



PRESS IMAGES OF MAURICE BISHOP, PRIME MINISTER OF GRENADA: A PRE- AND POST-DEATH COMPARISON

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A comparative content analysis of the shift in the portrayal of murdered Grenadian Prime Minister Maurice Bishop is undertaken in light of an "image manipulation" hypothesis.

Ce texte entreprend une analyse de contenu comparée des changements de représentation du Premier Ministre assassiné de la Grenada, Maurice Bishop, en fonction de la manipulation des images.

Two chapters in the book *Media in Latin America and the Caribbean: Domestic and International Perspectives* (Soderlund and Surlin, 1985) refer directly and unambiguously to a shift in mass media portrayals of Maurice Bishop, the Prime Minister of Grenada, following his murder and subsequent American military invasion of the island in October, 1983. In fact, both suggest an "image rehabilitation" hypothesis with respect to Bishop.

In his analysis of Canadian media coverage of Grenada, Roberto Hoogendoorn (1985:267) levels the following charge:

When Bishop was killed, the U.S. could no longer go after him and vilify him with the usual media labels "revolutionary", "marxist" and so on. So within the Cuban framework the so-called *hardliners* become the new Cuban-Grenadians, and in the most detestable label reversal of all, Maurice Bishop becomes the posthumous hero and victim of evil forces. From the despised marxist leader the media now convert him into "the charismatic leader", and even "President Bishop".

In the context of media coverage of the Grenadian invasion in the Caribbean, Peter Habermann (1985: 225) reaches a very similar conclusion:

Jamaica's participation in the military operation in Grenada...was hailed by...*The Daily Gleaner* as a patriotic contribution to Caribbean autonomy. One small but perhaps important difference appeared: the once evil Maurice Bishop suddenly became a popular hero.

The 1983 murder of Bishop and the American-led military invasion which followed can be traced back to a *coup d'etat* in 1979 which removed from power the island's first Prime Minister, Sir Eric Gairy. Although elected to office, Gairy became eccentric, autocratic and corrupt (DaBreo 1979: 52-114). In a political climate of

intimidation, opposition took extra-legal forms, and when Prime Minister Gairy was absent from the island in 1979, Maurice Bishop, a London-trained lawyer (whose father had been killed by Gairy's personal secret police force), led a successful *coup d-etat* which brought the opposition New Jewel Movement to power (DaBreo 1979: 117-142).

Bishop became Prime Minister of a People's Revolutionary Government (PRG) and Grenada became one of three perceived Latin American/Caribbean foci (along with Cuba and Nicaragua) of the Reagan Administration's New Cold War. Thus, despite progressive domestic social policies in the areas of education, health and housing, the Reagan Administration looked at the combination of domestic political repression (press censorship, imprisonment of political opponents and no elections) and a pro-Soviet position internationally as evidence that Bishop and his government were hostile to United States interests in the region. The 1982 construction of a new airport with a 10,000 foot runway was taken as evidence of a new Soviet-Cuban initiative bent upon using Grenada as a military stopping off point. This view was transmitted to the American people by President Reagan in a March 1983 speech on foreign policy, when he showed satellite photos of the runway and directly referred to Grenada as a threat to United States security interests (Brown 1985: 14-15).

In early June 1983, Bishop made a trip to the United States during which he adopted a more conciliatory tone towards the United States and indeed sought out a meeting with President Reagan. The American Government rebuked his overtures (*The New York Times* 1983: June 5). During this visit, Bishop repeated charges that the United States was training Grenadian exiles for an invasion of the island (*The New York Times* 1983: June 10). The American Government seemed surprised and unprepared for the political split within the PRG between supporters of Bishop on the one hand and those of Bernard Coard, a member of his Cabinet, on the other. This rift led to Bishop's house arrest on October 15th, and his murder on October 19th, after he had been freed by his supporters. The American-led military invasion began on the morning of October 25th.

The "Image Rehabilitation" Hypothesis

Three components support an image rehabilitation hypothesis with respect to Bishop coincident with the American invasion. The first can be seen as a "pure" propaganda campaign aimed at Grenadians and initiated by the American military forces. Bishop enjoyed tremendous popularity among the Grenadian population, so it would make sense that the invasion be cast in terms of rooting out the murderers of the slain leader. A "psychological operations" team from Fort Bragg, North Carolina constituted a part of the invasion force and therefore the potential for such image manipulation is not entirely fanciful (O'Shaughnessy 1984: 208-209).

In addition, there are two theoretical explanations regarding why a shift in media portrayals of Bishop might have been expected following his death. The literature suggests that journalists are obligated to serve objectively their readers' needs. This professional virtue is reflected in the deep seated norm of the profession to report objectively the news of the day to one's readers, "untainted by any personal bias or outside influence that would make it appear anything but what it is..." (Charnley 1966:23). However, more recent literature suggests that reporters do not report the news of the day in an unbiased manner. The reasons for this phenomena appear two-fold and both reasons seem to be operative in the case of Maurice Bishop.

First, the reporter is socialized into his professional role through various overt and covert messages in his work environment, messages which communicate appropriate journalistic behaviour (Breed 1955; Sigal 1973; Gans 1979). Since one's professional behaviour occurs within an identifiable social, cultural, economic and political setting, pressures develop which naturally affect the perspective of the individual. In this constellation of forces, pressure to support government policy looms large. A number of studies have focussed on the symbiotic relationship between government and mass media (Kern, 1984; Bennett, et al 1985; Tebbel and Watts 1985; and Parenti 1986). Other research has shown that news stories reflect the political perspectives of owners and managers (Merrill 1965; Halberstam 1979). Especially with respect to culturally held stereotypes and beliefs concerning foreign (particularly Third World) news, journalists would be influenced to present views that correspond to conventional wisdom (Scanlon, *et al* 1978; Riffe and Shaw 1982; Cuthbert and Surlin 1985).

Second, the journalist desires to serve the psychological as well as the informational needs of the audience. Therefore, information will be conveyed which parallels perceived conventional wisdom for the audience, offering a sense of "well-being". This "well-being" could be called "psychological balance"; news is presented in a fashion that is effectively read and digested, while corresponding to a normative belief system.

The concept of "cognitive consistency" has developed from work undertaken by prominent social psychologists such as Abelson, Aronson, Festinger, Fishbein, McGuire, Osgood, Rosenberg and Singer, among others (Feldman 1966). "Common to the concepts of balance, congruity, and dissonance is the notion that thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour tend to organize themselves in meaningful and sensible ways" (Zajonc 1960: 280-296).

Dissonance, or psychological discomfort, may be harmful to newspaper- reader relations. It may even result in financial loss for one's employer through disgruntled reader reaction and cancelled subscriptions. Research has documented how audience dissonance leads to media behaviour which acts to reduce psychological discomfort. This could occur through selecting other sources for exposure (Donohew and

Palmgreen 1971; Tan 1973), or changing one's attitude concerning the credibility of the source (Tan 1975). On the other hand, research clearly indicates that if audiences receive what they desire psychologically from a newspaper, a favourable newspaper-reader relationship exists. This is most clearly seen in the context of special-focus newspapers, such as black-oriented (Stevens 1970) and heritage-language newspapers (Surlin and Romanow 1985).

In summary, three distinct possible pressures were acting to push American news coverage toward a positive portrayal of Bishop after his death. First, the U.S. government desired a more favourable image of Bishop to serve as justification and legitimization of the Grenadian invasion. To achieve this, Bishop must be seen as a favourable alternative to his opposition. Although not measured in this study, we would also expect Bishop's opponents to be discredited after his death. Second, there are symbiotic pressures within the field of journalism to support government policy. Journalists were not allowed to witness the invasion for several days after it had begun and were dependent on military press releases for information necessary to do their jobs. Third, the press would desire to achieve cognitive balance with its readers concerning events occurring in Grenada. Since the Grenadian invasion was overwhelmingly supported by the American people (Kenworthy 1984), readers would want to believe that the American government was justified in its actions and that the course of events would result in a positive outcome.

Methods

The pressures identified above suggest that news reports will inevitably be biased. One way of identifying a biased presentation is through the use of evaluative valenced descriptions. Valenced adjectives, adverbs and phrases can greatly affect the reality of a person (Merrill 1965), a group (Shoemaker 1983), or an event (Hvistendahl 1979). As Farrel Corcoran (1984: 49-50) observes:

The key concept here is the power of the media to define, not merely reproduce reality through their narrative devices which actively make things mean. Reality is no longer viewed as a given set of facts,... Instead, it is the result of a particular way of constructing, through preferred meanings, a 'reality' which would have credibility, legitimacy and a taken-for-grantedness.

In order to assess the degree to which a media rehabilitation of Maurice Bishop's image actually took place following his death, we have employed a comparative design utilizing content analysis. The leading newspapers (the "newspapers of record") in three western countries (*The New York Times* in the United States, *The Globe and Mail* in Canada, and *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* in Britain), were examined throughout the entire year 1983 for material dealing with Maurice Bishop. These items were then read for words and phrases used to describe Mr. Bishop.

Since neither the British nor the Canadian governments supported the American military invasion of Grenada, there would be less reason theoretically for the image of Bishop to be rehabilitated in the press of these countries, other than the normal respect paid to one who has been killed in tragic circumstances. However, since a high percentage of international news appearing in Canadian newspapers is American in origin (Scanlon 1974), we would expect to find the Canadian newspaper mid-way between the American and British papers. In all, Bishop was mentioned in 168 items of newspaper content: 90 appeared in *The New York Times*, 46 in *The Globe and Mail*, and 32 in *The Times/Sunday Times*. A total of 94 separate words and phrases were used in these items to describe Bishop. Intercoder reliability for word and phrase choice was calculated at 84.2% (Holsti 1969: 140).

These words and phrases appeared in stories which carried, in the main, Caribbean datelines (53.5%), with the remainder originating primarily in the United States, Canada, and Great Britain. Local staff members and special correspondents provided 72.5% of Bishop related items, with 20% furnished by the major wire services. Fully 57% of the Bishop related items appeared as inside page news, 21% were front page news items, 18% were feature columns, 3% were editorials, and 1% were letters to the editor. Only 16% of items appeared in the nine and a half months prior to his death, while 84% appeared after Bishop was killed.

The words and phrases used to describe Bishop were recoded into positive and negative categories, employing an American perspective. Initially the authors agreed on the coding of 87% of the positive and negative references. Agreement was not reached on the contextual meaning of six words, and these were dropped from the analysis. All other disagreements were resolved to the satisfaction of both authors. Words such as "moderate", "moved toward democracy", and "wanted a better understanding with the United States" were coded as positive, while words such as "dictatorial", "authoritarian", and "suppressed the press" were coded as negative. Personal words and phrases were judged according to commonly accepted usage. Thus words such as "conscientious", "honest", and "modest" were coded as positive, while "irresponsible", "paranoid", and "womanizer" were coded as negative.

For the analysis which follows, the data set was divided into two periods: (1) all those words and phrases printed between January 1, 1983 and October 19th, and (2) all those printed between October 20th (the date on which Bishop's death was reported), through to the end of the year. The data, thus collected and organized, should allow us to make rather sensitive comparisons regarding Mr. Bishop's treatment in the press. If he had been "vilified" prior to the October *coup* which led to his death, was there an attempt on the part of the American press thereafter, to present a new Maurice Bishop "reality"?

Data in Table 1 indicate the percentage of positive and negative references to Maurice Bishop prior to and following his death.

TABLE 1
PERCENTAGE OF FAVOURABLE AND UNFAVOURABLE
REFERENCE TO MAURICE BISHOP, BY COUNTRY*

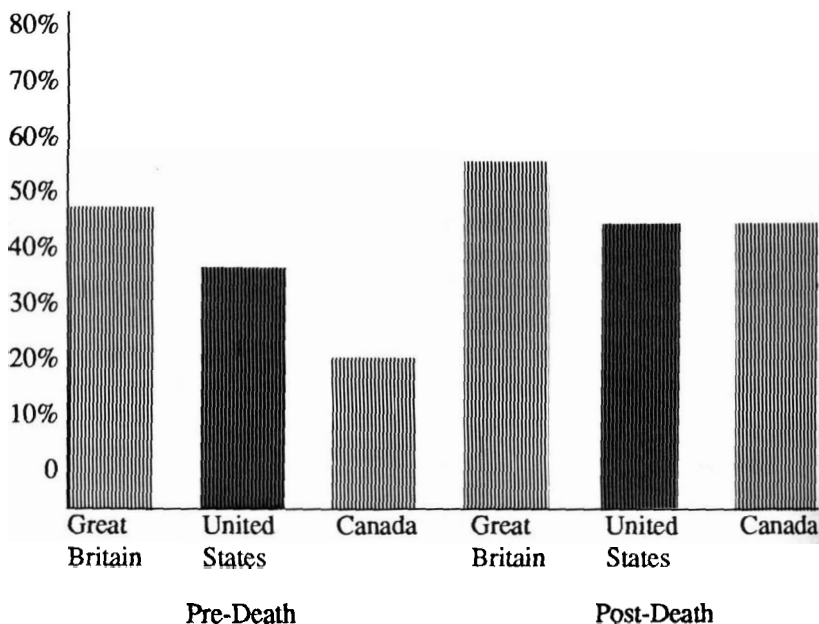
	Pre-Death	Post-Death	Total
Great Britain	N=13	N=43	N=56
Positive	46%	54%	52%
Negative	54%	46%	48%
	100%	100%	100%
	$X^2=0.22$ DF=1		
	Non significant		
United States	N=29	N=108	N=137
Positive	35%	42%	40%
Negative	65%	58%	60%
	100%	100%	100%
	$X^2=0.49$ DF=1		
	Non significant		
Canada	N=14	N=64	N=78
Positive	21%	42%	39%
Negative	79%	58%	61%
	100%	100%	100%
	$X^2=2.09$ DF = 1		
	Non significant		

* due to multi coding more than one reference can appear in a single item.

It is apparent that while some improvement in Bishop's image occurred in each country, there are major differences between hypothesized and actual distributions. In each country, Bishop's image did improve after his death: an 8% increase in positive descriptors was found in Great Britain, a 7% increase in the United States, and a 21% increase in Canada. In the United States, however, where pressures to produce an image rehabilitation should have been greatest, to actual percentage change was roughly equivalent to the change recorded in Britain, where these pressures were thought to have the least effect. Canadian data also presents a problem. While an intermediate position between the United States and Great Britain is hypothesized, the positive percentage increase is three times that recorded for Britain and the United States. Data from Table 1 are portrayed schematically in Figure 1.

In order to gain a fuller understanding of these valenced patterns, the words and phrases used most frequently to describe Maurice Bishop were further examined. As is evident from Table 2, the word "Prime Minister" was used to refer to Bishop in nearly 80% of news items. While the term is neutrally descriptive of the office he held, it must be remembered that Bishop assumed the Prim Ministership in 1979 as a result of a *coup d'etat*. Further, his tenure in office was never legitimized by an election.

Figure 1
Percentage of Favourable Words and Phrases
used to Describe Maurice Bishop,
by Pre-death and Post-death Periods, by Country



Various terms, usually unflattering, are routinely used to describe leaders who have assumed power in this manner. Given these circumstances, we believe that the use of the term "Prime Minister" to describe Bishop could be construed as positive, as it serves to legitimize his position. However, to do so, given the sheer volume of its use, would greatly skew the results. We therefore decided to omit it from all analysis other than reporting its frequency in Table 2.

The four positive terms used most frequently with respect to Bishop include: popular/likeable/admired; moderate/measured/non-extremists; 39 years old/youthful; and lawyer/barrister/London-trained. Negative terms occurring most frequently are: Marxist/Communist; leftist/left-wing; ally of Fidel/ally of Cuba/pro-Cuban; abusive of human rights; and socialist.

Data in Table 3 show the relative use of these most frequently used descriptive words and phrases before and after Bishop's death in each of the three countries.

For Great Britain, some favourable terms such as popular/likeable/admired and moderate/measured/non-extremist increase in use after Bishop's death, while others such as youthful/39 years old and lawyer/barrister/London-trained decrease in use.

TABLE 2

MAJOR WORDS AND PHRASES USED TO DESCRIBE MAURICE BISHOP IN BRITISH, AMERICAN AND CANADIAN NEWSPAPERS*

Rank Order	Word/Phrase	N	Percent of News Items In Which Appeared
1	Prime Minister	133	79.2%
2	popular/likeable/admired	25	14.9%
3	Marxist/Communist	24	14.3%
4	leftist/left-wing	16	9.5%
5	moderate/measured/ not extremist	11	6.6%
6	ally of Fidel/ally of Cuba/pro-Cuban	11	6.6%
7	39 years old/youthful	10	6.0%
8	lawyer/barrister/ London-trained	9	5.4%
9	abusive of human rights	7	4.2%
10	Socialist	6	3.6%

* due to multicoding, column does not add to 100%

Likewise, some negative terms such as Marxist/Communist and abusive of human rights increase, while others such as leftist/left-wing and ally of Fidel/ally of Cuba/pro-Cuban decrease. Clearly, this is a mixed pattern. The increase in positive references to Bishop after his death in the British press results from various descriptors used only once or twice.

In *The New York Times*, only the use popular/likeable/admired increased after his death. Usage of negative words and phrases such as abusive of human rights, leftist/left-wing, and ally of Fidel/ally of Cuba/pro-Cuban fell after his death, while the use of Marxist/Communist and Socialist increased. Again, no clear pattern in the use of valenced descriptors is readily apparent.

The pattern of valenced descriptors in *The Globe and Mail* is even more complex. While positive references to Bishop increased by 21%, this took place in spite of a slight increase in such negative terms as ally of Fidel/ally of Cuba/pro-Cuban; abusive of human rights; and Socialist. While the use of Marxist/Communist and leftist/left-wing did decline, we see a marked increase only in the positive term popular/likeable/admired. Thus in the Canadian newspaper, as is the case with the others, a large

TABLE 3
USE OF MAJOR WORDS AND PHRASES DESCRIBING MAURICE BISHOP,
BY PRE-DEATH/POST-DEATH, CONTROLLING FOR COUNTRY
 (percentage of newspaper items in which word was used)*

Word/Phrase	Great Britain			United States			Canada		
	Post-death N=9	Post-death N=23	Total N=32	Pre-death N=13	Post-death N=77	Total N=90	Pre-death N=5	Post-death N=41	Total N=46
Popular/Likeable/ Admired	11.1%	17.4%	15.5%	0	14.3%	12.2%	0	22.0%	19.6%
Marxist/Communist	11.1	17.4	15.5	0	15.6	13.3	20.0%	14.6	15.2
Leftist/Left-Wing	22.2	0	6.3	23.1%	5.2	7.8	20.0	14.6	15.2
Moderate/Measured/ Not extremist	0	8.7	6.3	23.1	5.2	7.8	0	4.9	4.3
Ally of Fidel/Ally of Cuba/Pro-Cuban	11.1	4.3	6.3	15.4	5.2	6.7	0	7.3	6.5
39 years old/youthful	11.1	4.3	6.3	23.1	2.6	5.6	40.0	2.4	6.5
Lawyer/Barrister/ London-trained	11.1	8.7	9.4	15.4	2.6	4.4	0	4.9	4.3
Abusive of Human Rights	0	4.3	3.1	15.4	3.9	5.6	0	2.4	2.2
Socialist	0	4.3	3.1	0	3.9	1.1	0	7.3	6.5

*due to multi-coding, columns do not add to 100%

number of positive words and phrases were used only once or twice to describe Bishop following his death.

Conclusions

While the image of Maurice Bishop projected to the reading publics in three major western democracies did improve after his death and the American invasion of Grenada, it would be hard to argue that the data supported our hypothesized confluence of pressures. The improvement of Bishop's image in the United States could have resulted from a propaganda campaign, the symbiotic relationships between government and journalists and a desire by journalists to reduce dissonance and increase balance among readers. However, where the forces operating to improve Bishop's image were theoretically not as great, the degree of image improvement was much greater (Canada) and at a comparable level (Britain).

There is no doubt there are forces at work here which cannot be accounted for by our theoretical explanation. One factor which we believe perhaps contributes to the relatively small improvement in Bishop's image in the United States is the remarkably sparse coverage of Grenada and Maurice Bishop prior to the events of October 1983, which took his life. Clearly, Bishop was not a household word. Without a negative image of Bishop firmly fixed in mass American public opinion, there would be less pressure to radically restructure his image to fit a reconstructed reality. Had Bishop, by October 1983, managed to achieve the notoriety of a Castro or a Kaddafi, we suggest that our theory would have greater predictive accuracy.

Image manipulation on the part of the press is both a controversial and interesting subject. Maurice Bishop's death combined with the American military invasion of Grenada offered a unique set of circumstances which we argued, given the literature, would increase the likelihood that image manipulation would occur. Thus it presented a "crucial case" to test the theory empirically. The findings do not appear to support the image manipulation hypothesis, although marginal shifts in Bishop's image did occur in the direction predicted by the theory.

We have not abandoned this line of research, although cases as pure as the Bishop one are hard to find. We are currently designing a study to test the same hypothesis with respect to the image of Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos, prior to and following the assassination of Benigno Aquino in August 1983. While not as sharp a turning point in American policy as the murder of Maurice Bishop, we would argue that this event was a critical juncture in the American government's decision to "abandon" its long-time, reliable anti-Communist ally. Therefore, if the theoretical pressures working for image manipulation are indeed manifest, we would expect Marcos' image to undergo a negative transformation in line with altered American foreign policy objectives in the months following the Aquino assassination.

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