

The Absence of Evidence and Its Consequences in Travesties of Justice

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By

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Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



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This book first published 2018

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-0909-5

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-0909-2

To my son David
Who has attained through
Talent and hard work
The rank of C.E.O
of Magenta (medical high-tech)

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INTRODUCTION

America's costly incursion into Iraq in 2003 was done on the widely propagated assumption that since Saddam Hussein's ruthless regime was using weapons of mass destruction against its own citizens and preparing to launch them against foreign enemies as well, it was imperative and urgent to detect and eliminate the entire stock of those deadly tools of death before they could be used again. The entire war plan, tactical moves and PR justification of that war were founded on that assumption. However, despite the valiant American effort, no such clear proofs of the existence of such weapons were found on the ground, producing, naturally, both in the American domestic debates as well as among America's rivals and critics of that incursion, an unprecedented mockery of President Bush's war aims, and a most cynical condemnation of his "crusade on terror", which he had launched as a response to the horrors of September 11, 2001.

Since then, the debate has been escalating, both in the US and abroad, about what is required to prove to the suspecting world media, that there was a smoking gun, i.e. incontrovertible evidence of the existence of such weapons. The fact that Saddam had used chemical weapons against his own Kurdish civilian population, and that thousands of innocent villagers, including children, had perished as a result, let alone his threats to "burn half of Israel" with his "binary weapons" that he was hard at work developing and manufacturing, was not convincing enough evidence for those who tried every rhetorical trick they could find to indict Bush's policies, at any price, even if that should exonerate the tyrant from his deadly designs. Similar debates emerged a decade later, when another tyrant, Bashar al-Assad, was accused of using chemical weapons against his citizens in the dirty civil war that erupted in 2011, resulting in President Obama's and Secretary Kerry's empty threats which the Russians worked hard to remove from implementation.

One can easily imagine a scenario where a murdered body is discovered, leaving traces of blood leading to the assassin, the motivation for manslaughter is revealed, there are eye witnesses who watched the crime and identified the criminal, and the spent cartridges of the fatal bullets are found, but what is missing is the smoking gun. Why? Simply because it was thrown into the river and has disappeared for ever. What

does that mean? That there was no murder? Is the absence of evidence, evidence of absence? Many of those who strove to indict Bush by exonerating Saddam, followed that logic: since the evidence for Saddam's WMD was nowhere to be found, that indicated for them that there was no smoking gun, or that the smoking gun had gone up in smoke, and therefore the real culprits were President Bush and his Secretary of State Colin Powell, who went out of their way to prove to the Security Council of the UN that the US was justified in invading Iraq. In fact, the critics claimed, the accusation of WMD was a vast political libel which attempted, in vain, to rationalize the US's imperialistic schemes against innocent Saddam.

Conversely, many other private, national and international events, such as the Blood Libel, the Dreyfus Affair, the West Bank Hoax and others, are deliberately manufactured to stain the reputation of a group or to incite others to their genocide as was actually carried out in the *Shoah*. The plight of refugees or other survivors of calamities, natural and man-made, which have marked us profoundly - individually, nationally or internationally, have been denied or plastered over and pushed aside, as if they had never happened. This is done for many possible reasons: either to rid ourselves of the discomfort and sense of guilt for having partaken in horrors done to the victims, or allowed them to happen because we kept silent while they were unfolding; or by wishing to appear on the righteous side of humanity when pretending that we never heard of the horror; or as a way to repent without admitting guilt; or in order to align ourselves with others who also deny the event; or to justify a policy or ideological line, by either rationalizing a course of events we initiated, or to pave the ground for events to come, or to vent one's frustrations, hatreds and aggression within another channel. In this case, a new narrative is created and indoctrinated domestically, then propagated internationally, in order to gather credibility by repetition, replacing the unpleasant narrative we wish to displace with a new structure of lies in which its creators can result in believing.

Numerous are similar international clashes, where facts are denied although they happened, or are manufactured from thin air into a hoax that never was. And when it is difficult, or impossible to produce a "smoking gun" to definitely prove anything, or to expose a hoax that had no basis upon which to stand in the first place, matters remain in doubt, with the burden of guilt either uncertain or unjustly charged to the wrong party. Individual criminal acts, such as the infamous case of the American O.J. Simpson, who murdered his wife, yet with a smart team of lawyers a partisan jury was able to acquit, merely by planting doubt in the existence of the smoking gun. The jury in the case, who against all evidence concluded there was none, allowed Simpson to go free, in spite of the fact

that all America had witnessed him live on TV fleeing from the police in Los Angeles, an act difficult to imagine, understand or justify when an "innocent" person becomes a fugitive from the law. And so it goes with many episodes in the Arab-Israeli conflict, when partisans on either side construct an entire structure of imaginary stories and accusations, relying on the fact that no clear evidence can be produced, and therefore narratives become the substitute for facts, and imagination replaces the true unfolding of events.

Tragically, while some manufactured lies, libels and hoaxes are invented or denied, particularly in connection with individuals, in order to extricate them from criminal chastisement, or to avoid public embarrassment, most of the salient cases reviewed in this volume are either related to anti-Semitic hatred, which for the sake of libeling Jews oversteps all known limits; or are connected to Arabs and Muslims who have specialized in such inventions as part of their world of delusions and conspiracy theories. We shall therefore group the case studies cited here into these three categories:

1. The general human proclivity to transcend facts and reality and to surf across the world of dreams and make-believe;
2. The millennial hatred of Jews which has produced libels and overt lies against them over the centuries, first in the Christian world where the blood libel was invented and practiced, and then in the Islamic world, where it was taken over and has become the flagship of the Arab-Muslim struggle against Israel; and
3. Arab and Muslim related phantasmagoria, deception and propaganda campaigns.

Judy Hershon, my copy editor, is to be commended for her untiring toil in correcting the text. I am indebted to my home base, the Truman Institute at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, for affording me the facilities and the peace of mind to write this volume. I am also grateful to all the authors who have provided me with the narratives that constitute the main core issues that I have tackled to illustrate my hypothesis. I remain, however, solely responsible for any errors or misinterpretations that may have befallen my text.

Raphael Israeli
Jerusalem, Spring 2017

PART I –

FAKE FACTS AND IMAGINED TRUTHS

Since the inauguration of United States President Donald Trump January 2017, and his branding of his rivals' criticism of him as "fake news", a debate has been raging in America and elsewhere in the western world, regarding reliable news reporting and what constitutes truth and counter-truth, real news and fake news. Moreover, the question has been raised whether there is a truth, one objective truth, one verifiable set of facts and events, as traditional, conservative historians would maintain, or are we in a post-modern reality where what matters are the many narratives, the various angles in which reality is discerned and reported, according to the point of view of the narrator.

When facts and events are analyzed and reported candidly, reflecting the reporting the writer actually observes and describes, such as Thucydides or Josephus Flavius, who were reporter-historians who not only watched events unfolding before their eyes, but also took part in the drama, one may or may not attach much credibility, depending on their degree of commitment to their side in the conflict or debate, or their disagreement with the unfolding events of acting personalities on the scene. Even when the historian writes with a spirit of objective detachment, depending on documents which had been discovered centuries later, still his choice of the documents and his interpretation of them, namely his leanings and biases towards one party or the other, will determine his degree of objectivity. In sum, one cannot expect a totally objective account from anyone on any topic; but one can expect and insist on a fair account of all parties and angles to a historical episode, and let the reader decide for himself what conclusions he may draw. However, a different situation exists when the reporter of the news or events purposely lies, in order to avoid a loss of face, or to escape punishment, or to profit, or under certain regimes brainwash the citizenry to achieve a policy goal. The accusation of lying may be attenuated when the lie is categorized as a "white lie", for example to cover up a fact or an event or reveal only a partial truth in order to prevent revealing a major occurrence from the

threat of early revelation, which may jeopardize the wished-for result, or to spare society painful breaking news.

We shall tackle in the following pages in Part I the issue of veracity or fallacy of reports, facts, events, and provide three examples of major events which had world resonance: instances of mass-hysteria across the globe, that were based on delusionary "facts", which were seen and experienced by many yet nonetheless remained as non-facts; the overwhelming controversy of our time regarding weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, which caused a war but yielded no findings when investigated; and the reputed case of O.J. Simpson, which held the attention of millions across the world, not for its intrinsic worth but due to the celebrity status of its subject; and in the end, against all evidence, the jury caused an outrage when the defendant was acquitted.

The examples will be comprised in the following chapters:

Chapter One: News and Fake News

Chapter Two: Mass Hysteria

Chapter Three: The Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq

Chapter Four: O.J. Simpson and the Dissipation of Evidence

CHAPTER ONE

NEWS AND FAKE NEWS

Winners have their success to speak for them and need no inventions of fake news to justify their position. Losers in politics, in debates, in business, or in one-upmanship, waste much of their time hating and stereotyping the victors, who caused them to suffer humiliation from their loss, or by providing a counter example of success to their impotence. Thus, they must invent, propagate, instill and absorb a whole range of compensating devices to fill the gap that separates them from their rivals. These devices encompass responses from outright hoaxes and common lies, to conspiracy theories in which the loser might end up actually believing, arguing that these are "alternative facts", to the prevailing narratives that have been rejected and discarded. In this fashion, not only their emotional make-up is stifled and state of mind distorted, but they come to accept fabrications as fact, to adopt a culture of stereotypes, and to digest patterns of hatred, paranoia, hostility and violence, that result in forging an entirely outlandish worldview. In consequence, hostility to the different and the dissident will be perpetuated, which might contribute to the escalation of international disputes, making them ever more intractable. In the long haul the constant friction between facts and counter facts is bound to inhibit communication, raise doubts and suspicions, and where leaders are concerned - to make them incredulous in the eyes of their constituencies.

After living as a billionaire real estate mogul, Donald Trump is now discovering, as a president, that words have actual power, especially when uttered by the "leader of the free world". The "fake news" issue that he has raised, is really about the devaluation of meaning and content of words and statements. Words were created to carry a meaning so that people can communicate, but if they are distorted and altered, then one can no longer call a spade a spade. For example, Muslim nations, movements and leaders who champion terrorism, claim that it is the US (and Israel) who are the terrorists, while they themselves "fight for the Path of Allah", which cannot by definition be termed terrorism. But Jews have always known that words have power; it is a very Jewish concept. After all, God spoke, and the Universe was created. Words created the world. And so does the mystical

kabbalist theory, which imputes a tremendous power to words and their symbols, to their numerical value, to their equivalents and to their graphic expression. Words should then be founded on rock-solid acknowledged facts that cannot lend themselves to controversy. Otherwise, the historical tradition, of Thucydides, Mommsen, Ranke, Huizinga and their followers, that was based on the verification of facts and events, and their intertwined analysis, which wove all the threads of the happenings into a powerful fabric of a synthetic historical account, runs the imminent danger of disintegrating into many contradictory narratives, which reflect a wide array of many divergent histories.

Perceiving reality and reporting it in a certain way and under a given bias is one thing but lying purposely is quite another. That means that one does not create a separate narrative of history incidentally while telling one's innocent tale but shapes it to fill premeditated goals regardless of the facts and the truth that one knows and acknowledges. We call that lies, and this is precisely what Donald Trump is accused of by his detractors, who claim that his "fake news" has morphed into something far more egregious - fake history, raising the question whether there can be a fake history, exactly as there cannot be a "fake truth". The claim is that since Trump had been lying routinely about himself, his business, his accomplishments and his opponents, and since he won the elections in the US, he also wins the political upper hand and dominates the news cycle. Thus, it is assumed by his critics that he would pick for his staff members and for members of his cabinet ignorant people like himself, resulting in an administration that cannot handle reality because it does not understand it at best, or distorts it to suit its purposes at worse.

We have often seen or imagined wily astute lawyers able to manufacture new realities, in order to turn the most abominable criminals whom they defend into saints, and to incriminate the most candid and innocent people as the most horrible culprits. Laws of evidence, which give credence to acknowledged facts, can be manipulated in the hands of a talented lawyer into an exercise in pseudo-logic, or into a wizardry of puns and word games, so as to make a mockery of what is evident, throwing doubt onto the obvious. Politicians and propagandists usually borrow the same tactics to push their opinions and impose their alternative truth, resulting, all the same, in a travesty of justice by exonerating the culprit and convicting the innocent. Nowadays, the Internet and social networks have spawned an entire industry of fake news that is geared to deceive while making money. But that is another story. Here we shall be concerned with major events that provide the framework for the drama of our lives in all domains: political, social, economic, and human, in order to show how fake news,

which seemed truthful and possessed all the convincing traits of reality, turned out to be false and deceiving.

Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) wrote an essay on "The Art of Political Lying". His brilliant sarcasm is as vigorous and biting today as it was three centuries ago:

Sometimes it has produced a monster and licked it into shape. At other times it comes into the world completely formed and is spoiled in the licking. It is often born an infant in the regular way, and requires time to mature it; and sometimes it sees the light in its full growth, and dwindles away by degrees... Here it screams aloud at the opening of the womb, and there it is delivered with a whisper. When it comes to the world without a sting it is stillborn whenever it loses its sting, it dies... It can conquer kingdoms without fighting, and sometimes with the loss of a battle. It gives and resumes employments, can sink a mountain into a molehill, and raise a molehill to a mountain..., can wash a blackamoor white, make a saint of an atheist, and a patriot of a profligate; can furnish foreign ministers with intelligence, and raise or let fall the credit of a nation...

Few lies carry the inventor's mark, and the most prostitute enemy to truth may spread a thousand without being known the author. Besides, as the vilest author has his readers, so the greatest liar has his believers; and it often happens that if a lie be believed for only one hour, it has done its work, and there is no further occasion for it. Falsehood flies and truth comes limping after it, so that when men come to be undeceived, it is too late. The jest is over and the tale has had its effect: like a man who has thought of a good repartee when the discourse is changed or the company parted; or like the physician who has found out an infallible medicine after the patient is dead... Considering that natural disposition in men to lie, and in multitudes to believe, I have been perplexed what to do with that maxim so frequent in everybody's mouth, that truth will at last prevail... Here we are under the influence of such counsels and persons, whose principle it is to corrupt our manners, blind our understanding, drain our wealth and in time destroy our constitution... while truth, which is said to lie in well, seemed now to be buried there under a heap of stones... I shall endeavor to undeceive or discover those deluded or deluding persons who hope or pretend it is only a short madness in the vulgar, from which they will soon recover; whereas I believe it will appear to be very different in its causes, its symptoms, and its consequences; and prove a great example to illustrate the maxim I lately mentioned that truth (however sometimes late) will at last prevail.¹

¹ Jonathan Swift, "The Art of Political Lying", *The Penguin Book of Lies*. pp. 155-6.

Journalist Andrew Higgins wrote a piece for the *Independent* on June 13, 1989, a few days after the Tiananmen massacre in Beijing, entitled "The Triumph of the Lie", in which he lamented the fact that a political lie was made to prevail in China in those days, and life went on as if nothing had happened. He had noticed amidst the mayhem in that Square that a woman, who must have been mad because only mad people are so inclined to show their grief in public, stood in front of the Bank of China, in a side street leading to the square, facing steel-helmeted soldiers of the PLA (People's Liberation Army, which could also stand for the Palestine Liberation Army in a Middle East context), holding in her hand a scrap which carried the name of some beloved relative who was killed in the massacre that the Chinese authorities pretended had never happened. The soldiers threatened her with their guns, grabbed that piece of paper from her, thus "foiling another counter-revolutionary plot". Higgins says that while the woman's message went unsaid, the Chinese state had no difficulty to project its own version of the events, making Goebbels' point that if a lie is big enough and repeated often enough, people start believing it, and even if they do not they will be sure to repeat the party line when communist cadres come to question them on the "correct facts" and elicit from them patriotic and bombastic statements which laud the state and its institutions and denigrate its enemies. Naturally, the author reminds us, that it will be only that "mad" woman who will persist in forgetting those lines, or some "deranged" man who will continue to "unfurl his banner of protest" or scream abuse at passing-by troops.²

The sane among the crowds, says the author, "will continue to wait for the storm to pass, for the terrible normalcy of mass arrests to come to an end, amidst shrill propaganda and obedient silence. For while those who had the means, and the passports, had already fled the country, and others sought shelter in foreign embassies, most of the hapless rest had no choice but to cower in silence, observing the truth turned on its head, accusing the victims and praising the oppressors"³. For indeed, the news programs had shown soldiers who were attacked by the crowds and incinerated live, but the thousands who were massacred vanished from the screens. The writer concluded that while he read the banners "Saluting the People's Liberation Army" on the very balcony of the hotel from which he had watched dozens of people mowed down by machine guns, he could only muster a sinister

² The *Independent*, June 13, 1989.

³ Ibid.

sarcasm in response: "Salute the security forces! Salute the police! Salute the armed militia!"⁴.

We have here a striking illustration of the power of propaganda in totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, as much as they pose to be "of the people" "for the people" and "by the people", which can hardly countenance dissent, where no investigative reporting is known or allowed, where no measure of truth or reason matter, and where the lie is allowed to be perpetuated. For when such societies (like the Arabs and Muslims) discover the "benefits" they stand to reap from deception, they become so enamored with it that they are in no mood to let go. The hell with the truth, which remains hidden, with hardly anyone "mad" enough to hail or to proclaim it. For, as Hamilton Gibb once remarked about Arabic speech in general, "the words passing through no filter of logic or reflection, which might weaken or deaden their effect, go straight to the head"⁵. Another keen observer of the Arabs, an Arab himself, has put it in different words: "Arabs delight in playing with words... and their tendency is to fit the thought to the words, rather than the word to the thought"⁶. When a lie is nationally adopted as "beneficial", then everyone is mobilized to sustain it: doctors issue affidavits that things happened that did not, politicians repeat their lies that amount to incitement, in their media, which shape public opinion rather than reflect it, and intellectuals and scholars, who hardly merit that epithet, are recruited to manufacture "facts", "history" and "archaeology", and even invent "citations" to denigrate the enemy that is in the sight of their barrel at any particular time.

Jew hatred and war-mongering under Nazi Germany, which necessitated widespread lying for self-justification, did not persist on that scale after the de-Nazification process, which clearly indicates that this matter of obsessive lying is not innate and not imprinted in the genes, but rather is a matter of acquired knowledge, perceptions, attitudes, or in short - education and upbringing. We shall see in the coming pages dramatic examples of all sorts of varieties of lying, which are instilled through the educational system, the media, and now ever more frequently through the Internet and social media (Facebook, Twitter, talkbacks, blogs, chats and the like), absorbed by new generations. This is affected especially by Jew-hating and Israel-boycotting governments and their indoctrinated populations in the

⁴ See the *Independent*, 13 June 1989. Cited by Philip Kerr (ed.), *The Penguin Book of Lies*, Viking, NY 1990, pp. 531-2.

⁵ H. Gibb, *Trends in Modern Islam*, Chicago, 1947, cited by John Laffin, *The Arab Mind*, Cassell, London, 1975, p. 56.

⁶ E. Shouby, "The Influence of the Arabic Language on the Psychology of the Arabs", *The Middle East Journal*, V, 1951, p. 293

Islamic world, in conjunction with the ongoing demonization of Jews and delegitimization of Israel in their countries.

Lies usually consist of making false statements, with an intent to deceive; but what is the yardstick of truth that we use to measure a lie, falsehood, deception? Truth, just like wisdom, justice and beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. Often, the *Rashomon* approach is used precisely to avoid confrontation with facts and words which are often looked upon in relative terms, or as politically or diplomatically incorrect⁷. A lie does not only mean the reversal or denial of the truth, which when repeated often enough, and insistently enough, becomes "true" in the eyes of its propagators, but a systematic manufacturing of verifiable delusions, and the fabrication of "histories" that never were, geared to elevate oneself and deprecate the enemy. In the first category one is reminded of the carefully cultivated hoax in the Arab world of the legendary 'map hanging on the Knesset wall' which allegedly depicted the coveted boundaries of Israel 'from the Nile to the Euphrates'. There are Arab members of the Israeli Knesset, who are reputedly no friends of the Jewish state, and could confirm as first-hand witnesses the vanity of that claim. But the Arabs would not allow facts to confuse them. The overarching strategy of the Arabs was to prove to their own people, and to the world, the boundless territorial aspirations of Israel, so as to inject into the Arab minds the "dangers" emanating from Israel, inspiring fear and hatred towards the Jewish state. In other words, exactly as hatred inspires lies, it also works the other way around, thus constituting a vicious cycle where cause and effect become blurred.

When President Sadat visited the Knesset in November 1977, some of his *entourage* requested to see that map, and could not be convinced that it had never existed. After that, Palestinians created further "proof" for their contention by claiming that the two blue stripes on the Israeli flag represented the two rivers (the Nile and the Euphrates), and could not be convinced by the simple truth that these stripes in fact symbolized the Jewish prayer shawl, that same artifact desecrated in Ramallah when a donkey was paraded wrapped in that very prayer shawl during the *Intifada*. At about the same time, Yasser Arafat presented in a press conference the Israeli coin of a dime (10 *agr*) that carries an ancient historical seal, as "proof" for the territorial ambitions of Israel. This might be termed a delusion, a deception, a cheap propaganda trick, or a conspiracy theory. Another example demonstrating this reality where most of the Muslim and

⁷ See e.g. this author's *Poison, Modern Manifestations of a Blood Libel*, Lexington Books, Lanham, 2002.

Arab press deny the Holocaust in varying degrees for example by forbidding showing movies such as "*Schindler's List*" which attest to its veracity, or documentaries on the death camps which could disturb their denial. Conversely, the Holocaust deniers in Europe, like Faurisson and Garaudy, are welcomed as heroes in the Arab world. David Irving's loss of his case denying the Holocaust in a London court of law, was ignored by most of the Arab and Muslim world. This rendering of history amounts to heaping upon the Jews and Israel all the crimes of humanity, in order to overwhelm them with delegitimizing accusations, and to ignore and discard any argument in their favor which might gain sympathy. This is denial, spitefulness and wishful thinking.

In a study carried out at the University of California, Los Angeles⁸, it was determined that pathological liars had less gray matter in their brains, something typical of psychologically impaired people. One possible interpretation was that since pathological liars had fewer brain cells in their prefrontal cortex, where distinctions are made between right and wrong, they find it more difficult to take moral considerations into account, thus finding it easier to lie. Yang and her team also found that pathological liars had considerably more white matter, which links the gray matter together, and therefore they are able to make more connections between associations and memories that are stored in their gray matter. All this amounts to saying according to Ariely, that higher brain connectivity may make it easier for any person to lie and at the same time think of himself or herself as an honorable person of integrity. More connected brains can afford more avenues to interpret facts spilling over into the world of conspiracies, delusions, self-deception, and rationalization of dishonest acts. Although he does not call it by name, Ariely finds a silver lining to this pathology, by identifying in it an element of increased creativity, since this is what it takes to create super-natural phenomena like delusions, conspiracy theories, deception and lies. Imagination, we should remember, has two derivatives: the imaginative, which we characterize as positive creativity; and the imaginary, which is detached from reality and brings us closer to the world of lies.

However, lest we slide into the abject world of racism, let us make clear that those observations made by Yang's research team as applied to a general American population were meant to indicate a universal dispersion of their findings. It is evident nonetheless, that certain cultures at certain times may evince more of this pathology of lying than at other times and places.

⁸ By Yaling Yang and her team. Cited by Ariely, Ibid. pp. 168-9.

President Trump and his team have been accused by their opponents not only of ignorance and oversight of fact, but also of fabricating "alternative facts" to fit their political interests. For example, President Trump was cited as stating that "since the day of my election, we have already cut illegal immigration at our southern border by 61 percent"⁹. Counselor Bannon, Education Secretary DeVos, and Health Secretary Carson were charged with fabricating the same sort of distortions, fitting the pattern attributed to the President himself. In addition to the President and his administration being accused of manufacturing facts, they were also demonized by one detractor, Brendan Reilly, who compared the President to Hitler, for allegedly describing civilian deportations as "a military operation".¹⁰

President Trump is not only accused of distorting facts regarding domestic affairs, such as *Obamacare*, but is also charged with divulging inaccurate data, stemming from ignorance in order to mislead his audiences. Additionally in foreign affairs he is charged with a "comprehensive volte-face"¹¹ attesting to an overall lack of stability and reliability. For example, the conciliatory remarks he made during his presidential campaign and in the immediate aftermath of his election victory about Russia's president Vladimir Putin and the possibility of a substantial improvement in the relations between Washington and Moscow, were contrasted with the sour atmosphere that seemed to overtake that relationship briefly thereafter. On the campaign trail he had also made the well-publicized statement that NATO was obsolete, and in July 2016 he declared that "Crimea is none of our business" and advised President Obama to stay out of Syria, stating that President Bashar al-Assad's staying power was not to be discounted.

But in his first ten weeks in the White House, President Trump made U-turns on all those key fronts. In the course of a single day, Wednesday, April 12, he made no fewer than four public statements which repudiate his previous positions. Standing next to NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, at an East Room news conference, Trump declared that NATO was "no longer obsolete." Only days after unleashing cruise missiles against Syrian government forces, he described Bashar al-Assad as a "butcher" citing chemical weapons attacks on civilians, sounding like an avid advocate of the very regime change he had previously totally negated. Was this merely a change of mind after taking office, realizing that he was in fact responsible for what he said and that, unlike during the

⁹ *PolitiFact* National, Wednesday, March 22nd, 2017

¹⁰ *PolitiFact*, Illinois Thursday, March 23rd, 2017

¹¹ Srdja Trifkovic | April 13, 2017, <https://www.chroniclesmagazine.org/trumps-comprehensive-volte-face>

campaign, his words could now determine international events and developments? Or was this rather a common case of politicians promising the world to please their audiences during the campaign, and then retreating after taking office realizing that they had pledged what they could not fulfill?

Indeed, when asked about apparent reversals, White House press secretary Sean Spicer replied, "Circumstances change"; and the President himself explained his reversal in an interview with the *New York Post*, in which he openly criticized his political chief strategist Steve Bannon, and then excluded him from the National Security Council, in a move that was widely interpreted not as a legitimate change of mind, but as a display of emotional instability in pursuit of a policy of misleading, hesitating, zigzagging and engaging in trial-and-error, borne out of his absence of deeply held convictions on world affairs. According to Trifkovic, this is no less than "an act of betrayal"¹², the closest charge to lying and cheating, and the most abominable accusation one can hurl against an elected president, which if authenticated would have required impeachment. On his way to delegitimization through demonization,¹³ Trump is credited with moving from "alternative facts" to "alternative language". The idea being that President Trump frequently refers to mainstream media outlets as "fake news", and resorts to *Tweeter* to deliver his favorite insults to journalists: "The fake news media failing (NYT, NBC News, ABC, CBS, CNN) is not my enemy, it is the enemy of the American people!" a phrase he tweeted 15 times, and then used 7 times in a news conference. A few months previously, the claim was not what "fake news" meant, and that those stories divulged and diffused by Trump had impacted the elections to some immeasurable degree, but they also engendered a tangible threat when a gunman inspired by false stories fired shots inside a Washington restaurant.

Now Trump was accused of casting all unfavorable news coverage about him as "fake news". In one tweet, he even went so far as to say that "any negative polls are fake news." And many of his supporters have picked up and run with his new definition. This ability to reshape language—even slightly — represents an awesome power, it was suggested. According to language experts on both sides of the aisle, the rebranding of "fake news" could be a genuine threat to democracy. As a linguist, University of California, Berkeley professor George Lakoff is one of the few people in the world who can truthfully say things like "I've studied the word 'fake' in some detail." Because of that expertise, he finds the term "fake news"

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Danielle Kurtzleben February 17, 2017, heard on *All Things Considered*.

uniquely troubling. He explained exactly what is so destabilizing about calling news "fake." To illustrate, he used the word "gun." Putting the adjective "black" in front of it doesn't negate that it's a gun. It just specifies a kind of gun. That black gun still has the same primary function as any other gun—that is, it can shoot something. But the word fake is entirely different, Lakoff said: "A fake does not have the primary function but is intended to deceive you into thinking that it does have that function, and hence to serve the secondary function. A fake gun won't shoot, but if you are deceived into thinking it is real, it can intimidate you."

The primary function of the news, claims the author,

is to *not* be fake; it's to pass along factual information that serves the public good, and the people who create it intend for it to be factual and to serve the public good. By Lakoff's logic, putting most modifiers in front of the word news—good, bad, unbiased, biased, liberal, conservative etc. — yet implies that the news is still somehow news. It is in some way tied to that main purpose, of being tethered to reality, with the intention of informing the public. When Trump calls news fake, then, that word implies that the news isn't serving its basic purposes: It means that the story is intended to serve something other than the public good, and that the author intended to falsify the story. In other words, calling something fake news implies that it isn't news at all. And using that phrase in the way that Trump uses it, said Lakoff, is dangerous: "It is done to serve interests at odds with the public good. It also undermines the credibility of real news sources, that is, the press. Therefore, it makes it harder for the press to serve the public good by revealing truths. And it threatens democracy, which requires that the press functions to reveal real truths." It may seem like a lot of fuss over one little phrase, but to Lakoff, it's an important fuss. Calling real news fake is an attempt to hide the truth and undermine the function of the truth in a democracy," he said.¹⁴

The author concludes that technology has been a significant aid in Trump's quest to redefine fake news. With the help of *Twitter* and *Facebook*, language is, arguably, slipperier than ever. "The speed of language adoption has never been as fast as it is now, and part of that is because of social media and the ability to touch people wherever they are, whenever you want, with no limits," stated Frank Luntz, a Republican strategist who has helped the GOP choose the words it uses to sell its policies. Furthermore, Trump had a receptive audience to begin with - Republicans in particular, along with some independents, who hold journalists in low regard, according to several polls. According to Luntz, though, it took Trump's political skills to capitalize on those trends. Trump is also taken to

¹⁴ Ibid.

task for not having kept his promises, as if this were extraordinarily uncommon conduct in politics. According to Luntz, the phrase "fake news" originally telegraphed a sense of danger about nefarious types intentionally sowing lies to influence Trump's election. When Trump called an unfavorable poll "fake news," he was borrowing some of the phrase's original power, even as he diluted that power by reusing the phrase. The result is a dizzying dichotomy, as Lakoff pointed out: "real fake news" (stories about "pizzagate" and a made-up endorsement from the Pope) and "fake news" (claims that legitimate stories are made up). But the speed with which Trump's messaging ricochets around the Internet worries Luntz, who fears that there is no accountability; technology helps unfiltered (and unchecked) ideas to spread quickly. That means that a phrase can be redefined in an entirely new way "within a matter of weeks," he said. "In the case of fake news, the problem is that we are actually undermining the core principles of a democracy," he added, echoing Lakoff. The conservative website, *The Federalist*, was quoted for listing 16 stories that it classified as "fake news", thus creating a whole new *genre* in journalism, like "reported journalism" or "investigative journalism", thus lending to it a degree of legitimacy and respectability. The author classifies a story that required a correction as "fake news", though by definition, a fake-news writer intending to deceive wouldn't try to correct a story. However, other complaints are voiced about perceived tone or framing. One can always argue that a story is poorly framed or biased. But that doesn't make it "fake news".

There are even those among Trump's detractors, who know why it is so easy for him to lie¹⁵. Adler surveys the whole gamut of explanations of Trump's lies and determines that political pundits, staggered by Donald Trump's exaggerated boasts, false promises, and outright lies, have offered various theories for what's wrong with him. Does he suffer from mental illness? Is he experiencing early-onset dementia? Andrew Sullivan recently argued in *New York Magazine* that Trump's chronic, stubborn dishonesty—unlike normal political fibbing—is "delusional" and "deranged," a frightening sign that the president is living in an alternative universe. "There is no anchor anymore," Sullivan wrote. "At the core of the administration of the most powerful country on earth, there is, instead, madness." But such dramatic theories, contends Adler, miss the simplest explanation for Trump's lying: He's a real estate developer from New York City, where lying isn't a personal failure. It's a business model. He

¹⁵ BEN ADLER, "For New York developers, blatant deception isn't just good for business—it's completely legal", *THE NEW REPUBLIC*, March 24, 2017.

says that New York real estate, where Trump first learned the art of the con, is a line of work that's built on chicanery, and specifies that

under state law, real estate developers have a de facto legal license to lie, and they use it with abandon. The marketing materials for a luxury condo might advertise top-flight amenities..., but buyers have no legal recourse after they move in and discover [that they have been cheated] ... And with land values so high and profit margins so slim, developers have every incentive to hype the sales pitch. "Real estate investors sell their product—and in the process, they promise it will have benefits that may not ever be realized," says Thomas Angotti, a professor of urban planning at Hunter College and author of *New York For Sale*. Or as one real estate broker and property manager in New York puts it: "Everybody in this business is a f--ng liar."¹⁶

The article went on, claiming that Trump was well versed in the dark arts of the New York mega-developer. In 1979, he got the city to approve 20 extra stories for Trump Tower, by creating a fourth-floor "public garden" that is almost never open... Trump has also lied to preservationists, promising to preserve the Art Deco friezes from the façade of the Bonwit Teller department store building that he demolished to make way for Trump Tower. When he realized it would take two weeks to remove them undamaged, he instead jackhammered them to pieces. Given that real estate developers are mainly salesmen—to investors, customers, local officials, and neighborhood advocates—lying is basically their job. But even among his fellow developers, Trump excelled at misdirection. In a deposition in 2007, when Trump sued a journalist for reporting unflattering truths about his business practices, lawyers caught Trump in 30 separate lies. He inflated the price of membership at one of his golf clubs, the fee he received for giving a speech, the magnitude of his past debts, the size of his stake in a partnership, the number of sales at a condo building, and the number of his employees. In real estate, as Trump knows, there's no detail unworthy of exaggeration. "I *try* and be truthful," Trump was cited as stating in his deposition in 2007, sounding like a kid who wants to be graded on effort rather than accuracy. Then, in an eerily prescient moment, he drew a straight line from his professional lying to his bigger ambitions. "I'm no different," he confessed, "from a politician running for office."

And Donald Trump, it was said, did run for office and had the opportunity to implement all the knowledge, skill and business methods that he spent decades to perfect. No wonder then that he himself avowed that diplomacy for him would be handled like a business deal, namely

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

instead of haggling, threatening, pressing and blackmailing, he would offer such *quid pro quo* to his partners as to make the deal with them worth pursuing. But he did not reveal the techniques and means he would adopt from his business experience to achieve his goals, let alone the sleaziest and creepiest among them. If, and to the extent that he does, he would not be totally original, because totalitarian regimes have rested traditionally on such methods. The Palestinians, for example, who have excelled in that practice, have become, together with other Muslim entities, such as Iran and Turkey, masters of those politics, who can teach Trump a lesson or two¹⁷. In Middle East reporting, that pursuit of lies, fake facts and alternate history has gained the epithet of "Pallywood", and some of its most blatant illustrations will constitute the chapters of this volume. The skill, self-righteousness and conviction in the delusional world thereby created, is such that superficially one can at first have the impression that "absence of evidence is not evidence of absence", in order to deconstruct the truth, and then weave an entire world of "alternative facts", to present to the uninitiated an imaginary (not imaginative) narrative that the perpetrator struggles to affirm as an alternative history.

The term "Pallywood" refers to the staging of scenes by Palestinian journalists in order to present the Palestinians as hapless victims of Israeli aggression. They are able to succeed in this endeavor in large part due to the credulity and eagerness of the Western press to present these images, which reinforces the skewed image of the Palestinian David struggling valiantly against the overpowering Israeli Goliath. Pallywood has led to astonishing lapses in Western journalistic standards, in which badly staged scenes regularly appear on the news as "real events." This is possible due to both the mobilization of the Palestinian (and Arab and Muslim media for that matter) to work in the service of the nation, a situation not applicable in America, where any attempt to create fake news will be scuttled by the strong independent media outlets that are backed by a strong independent judiciary. The list of fabrications in the Arab and Muslim press is staggering: from the 1982 Israeli incursion into Lebanon, where Norman Podhoretz's article "J'Accuse" *Commentary* charged some American media and journalists with anti-Semitism for their biased and counter-factual reporting on a list of issues and events including the alleged poisoning of Palestinians schoolgirls; to the claim of injecting the HIV positive virus into 300 Palestinian youth; to the Jenin "massacre" that never was; to the triggering and resulting violence of the first Palestinian

¹⁷ See R. Israeli, *Hatred, Lies and Violence in the World Islam*, Transaction NJ, 2014, where precisely the three case studies of Turkey, Iran and the Palestinians are widely documented.

Intifada (1987-92), and then the second (2000-2004). There was a claim that Israelis also sometimes manipulated fake news, but the differences are so great as to point to the enormous mental and policy gap separating the parties, to wit:

1. The Israelis do not fake images of injury; on the contrary, ingrained taboos prevent the Israeli press from showing pictures of dead bodies.
2. Nor do the Israelis constantly show images designed to arouse hatred, unlike Palestinians. Compare the coverage in the Israeli media to the stunning footage from the Ramallah lynching of two Israeli soldiers on October 12, 2000, with the constant repetition on TV and in the school curriculum of the footage and of reenactments of the Muhamed al- Dura affair two weeks earlier¹⁸.
3. The Israeli press constitutes one of the most self-critical media outlets in the world. Government mistakes rarely pass undetected and un-denounced. When the IDF accused the UN of using their ambulances to move *Qassam* rockets in Gaza (2012), and the evidence failed to provide proof, the Israeli press denounced its government's mistake sharply: "Israel behaved with reckless haste and injured its pretensions to superiority over the Palestinians with regard to credibility."
4. There is no equivalent in the Palestinian – or Arab – press of Gideon Levy and Amirah Hass, journalists for *Ha-Aretz* whose *raison d'etre* seems to be to blast the Israeli government and to lament the fate of the Palestinians. This element of self-criticism is, for the most part, absent in the Arab media.
5. Even Israeli organizations denounced by the other side as "propaganda" sites, like Palestinian Media Watch and MEMRI, are scrupulously honest in the material they post from the Arab world,

¹⁸ At the outbreak of the second Intifadah (2000-03) journalists came upon a picture of a Palestinian boy who was caught in a cross fire between Israelis and Palestinians, while he was seeking shelter with his father, who protected him until he was hurt and died. The press, Arab and international, immediately threw the blame on Israel and Muhamad al-Dura became a hero and presented as the model of a martyr for the Palestinian cause. Israel at first apologized, but then in a thorough investigation of the ballistic condition on the ground, backed and confirmed by foreign journalists, incontrovertible findings were revealed that there was no Israeli fire in that sector on that day and that the boy had unfortunately died of Palestinian fire.

in their translations, even careful not only to post the negative comments in the Arab press, but also the positive ones.

6. To make the facile, “even-handed” comparison misses a major distinction between the rough and tumble criticism of a free press in Israel, versus the intimidation and propagandistic content of the press in Arab authoritarian societies. If one cannot decipher these differences, one cannot understand the value and importance of a self-critical free press sustaining civil society. Tolerance for criticism and for variant viewpoints marks the commitment to a free civil society.

Conversely, Pallywood distorts Western and Middle Eastern public opinion, distorting the narrative of victim/victimizer, dominant in both Western and Middle East Media prolonging the conflict, thus perpetuating the David (Palestinians) vs Goliath (Israel) narrative, contributing to the demonization of Israel and to the rise of anti-Semitism. Accurate fair criticism is crucial for a healthy civil society; by its sheer drama Pallywood leads to Western romantization of the Palestinian struggle, and to justification of the most atrocious methods to achieve their aims. “They’re beautiful, highly trained and deadly. They are the female suicide bombers.” This is how some Western media characterized Palestinian females trained to sow *Islamikaze* terror among innocent civilians¹⁹. The following case studies will handily illustrate these hypotheses.

¹⁹ *New Idea Magazine*, Australia, April 7, 2003.

CHAPTER TWO

MASS HYSTERIA²⁰

One of the most widespread, yet involuntary mass deceptions which occasionally grips the public is connected to a medical condition of a psychogenic nature. In general, such an occurrence would be dismissed as a case of mass hysteria, a phenomenon which can unfold in any part of the world, in any cultural environment. But when it touches Israel, it becomes quite another matter. As we shall see in Chapter Nine below, the West Bank Hoax, became a *cause célèbre* in world affairs in 1983, most likely contributing to inspiring the first Palestinian *Intifada* which occurred four years later under the "right" circumstances. When fed by delusion and world media encouragement, even a hoax made out of fake news can evolve into a worldwide "real news" story. But until we describe in detail that hoax which garnered the attention of a global audience throughout the months of March-April 1983, let us try to understand that phenomenon, which in the annals of medical history is considered as a mere innocent outbreak of mass hysteria, although in areas of potential danger contextual circumstances can allow a negative impact on the public market place of competing ideas.

In the Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry, which has catalogued all known clinical manifestations of psychiatric disorders, reference is made to cases of mass hysteria as follows:

In situations of group delusions and sometimes in cults, passive individuals adopt the delusional beliefs of stronger ones. In epidemic hysteria, which was described so beautifully among young women at the Salem witch trials in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, distorted and even delusional perceptions and beliefs may sweep over a group that has been aroused by a charismatic leader²¹.

²⁰ This chapter is based on R. Israeli, *Poison: A Modern Manifestation of a Blood Libel*, Lexington Books, Lanham and NY, 2002.

²¹ H. Kaplan and B. Sadock, *The Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry*, Vol I, 5th Edition, 1989, p. 566, under the heading "suggestibility".