o selectare atentă a materialului lexical de către cel care mediază pentru a înlesni

găsirea unei soluții de rezolvare sau aplanare a conflictului, soluție la care să ajungă participanții la dispută, prin voința acestora, fără a fi impusă de intervenția celei de-a treia părți. Astfel, vocabularul ce caracterizează comportamentul lingvistic al mediatorului este reprezentat în mare parte de elemente care aparțin sferei semantice legate de război și pace. Scopul este același – de a determina disputanții să rezolve conflictul, fie și printr-o situație de compromis