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# Building community in international politics: A study of political press conferences

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## Abstract

In today's increasingly globalised yet disconnected world, especially in the contemporary context of a turbulent political landscape, there has been an increasing effort made by socio-political leaders at solidifying alliances and drawing support from different corners of the world in order to neutralize policies. Drawing on a multidimensional framework, in particular, critical discourse analysis and membership categorization analysis, this paper explores the various strategies employed by political leaders, attempting to reconcile disparate perspectives in the face of increasing socio-economic inter-connection and political dependence. More often than not, it was discovered, political leaders drew upon the somewhat "illusory" notion of "international community", turning it into a tool of persuasion and membership category. In doing so, this paper aims to illustrate how the creation of illusive categories and perceptions are intended as a means of drawing support from diverse political leaders and projecting a united front before scrutinizing press and public.

**Keywords:** critical discourse analysis, membership categorisation analysis, political press conferences, solidarity, diplomatic language.

## Resumen

*La creación del concepto de comunidad en política internacional: estudio de las ruedas de prensa políticas*

En el mundo presente, cada vez más globalizado y sin embargo fragmentario, y en especial en el convulso panorama político actual, los líderes socio-políticos se esfuerzan en crear alianzas y conseguir apoyos desde todas partes para hacer más aceptable su forma de gobierno. El presente artículo investiga, dentro de un

marco multidimensional, concretamente el análisis del discurso y el análisis de categorización de la afiliación, las distintas estrategias que los líderes políticos emplean para intentar reconciliar, dentro de esa creciente (inter)dependencia política y socio-económica, posturas bastante dispares. Reflejamos cómo, en la mayoría de las ocasiones, los líderes políticos se aferran a la noción un tanto ficticia de “comunidad internacional”, convirtiéndola en una herramienta persuasiva y de categorización de la afiliación. El objetivo de este trabajo es ilustrar cómo mediante la creación de esas categorías y percepciones ficticias se pretende obtener el apoyo de líderes políticos de distinto signo y, a la vez, proyectar una imagen de unidad frente al escrutinio de la opinión pública y la prensa.

**Palabras clave:** análisis crítico del discurso, análisis de categorización de la afiliación, ruedas de prensa políticas, solidaridad, lenguaje diplomático.

## Introduction

There has been a multitude of work done on political discourse; studies which explore various facets of politics, including the role of evasion in political talk (Harris, 1991), political broadcasts and interviews (Atkinson, 1988; Scannell, 1991), political language in general (Chilton, 1985; Biletzki, 1997), the correlation between media and politics (Van Dijk, 1993; Schaffner, 1997). Within the more general context of political discourse, political press conferences have also been the specific subject of study, particularly presidential press conferences (Smith, 1990; Eshbaugh-Soha, 2003) which focus on issues of “show business and politics” and dramatic license in political broadcasts (Jennings, 1968), broadcast political talk (Davis, 1997; Reinsch, 1968), politicians and media hostility in press conferences (Ryfe, 1999), press conferences and public relations (Manheim, 1979), and press and political campaigning (Barkin, 1983). However, given the complex interplay that takes place between political leaders, often representing opposing ideologies, there has been relatively less work done on press conferences that take place between different political leaders (Bhatia, 2006; Ekstrom, 2006). Whereas Bhatia (2006) using critical discourse analysis takes a closer look at diplomatic language used to communicate political differences in a positive way to smooth out ideological discrepancies that often divide prominent political figures, Ekstrom (2006) using conversational analysis focuses on how floor is accessed and regulated in political press conferences within the context of institutional interaction and model of power.

This paper, following the above-mentioned earlier work by Bhatia on press conferences, aims to explore not just the diplomatic language used to negotiate ideological differences, but rather the social practice of building solidarity between nations in order to establish a sense of community. Political press conferences (PPC), especially the ones analysed in this paper, represent dialogues between two political leaders, sometimes from similar political schools of thought, sometimes diametrically opposed. The resulting dialogue is often formulaic as an attempt is made to portray a positive diplomatic front. Political press conferences give an indication of how ideologies are discussed and negotiated, and how various rhetorical strategies are employed in order to arouse trust and build solidarity within international politics, between political leaders. Rhetorical strategies here can be understood as specific recurrent patterns in the data set. These rhetorical strategies give shape to intended train of thought, an argument, or a belief that coheres to reflect the theme of solidarity, a general motivation for the employment of such strategies.

The political press conferences analysed can be seen as a sub-category of a much broader category of “press conferences” constituting “conventionalized communicative events covering many domains, such as sports, religion, business, law, and medicine, among many others” (Bhatia, 2006: 175). Political press conferences can be viewed as a sub-category of this genre, although even then it would be difficult to rigidly define its boundaries. The political press conferences analysed are a mix of two and three-party conferences between leaders from around the world taking place on an international platform. The press conferences take place over an eight-year period, from 2001 to 2009 representing a predominating volatile political landscape, coloured largely by the Bush presidency, illustrating deep rifts in relations, and taking place at a time when multilateralism needed to be pursued. Such conferences were aimed at sanctioning actions, justifying policies and building plentiful alliances and continuing to an era of new administrations, yet similar socio-political clashes.

The rhetorical strategies employed by political leaders illustrate efforts to unite the global community against global issues like terrorism, nuclear proliferation, and climate change; to invoke responsibility and a desire to fight against the conceived notions of threat in unwilling states, to take pre-emptive action in order to defend citizens of the world. The rhetorical strategies thus employed are the following: “overcoming differences” which through expressions of intimacy and friendship aim to recruit allies in

support of actions; overcoming differences leads to the “construction of an ‘International Community’”, a category that serves to create solidarity through the homogenisation of all “good” and willing nations; inclusion in such a category implies possession of certain values; and lastly, the members of the “international community” are reminded that being part of this particular category and possessing certain values compel that certain actions be taken, therefore the rhetorical strategy of “invocation of responsibilities” is employed.

The content of the political press conferences can be seen as clichéd and repetitive to a great extent. Despite the implied spontaneity, such conferences are very formulaic, complementing the equally ritualistic structure of the conferences themselves, often entailing an opening statement, individual speeches, a question-answer session, and the closing (Bhatia, 2006). Such an organised structure of a political press conference enables the achievement of a positive, diplomatic front, generally following the principles of political politeness (Harris, 2001) and Grice’s maxims of quantity and relevance (Grice, 1975). Although many reasons factor into the occurrence and frequency of political press conferences, including how comfortable political leaders are at making a statement in front of a scrutinising press and ultimately public; however, the occurrences of two/three-party political press conferences are more dependent on the international political environment. If the government is in need of multilateral support or is in a potentially controversial foreign policy situation, then the number of press conferences may increase in an attempt to gain support, make amends, or withdraw the policy, though the latter seems unlikely. The ritualistic nature of press conferences also lends the content of speech a certain amount of predictability.

## Methodology

For its analysis, this paper draws on a data set that consisted of political press conferences ranging from 2001 to 2009, between leaders of different nations, particularly in the context of the turbulent War on Terror. The primary data set was supported by reports, articles and analyses drawn from various national and international newspapers and magazines, which include *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *South China Morning Post*, *TIME*, *Newsweek*, *Asia Today*, and *International Herald Tribune*, in addition to numerous others.

The negotiation and alliance-building strategies employed in the political press conferences analysed illustrate the layered interaction that takes place between political leaders. Each statement is expertly put together by an experienced team of speechwriters and diplomats, and delivered to give the impression that social unity and political solidarity are viewed as prerequisites by political leaders to reach any sort of decision. Closer, and more accurate, analysis of such multi-layered and complex interaction requires an appropriately multidimensional approach. The multidimensional framework employed for analysis of the press conferences consists of two primary approaches:

- 1) Integration of certain aspects of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1989) has been useful for textual analysis, especially for the diffusion of, to whatever extent possible, the complexity of power relations within socio-political and institutional structures. CDA makes relatively more comprehensible this complex mesh of power relations, which appear even more overwhelming when we begin to decipher the ideological intentions behind the diplomatic strategies used to build solidarity. It is essential to consider these relationships between text, context, and sociocultural practice, which produce ideological and power-laden discourses. CDA is thus a useful approach to integrate in the methodological framework in order to achieve multidimensionality since it is concerned with assembling contextual evidence of many sorts in order to build the richest possible interpretive framework. Investigation of data through CDA includes “description of text, interpretation of the relationship between text and interaction, and explanation of the relationship between interaction and social context” (Fairclough, 1989: 109). Aspects of Fairclough’s approach, when integrated in the framework, allow the analysis of linguistic elements of the discourses collected that “show up their generally hidden detriments in the system of social relationships, as well as hidden effects they may have upon that system” (Fairclough, 1989: 5).
- 2) Conflicts and contestations between powerful political parties engender many delineating categories resulting in the prioritisation of one version of reality over another. More specifically, these categories are a result of a more powerful social group outcasting a less powerful minority group. In order to discover the intentions

and ideologies of participants, who create and diffuse various representations of reality and membership categories, certain aspects of Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA) (Jayyusi, 1984; Sacks, 1992) are also drawn upon. MCA suggests that categorisation is deliberate, has a purpose, and derives from the common sense people possess, which itself has its basis in ideology. An analysis of membership categories and membership categorisations can enable, to whatever extent possible, the discovery of the impact of *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990) on the way we receive and perceive the world. We categorise not necessarily on the basis of what is objectively true, but rather what we believe to be true. Although over the years MCA as a tradition has gained its own share of followers (Hester & Eglin, 1997; Lepper, 2000; Eglin & Hester, 2003), many of whom have attempted to forge a closer link between Conversational Analysis (CA) and Ethnomethodology, there are still certain critics, Schegloff (2007), most notably, who have argued that extending work on categorisation must consider the whole range of analytical tools offered by CA over the last 35 years. In particular, Schegloff (2007) argues for more specific inquiries into how ordinary workings of talk activate categorisation devices for involved parties, and how analysts “show parties’ orientation to the categories they want to claim are at play” without specifically and verbally admitting to those categories (Schegloff, 2007: 477). Schegloff mentions that work on MCA must take into account the juxtaposition between “a possible description with that which it purports to describe in order to recognize it as a possible description, and in order to undertake next actions predicated on its adequacy” (Schegloff, 2007: 481). MCA is useful since it consists of “a formal analysis of the procedures people employ to make sense of other people and their activities...[it] has a strong pragmatic component – it orients towards practical action ... delimiting one’s own moral, social and religious characteristics as well as those of opponents” (Leudar, Marsland & Nekvapil, 2004: 244). Elements of MCA will be useful in analysis since MCA can be seen, to some extent, as a textual analysis of the category sets people employ to negotiate power and ideology within socio-political relations.

Building solidarity and community is an important “process” within international politics. It involves the employment of the strategy of cooperation and overcoming differences on the part of political leaders; overcoming differences involves the identification of membership categories such as the construction of an “international community”, often creating dichotomies and boundaries between different groups within the socio-political world. Membership categories further involve the identification of certain values that members of a particular category should possess, such as civility and unity; these values emphasise what qualities are required to obtain membership. The categorisation of certain groups and the identification of the values required for the members of such categories demand that political leaders employ the strategy of invocation of responsibilities, which aims to recover differences between political parties, by reminding them that to qualify as members of a certain category, they should act on the aims and fulfil the agendas of that particular category.

## Overcoming differences

International politics is rife with ideological and power-fuelled tensions and, in order to overcome differences, political leaders often try to gather support and consensus by building alliances and solidarity, since raising a relatively national issue to a more global level does not always necessitate a multilateral response to it. Political press conferences often bring together two individual leaders who may or may not bring to the table their individual agendas. If the case should be that two leaders meet to collaborate but do not share entirely similar perceptions, considerable political politeness and negotiation, which makes use of “language to cajole, persuade, threaten, induce, drive, blackmail, intimidate, and flatter” (Bell, 1995: 50), is involved. Praise, flattery, and expressions of immediate intimacy are often used to create goodwill. This sort of interactional exchange can be characterised as part of Goffman’s (1959: 107-128) distinction between front-stage and back-stage behaviour:

The performance of an individual in a front region may be seen as an effort to give the appearance that his activity in the region maintains and embodies certain standards (...) back-stage may be defined as a place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course.



Some illustrative examples include (*italics added*):

- (Extract 1) *The Prime Minister is a man of his word. He is a man of great ability, deep conviction, and steady courage. He has my admiration, and he has the admiration of the American people. Our two countries are joined in large tasks because we share fundamental convictions.*  
(Bush, Bush-Blair PPC, 8/4/03)
- (Extract 2) *Tony Blair is a leader of conviction, of passion, of moral clarity, and eloquence. He is a true friend of the American people. The United Kingdom has produced some of the world's most distinguished statesmen, and I'm proud to be standing with one of them today. The close partnership between the United States and Great Britain has been and remains essential to the peace and security of all nations.*  
(Bush, Bush-Blair PPC, 17/7/03)
- (Extract 3) *In all these efforts, the American people know that we have no more valuable friend than Prime Minister Tony Blair. As we like to say in Crawford, he's a stand-up kind of guy. He shows backbone and courage and strong leadership. I thank him and Cherie for coming. I thank the British people for their strength and their unyielding commitment to the cause of liberty.*  
(Bush, Bush-Blair PPC, 16/4/04)
- (Extract 4) *On North Korea, we have total convergence of views with the American President (...) So really it is a pleasure to work with Barack Obama. We work regularly together. He knows that France is a friend of the United States. We basically coordinate on all major issues and we are determined to continue that. Barack, welcome. Welcome to your family.*  
(Sarkozy, Sarkozy-Obama PPC, 6/6/09)

The extracts above illustrate the almost mechanical and repetitive nature of negotiation and intimation of friendship in political press conferences. In the extracts above the recurrence of terms such as “friend” (extracts 3 and 4), “commitment” (extract 3), “conviction” (extracts 1 and 2), “courage” (extract 1), “family” (extract 4), all of which aim to reiterate the closeness between two leaders by acting out of the same semantic force, in conjunction with “great ability” (extract 1), “distinguished statesmen” (extract 2), “stand-up kind of guy” (extract 3), “pleasure to work with” (extract 4) reinforce a sense of unity and sociability between leaders and nations. Reflecting the strategy of unification, bi-nomials such as “Prime Minister and I”, “friends and allies” (two of the more preferred collocations); in addition to “Our two countries are joined in large tasks” (extract 1); and “The close partnership between the United States and Great

Britain” (extract 3), “we have a total convergence of views” (extract 4), or even the use of the first name basis, “Barack, welcome” in extract 4, emphasise the alliance between two leaders, especially in front of international audiences and the media, from which should leaders turn away could cause a loss of face. It is because of this somewhat overly emphatic relationship often expressed between two closely allied countries, of which America and Britain are an apt example, that leaders cannot easily distance themselves entirely or retrench too explicitly on earlier commitments.

Great Britain is represented as a civilised country, and Blair as a person with “moral clarity” (extract 2) because of their “unyielding commitment to the cause of liberty” (extract 3). However, many media and news analysts did not at the time see the alliance between the US and UK as anything more than Blair being “America’s ‘poodle’ (...) Bush is the British P.M.’s albatross (...) Blair’s stand has also cost heavily in Europe. Britain was once first among equals in the pantheon of European Union leaders. No longer” (McGuire & Wolffe, 2003). One reason for the impression that media analysts had of Blair could possibly have been that, even though the level of solidarity and rapport was more evident and intense between the two men as compared with other political leaders, Blair, for various reasons which could include decorum, culture or strategy, was comparatively more passive in verbalizing his praise for Bush. More importantly, it is possible to assume that due to media scrutiny, many a times overly eager attempts to initiate immediate camaraderie and intimacy in political press conferences are labelled as a farce or mock.

It is possible to regard the use of such expressions of unity and intimacy as forms of “emo-political blackmail” (Bhatia, 2006: 186), somewhat along the lines of political politeness, which serves to prevent the opposite speaker from acting otherwise so as not to cause his counterpart loss of face. Unlike everyday face-to-face conversation, a considerable amount of power, dominance and influence is exerted on an international platform, along with immediate and sometimes forced friendship. There have also been many critics who have accused administrations in the past, especially the Bush administration, of exploiting their power and influence in order to persuade international leaders to follow suit, as an article from Sydney Morning Herald (SMH) notes:

Washington has said that its decision to bar opponents of the war on Iraq such as France, Germany and Russia from \$US18.6 billion (\$25 billion) in US

reconstruction projects is appropriate and an inducement for countries to commit troops and provide other support (...) It suggests that President George Bush is in no mood to forgive key allies that opposed the war and thwarted his effort to gain United Nations backing for the invasion of Iraq (...) (Holland, 2003: 1)

The strategy of “flattery”, often employed by political leaders, can be viewed in two ways: the positive reinforcements given about the talk itself, and the kind of positive reinforcement given in the case of allies and friends such as Britain or France (in the case of the current Obama administration), which is seen to provide unrestricted support. Between leaders who share a more positively allied relationship, praise is often directed at the person in addition to the talks, for example Bush was generous with his praise for Blair the “person”, Blair the “Leader”, and Blair the “valuable friend” (extract 3); however, between countries who share more troubled, uncertain relationships, praise is often more conservative, shorter and generally only in the form of assessments about the talk not the leader specifically:

(Extract 5) I look forward to having a *very good discussion about our relations*, as well as what *we’re going to do as people who love freedom* about terrorism. And I want to thank you very much for your *strong statements of support for the American people*, and your *strong statement against terrorist activities*. *It meant a lot to us.*

(Bush, Bush-Megawati PPC, 19/9/01)

(Extract 6) I would like from the outset to say that there was a *very useful and very open business-like conversation*. This, no doubt, was a meeting that has been expected, both in this country and the United States of America, and on which not only the *future of our two country depends but also, to a large extent, the trends of world development*.

(Medvedev, Medvedev-Obama PPC, 6/7/09)

Extracts 5 illustrates Bush’s appreciation and praise for the discussions that he shared with Megawati, the former president of Indonesia: “I look forward to having a very good discussion about our relations” (extract 5), indicating that at point in time Megawati and Bush did not share the closest of relations, but being one of those “people who love freedom” Megawati’s “strong statements of support for the American people” while it did not match Blair’s “unyielding commitment to the cause of liberty” (extract 3), her “strong statement against terrorist activities” did hold significance for the American people. Similarly, in extract 6 the current president of Russia Medvedev comments on the “very useful and very open business-like

conversation” he shared with the current US president Obama, which can be perceived as a very professional compliment given to the “nature” of the talks, which took place due to the importance they hold for the “trends of world development”. Very unlike the more personal praise and support Sarkozy, the current president of France, bestows upon Obama.

There is often a subtle difference between the terms used to express personal closeness, and personal distance with professional agreeability, and if the terms of praise of close leaders, such as Bush and Blair, are juxtaposed with allies who are less staunch in their support for America, one finds that praise and flattery, though evoked in political press conferences, range on a solidarity scale: “great ability, deep conviction, and steady courage” (extract 1), “He has my admiration” (extract 1), “passion” (extract 2), “moral clarity” (extract 2), “close partnership” (extract 2), “valuable friend” (extract 3), “stand-up kind of guy” (extract 3), “great pleasure to work with” (extract 4), “welcome to your family” (extract 4) all connote a relatively more intimate friendship. Such praise comes across as relatively more personal, more emotive, in turn hinting to the “type” of person a political leader might be, or wants to be thought of by others- moral, passionate, pleasure, family, courageous. This can be compared to “strong statement” (extract 5), “very good discussion” (extract 5), “open business-like conversation” (extract 6) all of which come across as less personable, implying a more formal and often “diplomatically-in-limbo” relationship.

## **Discursive construction of “international community”**

As part of the rhetorical strategy of overcoming differences, membership categories are created within which all those in favour of a particularly powerful country’s actions, all democratic and honest nations, form part of an “international community”. The “international community” here may be considered as a self-organised group that is united by common beliefs, interests and commitments, but is “further constituted through a set of membership rules and procedures which admit persons to membership within the group, and thus to category incumbency” (Jayyusi, 1984: 26). All those opposed to the ideals of more dominant countries otherwise find themselves excluded from this rather beneficial in-group that leads the world.

- (Extract 7) And we believe that *free nations must advance human rights and dignity across the world*. We believe that the *just demands of the international community must be enforced, not ignored*. *We believe this so strongly that we are acting on our convictions.*  
(Bush, Bush-Blair PPC, 8/4/03)
- (Extract 8) The President and I also discussed *our hopes that Iran will make the right choice and take advantage of the international community's willingness to negotiate*, and how we will *renew our efforts to deliver security and peace for both the Palestinians and Israel*.  
(Brown, Brown-Obama PPC, 1/4/09)
- (Extract 9) (...) *North Korea has a choice*. It can continue down the path of confrontation and provocation that has led to less security, less prosperity, and more isolation from the global community, or it can *choose to become a full member of the international community, which will give a better life to its people* by living up to international obligations and foregoing nuclear weapons.  
(Obama, Hu Jintao- Obama PPC, 17/11/09)
- (Extract 10) I fully respect President Obama's peace efforts for the *international world order* (...) Iran has to respect the *rules of the international community*. And we certainly wish and hope and trust that this small window in the reduction of nuclear weapons may consolidate and strengthen.  
(Zapatero, Obama-Zapatero PPC, 13/10/09)

The international community is often represented as a collection of “free nations” (extract 7) who work together in order to “advance human rights and dignity across the world” (extract 7), ensure that the “just demands” made are fulfilled (also extract 7), and “renew efforts to deliver security and peace” (extract 8). The international community is portrayed as working towards the advancement of an “international world order” (extract 10), nations and citizens part of the international community are granted “a better life” (extract 9), disengagement from the community is often seen as being the equivalent of “confrontation and provocation” leading to “less security, less prosperity, and more isolation from the global community” (extract 9), which was seen to be the case with Iraq prior to the war at the time of the Bush administration, and is often seen as being the case with North Korea and Iran on matters of nuclear proliferation, and sometimes a point of contention between developing and developed nations on the matters of global climate change. The international community displays qualities of democracy, goodness, and a “willingness to negotiate” (extract 8); by implication, nations not part of the international community are

viewed as inflexible and unwilling to commit to diplomatic discussion. The international community is portrayed as lawful and rule-oriented (“Iran has to respect the rules of the international community” – extract 10), they quote laws and resolutions which countries have to follow “to become a full member” (extract 9), though the point of contention is always who decides what these rules are. As the current Russian Prime Minister, and former president, Putin stated, “if decisions are being made by just one member of the international community and all the others are required to simply subscribe to support those decisions, this is something that we would not find acceptable” (Putin, Blair-Putin, PPC 30/4/03). Nevertheless, in political press conferences the concept of “international community” almost becomes a sort of membership category used to decisively homogenize the more succumbing parts of the world, defining common features shared by nations considered to be members, while manipulating the more adamant parts on the basis of their lack of these features. To build solidarity and community is, perhaps, less complicated in everyday interaction than in political interaction since there is constant assertion of political onepmanship, and conflicts between political parties generally have much more widespread consequences.

Often positive diplomatic ties are sought by political leaders when they are in need of allies regarding certain actions hoping to be taken. In such cases where less support and more criticism regarding the actions taken is faced, it is common for leaders to emphasise the support that they have acquired thereby minimising the lack of support from those who oppose them. As Blair mentioned in one press conference:

(...) I think it is important to *recognize the strength of our alliance* – yes, there are countries that disagree with what we are doing. I mean, there’s no point in hiding it, there’s been a division (...) *go and ask those other countries why they’re not with us*, and they will give you the reasons why they disagree. But I think *what is important is to bear in mind two things*. First of all, there are an *immense number of countries that do agree with us*. I mean, I hear people constantly say to me, *Europe is against what you’re doing*. That is not true. There is a *part of Europe that is against what we are doing*. There are *many existing members of the European Union, and virtually all the new members of the European Union, that strongly support what we are doing*. So there is a division, but we have *many allies*.

(Blair, Bush-Blair PPC, 27/3/03)

In the extract above Blair attempted to counter-balance the “part of Europe that is against what we are doing” by highlighting the “strength of our

alliance”. The acknowledgement that “there are countries that disagree with what we are doing” was subdued by the claim that there “are many existing members of the European Union, and virtually all the new members of the European Union, that strongly support what we are doing” creating a vigorous parallelism. Following Grice’s maxim of quantity, which countries were in support of and opposed to was not mentioned. In such cases the “discoursal process of re-imagining “international community” is an essential element in the political project of re-constituting international relations” (Fairclough, 2005: 53). However, Glosserman (2003) counter-argued that what Bush and Blair referred to as a large international coalition was in fact “‘a la carte multilateralism’, picking and choosing ... allies and mechanisms as circumstances dictate”.

This was similar to the more recent debate surrounding the recent global climate change Copenhagen Accord (COP 15) where the support of a few handpicked nations, namely Brazil, India, China, and South Africa, who put together the Accord with America, was seen as being representative of the international community. As Venezuelan representatives, who denounced the Accord, claimed, the final document

was made behind closed doors, and that developed countries, those most responsible for global warming, want to solve climate problems by throwing small amounts of money around. The Venezuelan delegate (...) said on Saturday that *only twenty-five countries* participated in writing the document L-7, the draft of the final summit resolution that the chair of the summit “noted”, and that was not voted on.

(Pearson, 21/12/09; italics added)

The membership category of “international community” often includes a collection of nations that have already offered their support, rather than being used as a tool of persuasion, an incentive, to draw the more detached and unconvinced nations. The membership category in this case has a contradictory function, whereby it might unite in-group incumbents but, instead of recruiting more new category members, it outcasts those not part of the group, somewhat negating the purpose of building community and solidarity in international politics. It is even possible to make the claim that elicitation of support within the international community may not necessarily be actual attempts to reach out to unwilling nations, but rather a diplomatic display of support already garnered, much in the form of self-justification for actions taken. Relations between nations are historically

moulded and thickly layered with preconceived ideologies; often many times common suspicions on part of nations, solidified over years of mistrust, are harder to overlook or dissipate. Furthermore, it is even possible that nations that have shared relations characterised by dominance and struggle over time may become more submissive. Therefore, building community in politics may just be a historical process, and not something that can be attempted for specific policies and actions, but established over time. As such, searching for solidarity within international politics could possibly be a form of justification for the public eye more than anything else.

Political press conferences do, however, present a unique opportunity for political leaders to meet and negotiate their individual socio-political agendas and perspectives in order to “achieve the right strategic partnership between the main countries of the world” (Blair, Blair-Putin PPC 30/4/03). As the current Prime Minister of Italy, Berlusconi, mentions,

...we really need to support and develop the culture of union and cohesion, and certainly not nurture the culture of division. Selfishness, narcissism and division shall never win. We need to revive the huge strength of cohesion. And this has to be a vital force, able to plan and build something.

(Berlusconi, Bush-Berlusconi PPC, 21/7/03)

It might be for this reason that during his presidency Bush tried to extend an arm of friendship towards many previously forgotten directions, one such example being India, which not until long ago was negligent on the Bush administration's

black-and-white view of the world (...) India began the Bush era as an incidental blip on the margins of the radar screen- an unfamiliar place that could possibly serve as a counterweight to China. After September 11, it has re-emerged- at the centre of a resurgent Pax Americana dream.

(Chawla, 2001: 24)

The formation of certain categories further requires distinguishing them by establishing category values; it involves identifying descriptor designators (Jayyusi, 1984) that can be seen as a way of labelling and distinguishing the members of the category. Descriptor designators serve to unite members of a particular category, in this case the “international community”, by emphasising the common qualities and goals of category members. Emphasising the common values shared by category members can be seen



as strengthening the in-group boundary of the willing nations, the favoured nations that form part of not only the international community but who often earn themselves an upgrade to the “civilised” world.

(Extract 11) It is for the people of Iraq to say, *here’s how civilized people must live. Here’s how you protect minority rights. Here’s how you protect the rights of religious people. And here’s how civilized people should live if they’re going to provide hope for the future.*

(Bush, Bush-Blair PPC, 16/4/04)

(Extract 12) *The terrorists know they face defeat unless they break the spirit and commitment of the civilized world. The civilized world will not be frightened or intimidated.*

(Bush, Bush-Blair PPC, 28/6/04)

(Extract 13) *The United States and the United Kingdom have stood together through thick and thin, through war and peace, through hard times and prosperity – and we’ve always emerged stronger by standing together... And I know that we both believe that the relationship between our two countries is more than just an alliance of interests; it’s a kinship of ideals and it must be constantly renewed.*

(Obama, Brown-Obama PPC, 1/4/09)

In order to strengthen and maintain support amongst existing alliances attempts are often made to strengthen standards of membership category. The civilised world, of which willing nations are members, is often ascribed positive values of “spirit” and “commitment” (extract 12) that are juxtaposed with the language of negative action of those who stand on the outside of the civilized world, namely perceived terrorist groups and nations (“frightened”, “intimidated” – extract 12). Extract 11 goes a step further and prescribes how civilised society should live and function, acting on past frames of experience, through the instructive “here’s how”, which due to its listing in a set of three can also be seen as an effective instrument in eliciting unifying applause (Atkinson, 1988). It is implied in the extract that there is no “hope for the future” if the rules of civilised society are not followed. It is not an uncommon occurrence when “political evocations of the future tap into – indeed, pray upon – the public’s general anxiety about the inherent ambiguity and indeterminacy of the future in order to influence social perceptions, cognitions, and actions” (Dunmire, 2005: 484).

The civilized international community is often portrayed in political press conferences as abiding by certain values that make their policies and actions distinctive, and place them in a more desirable league; they not only show

spirit, commitment, and a “willingness to negotiate” (extract 8) but share a “a kinship of ideals” (extract 13). These ideals, Gray (2003) argues, are Western ideals, as “Western societies are governed by the belief that modernity is a single condition, everywhere the same and always benign (...) Being modern means realizing our values – the values of Enlightenment ...” (Gray, 2003: 1). These ideals require that nations remain allied “through thick and thin, through war and peace, through hard times and prosperity” (extract 13), this extract reading almost like marriage vows, requiring a staunchness in commitment on part of members of the international community.

## Invocation of responsibilities

With civilisation comes responsibility and political press conferences often find leaders attempting to unite nations for any particular course of action by invoking a sense of responsibility within them. Actions based on these global ideals of an international community can be interpreted as sourcing from the deontological approach to moral action that defines “an action as right if, and only if, it is in accordance with a moral rule or principle, which may be based on revelation or laid out by reason or command universal rational acceptance” (Wijze De, 2002: 213).

(Extract 14) *It is a cynical world that says it's impossible for the Iraqis to run themselves. It is a cynical world which condemns Iraq to failure. We refuse to accept that. We believe that the Iraqi people are capable, talented, and will be successful in running their own government.*

(Bush, Bush-Blair PPC, 8/4/03)

(Extract 15) *History shows us that when nations fail to cooperate, when they turn away from one another, when they turn inward, the price for our people only grows. That's how the Great Depression deepened. That's a mistake that we cannot afford to repeat.*

(Obama, Brown-Obama PPC, 1/4/09)

(Extract 16) *The truth is that today's global problems require global solutions. And at this week's summit, where leaders representing 85 percent of the world's economy are gathering together, this summit cannot simply agree to the lowest common denominator. We must stand united in our determination to do whatever is necessary.*

(Brown, Brown-Obama PPC, 1/4/09)

(Extract 17) *The major challenges of the 21st century, from climate change to nuclear proliferation to economic recovery, are challenges that touch both our nations, and challenges that neither of our nations can solve by acting alone. That's why the United States welcomes China's efforts in playing a greater role on the world stage - a role in which a growing economy is joined by growing responsibilities.*

(Obama, Hu Jintao-Obama PPC, 17/11/09)

During the Bush administration unwilling nations were remonstrated by Bush as behaving in a cynical manner by contributing to the War on Terror, and “It is a cynical world which condemns Iraq to failure” (extract 14). The pronoun “we” could be seen as metonymic of America and its allies who were not cynical since they “refuse(d) to accept” that Iraqis cannot “run themselves” because “Iraqi people are capable, talented, and will be successful in running their own government” (extract 14). Extract 18 again creates a parallelism, which reinforces the message being put across. This is a presupposition based on a relatively subjective conceptualisation of social reality indicating that

Discourses include imaginaries - representations of how things might or could or should be. The knowledge of the knowledge-economy and knowledge-society are imaginaries in this sense - projections of possible states of affairs, ‘possible worlds’. These imaginaries may be enacted as actual (networks of) practices- imagined activities, subjects, social relations, etc. can become real activities, subjects, social relations (...) (Chiapello & Fairclough, 2002: 195)

An attempt was made to enhance the solidarity of the civilised world, which claims to be democratic and values the basic right of every human being – freedom – emphasising the needed to remain committed to the cause and values it was endorsing, and it seems that Bush’s argument for the continuing presence of troops and military action was to honor their commitments to the Iraqi people. It is interesting to note in this instance “behind the supposedly democratic conceptions (...) that seem to underpin all the democratic governments of this global world, lies a restricted conception of democracy at the social level” (Pardo, 2001: 94). Bush’s motivation behind the proliferation of freedom and liberty in the world was also interpreted as signalling

the capacity to say and do anything he wanted to (...) The “Bush doctrine” in foreign policy has signified freedom for the US to wage preemptive strikes

anywhere it wishes at anytime, and the unilateralist Bush administration foreign policy has signified freedom from major global treaties ranging from Kyoto to every conceivable international effort to regulate arms and military activity ... (Kellner, 2004: 46)

Powerful leaders often exploit whatever advantages the status of their nations offer, in order to place themselves in a position where they can influence and pass judgment of any kind – religious, moral, ethical, political, cultural, social – on another nation or institution in order to persuade others to act in accord with their own agenda. Influence here is the exertion of power used to create hegemony rather than voluntary harmony and solidarity. Van Dijk (1993: 249-50) refers to such influence and power as dominance, defining it as

the exercise of social power by elites, institutions or groups... process may involve such different “modes” of discourse – power relations as the more or less direct or overt support, enactment, representation, legitimation, denial, mitigation or concealment of dominance, among others.

Similarly, Bell (1995) describes three primary constituencies of “political action language”: power, influence and authority. Influence is too broad a category to label with a set meaning. Bettinghaus and Cody (1994) distinguish between six types of influence: informational, referent, expert, reward, coercive and legitimate (power generated from status quo). In the case of these political press conferences what is evident is a combination of reward, referent and legitimate influence that enables political leaders to use their political positioning, their interdependence, and right as members of an international community to determine to some extent another nation’s behaviour and cooperation. In talking about influence and power, Grice’s (1975) notion of “implicatures” is also invoked, especially conversational implicatures “derived from a general principle of conversation plus a number of maxims” (Brown and Yule, 1983: 31), whereby information that cannot be made explicit in speeches following diplomatic discourse is implied through various other means (Wilson, 1990).

Invocation of responsibilities is an oft-repeated rhetorical strategy which political leaders seem to draw upon in order to exert their own authority, while attempting to unite nations by reminding them that failure to be responsible extends beyond political differences to “the price for our people” (extract 15), to “major challenges of the 21st century, from climate

change to nuclear proliferation to economic recovery (...) [that none of the] nations can solve by acting alone” (extract 17) and to the example that history shows us “when nations fail to cooperate (...) That’s how the Great Depression deepened” (extract 15). Pressure to live up to expectations and responsibilities is exerted by placing emphasis on the “global-ness” of problems (“today’s global problems require global solutions” – extract 16). Community is built through emphasis on unity, with the use of several repetitive phrases that act out of the same semantic force: “price for *our* people” (extract 15) where people are not distinguished according to their citizenship, but viewed collectively, as people of the world; “mistake *we* cannot afford to repeat” (extract 15) where consequences of failure to live up to responsibilities extend beyond political exclusion to affect the world collectively, elevating the impact of disunity; “we must stand united in our determination” (extract 20); “growing economy is joined by growing responsibilities” (extract 17).

Finding faith and building community within international politics is not a matter of just holding talks, it is a process that involves the careful negotiation of rhetorical strategies such as “overcoming differences” which draws on praise and flattery to strengthen alliances, further creating membership categories such as that of “international community”, which unites members of the in-group by reinforcing their common values, qualities and objectives: the maintenance of democracy, the advancement of peace and security, and civility. Membership categories are further strengthened through descriptor designators that act as labels prescribing the sort of behaviour expected of members, and, finally, category members are reminded that possession of such values and the responsibility of being part of the in-group necessitate action.

## Conclusion

The role of political press conferences in turbulent socio-political contexts is not only to present a joint and united front between leaders, but also to make attempts to strengthen solidarity and build community between willing nations. This is crucial considering the social role that political figures have come to play through the mediatisation and dramatisation of politics and government. Political leaders are representatives of their population, and thus answerable to them. It is therefore an increasing necessity to engender

support and trust in their leadership and administration abilities by ensuring the public and media of a positive front. As Smith and Smith (1994: 192) reiterate, “For successful presidents trust, competence, and consistency are a troika of horses pulling together (...) when one of those horses comes up lame (...) the president driving the wagon is in crisis”.

Building a sense of unity is necessary in order to strengthen relations and ensure support for present and future actions; and in the case of political leaders building community and encouraging unity amongst disparate and cooperative nations is not only crucial to political continuity and success, but a difficult and complex task. The analysis of the data set found that what ensued in the press conferences was a process of triangular communicative negotiation, which generally involved two political leaders contesting their individual realities amongst themselves; it involved the creation of certain categories which attempted to strengthen solidarity between agreeable nations, while out-casting those who lacked the required values of the membership category; and finally it involved negotiating the outcome of the talks with the media, which would eventually trickle the information into the layman’s social sphere.

The discourse analysed in this paper was explored in terms of power to unite and divide different groups of thinkers, in order to legitimise just a prioritised nation or nations’ “versions” of reality, according to which actions should be measured and taken. This was done through the use of certain rhetorical strategies, which aimed to illustrate that not only were efforts being made on part of powerful administrations to reach out to unwilling nations, but nations not accepting the hand of friendship were part of a band of inflexible and confrontational leaders who went against everything that free and civilised nations stood for. This highlights the paradoxical nature of political press conferences, and the even more contradictory nature of alliance-building in international politics, whereby certain measures are taken to strengthen membership categories that build solidarity and in-group identity amongst cooperative nations, while at the same time creating stringent dichotomies which outcast and negate nations that hesitate to fall into such a pre-fixed division of the political landscape.

Most importantly, what emerged from the analysis was the power of the genre (Bhatia, 2006) of political press conferences, whereby the realities of politics take a backseat to the nature and function of the genre; where regardless of the players or socio-political issues at stake, whether it is Bush

or Obama gracing the lectern, or whether the issue being discussed is nuclear proliferation or global climate change, the intensely conventionalized nature of political press conferences determines the construction, interpretations and value of the discourse generated.

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