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Framing the 2023 Israeli-Palestinian conflict: a comparative corpus-based discourse analysis of the US, Arab and British press

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Introduction

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the most ideologically charged conflicts in modern history. Sited in a strategic geographical area, it has consistently drawn the attention of both media and politicians, to the point that coverage of the conflict has become routine in news outlets, especially since the outbreak of violence following the end of the peace process and the start of the Al-Aqsa Intifada in 2000. Despite media claims of adherence to high standards of truthfulness, accuracy, integrity and impartiality, news reporting has often received criticisms by both sides, with each accusing news outlets of being biased against their group of reference. This is one of the reasons why the discourse on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been the object of various academic studies, although it has been relatively understudied from a linguistic perspective, especially in recent years. This thesis hopes to contribute to the already existing knowledge on this topic by critically analyzing the discourse of news reports on the first six months of the 2023-2024 Israeli-Palestinian conflict, from October the 7th to April the 7th. This work will focus on the comparison between Western and Arab newspapers reports regarding the representation modalities of the conflict and on the way politically divergent newspaper in the UK, the US and the Arab world portrayed the same events.

To this end, this study integrates Critical Discourse Analysis with Corpus Linguistics, positioning itself within the field of Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS). Foundational works from various approaches within the discipline of Discourse Studies will serve as the analytical framework for the research. This methodology was chosen because of the linguistic nature of the topic. On the other hand, if it is true that we do things with words (Austin, 1962) we also do things *because of* words. The use of language is never neutral, as it always implies some choices (Fairclough, 1989). At the core of Critical Discourse Analysis is, in fact, the examination of why specific linguistic forms are chosen over others to construct particular meanings in given contexts to convey certain ideas. While many comment every day on media language, these mostly remain mere impressionistic or anecdotal insights, lacking a proper theoretical and methodological approach. At the end of the day, only a systematic analysis of media language can reveal the ideological implications embedded in such ideologically connotated discourse. This is even truer for research conducted through the auxilium of digitally stored corpora, directly compiled from the news outlets' websites. For the

purpose of this work what was needed was a discipline in the field of applied linguistics that could provide tools and conceptual frameworks for the analysis and the interpretation of data. Not only, given the socio-political nature of the issue, the task also required an approach flexible enough to incorporate insights from other disciplines, such as history and political science. Hence, the choice of Critical Discourse Analysis.

However, such a structured analysis could be conducted only by obtaining reliable evidence of the use of language in news reports through a larger sample of data. In fact, larger samples are more likely to be representative of what is typically presented in the media about the conflict than a few selected articles, which may result in unusual reporting rather than a typical representation of everyday news. Furthermore, a larger sample can reveal practices that would have been otherwise ignored by analyzing only a small number of texts. Hence, the reasons behind the choice of the “synergistic combination” between Critical Discourse Analysis and Corpus Linguistics. Five corpora were compiled by extracting the texts directly from the newspapers’ websites. Then, they underwent an analysis with the help of AntConc, a concordance software. The examination of the data was structured on two different linguistic levels: semantics and syntax. It is mainly concerned with the lexical choices made by text producers to portray social actors and the transitivity models employed to represent their actions.

However, this work started with the intention of understanding how the 2023-2024 Israeli-Palestinian conflict was being portrayed. Being the topic so ideologically charged, there was the need to incorporate different perspectives into the analysis. This led to the incorporation of three national and/or regional press in the research, namely the UK, the US and the Arab press. Another variable was then added to the framework to acknowledge the ideological and political nature of the conflict and its representation: the newspapers’ political orientation. Two politically divergent newspapers were chosen both for the UK and the US national press, namely *The Guardian* and *The Times* for the UK and *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* in the US. As for the Arab world, no counterpart of *Al Jazeera English* in terms of circulation, readership and prestige was found, at least none that published news in English.

Having established the premises of this work, this research aims at answering two fundamental research questions: how the representation of the 2023-2024 Israeli-Palestinian conflict differs in representation in the five selected newspapers and if the

newspapers' political orientation influenced the coverage of the topic. I will try to provide the answers to these questions by means of a CADS analysis on lexical choices and transitivity structures. Two hypotheses have been made on the potential results of this work. First, the coverage of the events of the conflict is biased to a certain degree, reflecting the ideas and ideologies of the different newspapers. Second, the discourse of reporting events of the conflict is a site of struggle between different ideologies.

In the following section, the theoretical framework is presented to familiarize the readers with the main CDA concepts employed during the examination of the data. A brief introduction to what it means doing Critical Discourse Analysis is followed by a more detailed account of the theoretical roots of this approach, mentioning the linguists and sociologists that had an impact on the theoretical questions at hand. Special attention is devoted to the peculiarities of Critical Discourse Analysis applied to the genre of hard news reports. The second chapter, instead, focuses on a more pragmatic explanation of the methodological guidelines followed throughout the research. Since this study hopes to contribute to the development of the CADS studies, the major criticisms towards this approach had been presented, especially those that this research tried to overcome. Then information about the corpora and the process of collection of the texts are provided. The next section presents the criteria for the selection of the newspapers along with a brief description of the newspapers' historical and ideological background. Finally, the chapter presents an historical account of the main events of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, from the late 19th century to the ongoing war. The third chapter, on the other hand, after an introductory description of what is meant for lexicalization and transitivity, presents the actual results of the analyses, underlying analogies and differences across the newspapers.

Chapter 1

Theoretical framework

This chapter will first present a general overview of Critical discourse Analysis (CDA) and its applications to newspaper discourse. It begins with an introduction to Critical Discourse Analysis, tracing back to its theoretical origins from Western Marxism, Foucault's notion of orders of discourse, and Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics, to Bakhtin's theory of genre, French discourse analysis and Critical Linguistics. The chapter then explores key approaches within CDA, with a focus on Fairclough's socio-cultural theory, van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach, Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) and van Leeuwen's socio-semantic (SocSem) framework. Then, an examination of what it means to apply a CDA approach to newspaper discourse is provided, analysing the structure and the main linguistic features of news stories. Last, a review of the relevant literature on the representation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in various newspapers and a general outline of how this study tries to integrate elements from all these distinct frameworks to analyse the narratives of its sample newspapers.

1.1 Introduction to CDA, its methods and objectives

Emerging in the 1990s, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary approach within the discipline of Discourse Analysis (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997; Wodak, 2001b). Despite its diverse interests and theoretical frameworks, the objectives of CDA do not differ significantly from those of Discourse Analysis. As Wodak and Meyer (2001:10) explain:

CDA can be defined as being fundamentally interested in analysing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language. In other words, CDA aims to investigate critically social inequality as it is expressed, constituted, legitimized, and so on, by language use or in discourse.

This quote captures the core of Critical Discourse Analysis: the exploration of power dynamics within language, the analysis of dominance reproduction and the intellectual engagement in social change. To better outline a proper understanding of CDA,

Fairclough and Wodak (1997) identified eight principles which serve as a theoretical foundation for much of CDA research:

1. *CDA addresses social problems*: CDA is not the mere analysis of linguistic/semiotic features; the focus is rather on the linguistic/semiotic aspects of social issues.
2. *Power relations are discursive*: power in and over discourse (Fairclough, 1989) is exercised and negotiated in discourse itself. However, less powerful social groups are not granted equal access to discursive resources.
3. *Discourse constitutes society and culture*: there is a dialectical relationship between society and discourse. Language use contributes to reproducing and/or transforming society, culture and power relations. This explains why fighting over discursive control is crucial for social groups.
4. *Discourse does ideological work*: no instance of language is neutral; meanings always carry some ideological implication. To assess the ideological impact of a text, it is crucial to acknowledge how it is interpreted and understood by its readers.
5. *Discourse is historical*: discourse is embedded in a certain historical, political and social context; thus it cannot be understood without taking its context of production into account. This means that discourse should be studied historically and dynamically.
6. *The link between text and society is mediated*: CDA unveils the connections between socio-cultural structures and textual properties. However, these connections are mediated by either the socio-cognitive resources of social actors or the discursive practices related to the text. Hence the emphasis on processes of textual production and interpretation.
7. *Discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory*: different interpretations of the same text depend on the cognitive schemata of the reader. Understanding is made possible through a background of emotions, knowledge and attitudes, especially when intertextuality, interdiscursivity and hybridization of genres are kept into account.
8. *Discourse is a form of social action*: CDA takes an explicit political stance, aligning itself with the oppressed.

These points are better understood with reference to CDA's theoretical roots, involving influences from the Western or neo-Marxism, the Frankfurt School's Critical Theory, Gramsci's notion of hegemony (1983), Althusser's theory of ideology (1971), Foucault's orders of discourse (1971), Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (1978) and Bakhtin's theory of genre (1981).

1.2 Theoretical origins of CDA

1.2.1 Influences from Western Marxism

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) derives some of its features from various disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. At its core, CDA is fundamentally rooted in neo-Marxist theory (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). CDA specifically draws on the relevance assigned to the cultural dimension of society by Western Marxism, with references to the Frankfurt School, Jüger Habermas, Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser (Jenner and Titscher, 2000; Blommaert and Bulcaen, 2000). This tradition sees capitalist social relations as primarily established and maintained in culture (hence in ideology) rather than solely in the economic base of society (Jenner and Titscher, 2000). According to neo-Marxism, discourses are produced and consumed within specific political economies, and thus they shape and reflect broader ideologies and interests (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997).

Within the neo-Marxist tradition, CDA also incorporates insights from the Frankfurt School of philosophy (van Dijk, 1993). Its Critical Theory revisited the philosophical thought of Marx, Kant and Hegel, while emphasizing the role of cultural products in society as a whole (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). As a matter of fact, culture is not to be considered as a mere byproduct of the economic base but rather as the expression of social contradictions (Jenner and Titscher, 2000). Also, cultural products contain both the dominant social conditions of the present and the forces opposing the established order (Fairclough, 1995a).

The value of the term 'critical' in CDA traces back to the philosophical tradition of this School, particularly to the work of Jürgen Habermas (Titscher et al., 2000). While the Frankfurt School laid the groundwork in terms of relevance of culture, Habermas definitions of 'critical' and ideal speech situations have been largely used and rejected by CDA scholars. Habermas' (1971) defines a 'critical' inquiry as a self-reflexive,

historically bounded analysis of linguistic and social issues. In this sense, self-reflexivity accounts for the acknowledgement of the interests underlying a discipline's theoretical framework (Habermas, 1971; Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). He also introduced the notion of 'ideal speech situation' – a utopian realization of interaction without power relations involved (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). He argued that through rational discourse often opaque ideological communication can be overcome, and such ideal speech situation may somehow be reached (Fairclough, 1989; Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). However, the majority of CDA scholars reject this theory and prove it wrong through their research (Fairclough, 1989; Fairclough, 1995a; van Dijk, 1991; Wodak, 1991).

Another influential scholar located within the neo-Marxist theory was the Italian scholar, Antonio Gramsci. In his view, the power of capitalist society lies in a specific combination of political/institutional and civic society (Gramsci, 1983). However, more than on this, CDA seems to rely on Gramsci's definition of hegemony (see Gramsci, 1983) - the practice of power that operates through discourse in order to represent the order of things, making them appear natural, inevitable or universal (van Dijk, 1993; Titscher et al., 2000; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Hegemony lies where the agreement or acquiescence of the majority to the status quo is reached (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). One way to achieve such consent is through the formation of a collective will by means of ideology (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Gramsci, 1983). Thus, Gramsci's concept of hegemony is central to CDA's understanding of power.

Turning now to another neo-Marxist scholar, Althusser's theory of ideology informed much CDA research (Fairclough, 1989; Fairclough, 1995a; Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). In his theory, institutions are defined as mediation mechanisms between the broader mechanisms of society and the phenomena of interactions (Althusser, 1971). Both Gramsci (1983) and Althusser (1983) argue that ideologies are linked to material practices embedded in social institutions. Such ideologies might be detected, for instance, in the way teaching practices are organized as well as in the way newspaper editorial boards deal with news reports. Ideologies are therefore tied to discourse, which may be framed as a type of social practice itself (Fairclough, 1989; Fairclough, 1995a; Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). Moreover, even if in a rather deterministic way, Althusser argued that, being themselves embedded in a social practice, ideologies can locate people in specific

ways as social subjects (Titscher et al., 2000; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Fairclough, 2001). In other words, he recognized the key role of ideologies within political and social institutions and thus within discourse as a form of social practice. Part of CDA theoretical framework is, in fact, derived from Althusser's theory of ideology (see Althusser, 1983). For instance, the constitutive role of discourse in terms of people's social identity will be further developed in van Dijk's ideological squaring (van Dijk, 1988b).

1.2.2 Foucault's orders of discourse

The constitutive nature of discourse is brought to the fore with Michael Foucault's work. According to Foucault, knowledge is not a mere reflection of the world; rather the power dynamics at play in discourse can shape both human practices and identities (Foucault, 1981, 1990). Language and discourse construct, regulate and control knowledge, social relationships and institutions. They are indispensable for the human understanding of natural and social world, otherwise not accessible nor analysable (Foucault, 1981; Foucault, 1990). Yet, language and discourse cannot provide a neutral nor transparent account of the social world due to power implications. Foucault assigns prominence to the orders of discourse. They reflect the way in which discourse is informed by power dynamics and institutional controls, influencing what is considered acceptable or true in a certain context (Foucault, 1971). Norman Fairclough has tried to integrate this notion into his theoretical system (Fairclough, 1989; Fairclough, 1995b), even if Foucault's influence is widely recognized within CDA scholarship (Wodak and Meyer, 2009).

1.2.3 Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics

Having explored the major philosophical influences of CDA, we now turn to its linguistic dimension, particularly to Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics, which provided CDA with the necessary tools for the analysis of power relations within discourse (Titscher et al., 2000). Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday 1978) grounds the analysis and interpretation of power relations in systemic descriptions of discourse. Halliday (1978) emphasizes the need for a more practical approach to language studies, suggesting that a thorough study of grammatical forms could elicit significant insights on the discursive reproduction of dominance (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). According to Halliday (1978), ideology can be extracted from the preference of text producers for certain linguistic features within a grammatical system of reference. CDA takes its

analytic tools from these fields (Wodak, 2001b). For instance, specifically drawing on this insight, Fairclough underlines not only the ideological relevance of linguistic choices, but also the importance of studying what is absent in the text (Fairclough, 1989).

1.2.4 Bakhtin's theory of genre and ideology

Continuing the exploration of CDA's major influences in the field of linguistics, the first linguist theory of ideology was formulated by the Russian theorists Mikhail M. Bakhtin (1981) and Valentin N. Volosinov (1973, written in 1928). They argued that ideologies reach concreteness in linguistic signs and thus all instances of language use are ideological. Linguistic signs are the arena for class struggle while the meanings of words are the charioteers of ideology. In particular, Bakhtin's notion of intertextuality is typically integrated into CDA analysis (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997; Wodak, 2001a). This sees every text as a link in a chain of other texts to which 'it reacts and refers, and which it modifies' (Tischer et al., 2000: 146). CDA also incorporates Bakhtin's theory of genre, according to which texts depend on socially predetermined repertoires of genres. This means that text producers must address the tension between following conventional rules and innovating by creatively mixing different genres (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Bakhtin's theoretical approach lies on the poststructuralist idea that discourses are constitutive of people's identity and actions (Bakhtin, 1981).

1.2.5 French Discourse Analysis

Althusser's explanation of the effects of ideology and Foucault's theorization of discourse significantly influenced French Discourse Analysis (DA hereafter), particularly Michael Pêcheux's work on political discourse (Pêcheux, 1982). French DA was mainly concerned with the analysis of the ideological dimensions of language use and their materialization in language. The meaning of words depends on the position from which they are used within class struggle, which is particularly relevant in contexts where "someone's freedom fighter can be someone else's terrorist". Echoing Althusser, Pêcheux suggests that people tend to position themselves in the 'imaginary' role of source, "whereas actually their discourse and indeed they themselves are effects of ideological positioning" (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997:263). Sources and processes responsible for such positioning are concealed from them so that people are unaware of the fact that they are writing/speaking from a certain discursive formation (Pêcheux, 1982). In other words,

people see themselves as sources of brand-new information while they are in fact merely ‘amplifiers’ of other discursive sources and processes. Such sources and processes put people within ideologically charged discursive positions. It is, in fact, from such positions that people would articulate their discourses. According to Pêcheux, if one were to seek for a radical change in the way people are positioned, it can only come from political revolution (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). The French approach to Discourse Analysis, especially to political discourse, is key to a proper understanding of CDA’s relationship with Critical Linguistics.

1.2.6 Critical Linguistics

The term ‘Critical Linguistics’ was forged in the 1970s by a group of scholars at the University of East Anglia (Fowler et al., 1979; Kress and Hodge, 1979), namely Roger Fowler, Terry A. Kress, Tony Hodge and Gareth Trew. During this time, Discourse Analysis was emerging as a distinct discipline that acknowledged the role of language in shaping power relations within society (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). Early linguistic research primarily focused on abstract aspects of language, such as speakers’ linguistic competence, with little emphasis on the specific instances of language use (Chomsky, 1957). The pragmatic turn in language studies (Levinson, 1983) brought greater attention to pragmatics and sociolinguistics (Zeher, 2009; Kandil, 2009), even if concepts of power and hierarchy remained largely unexplored (Labov, 1972). This growing interest in the relationship between power and text eventually led to the development of Critical Linguistics (CL hereafter). CL primarily draws on MAK Halliday’s Systemic Linguistic Theory (Halliday, 1978), prioritizing more practical ways of analysis, in contrast to Pêcheux (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). Halliday’s Systemic Functional Theory systematically links social contexts and textual functions, aiming to identify how ideologies manifest through discourse structures and processes (Fowler, 1991). CL advocates for the analysis of authentic texts to better recognize social meanings and interpret them in the light of their political and ideological stance (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997; Titscher et al., 2000). CL is founded on the idea that grammar works ideologically, with ideological stances manifesting through the selection of specific grammatical features among those available in the grammatical system (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). A few important grammatical categories are employed to this end, namely transitivity,

nominalization and passivation. CL claims to analyse linguistic structures considering their wider social context (Fowler, 1979; Fairclough and Wodak, 1997; Wodak, 2001a). Critical Linguistics was further developed by Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak and Teun A. van Dijk into what is now known as Critical Discourse Analysis. Their main concern remains the relationship between discourse, power and ideology; however, it is worth unfolding the theoretical and methodological differences among their approaches so to better frame the theoretical roots of this work.

1.3 Approaches to CDA

This section will explore CDA's main theoretical and methodological approaches, namely Fairclough's socio-cultural approach, van Dijk's socio-cognitive analysis, Wodak's Discourse Historical Approach and van Leeuwen's social-semiotic approach.

1.3.1 Norman Fairclough's socio-cultural approach

Norman Fairclough is one of the early and leading figures in CDA and critical approaches more in general. He first became interested in Critical Discourse Analysis in the 1980s (Fairclough 1989). Some years later, the author launched *Discourse & Society*, a prominent journal for CDA scholars, and began formulating a social theory of discourse (Titscher et al., 2000), providing CDA with a significant methodological blueprint (Blommaert and Bulcaen, 2000). Fairclough criticizes the lack of critical perspective in traditional Discourse Analysis, so he develops a social theory of discourse as a response to the traditional divide between linguistics and other areas of social science research (Fairclough, 2003).

Building on Halliday's functional-systemic linguistics (Titscher et al., 2000), his objective is to align CDA closer to sociological and social scientific research, mainly in relation to social and cultural change (Fairclough, 1989, Fairclough 1992a). In fact, in his view, the real challenge for CDA is to enact a micro-linguistic analysis capable of informing a wider social analysis, with special attention to the role of discursive practices in the endorsement of social change (Fairclough, 1989). To explain how discursive change can anticipate and contribute to social change, Fairclough (2001, 2003) draws on Foucault's concept of 'orders of discourse' (Foucault, 1971). The author defines them as a particular social organization of the relationships among different ways of producing meaning (Fairclough, 1989). In other words, orders of discourse are networks of social

practices involved in the production of discourses, genres and styles, rather than nouns or sentences (Catalano and Waugh, 2000; Titscher et al., 2000).

Echoing Foucault on the socially constitutive nature of discourse, he introduces the notion of intertextuality — the bridge between the textual and the contextual levels of discourse (Fairclough, 1992a). In particular, Fairclough (1992b) starts from Bakhtin's theory of genre and identifies two types of intertextualities: manifest intertextuality, where other texts are explicitly referenced in the text under study, and constitutive intertextuality, where various elements of the orders of discourse are assembled in the text (Fairclough, 1992b). This highlights how creativity in discourse practices and their textual realizations contribute to both discursive and social change (Fairclough, 1992a). Specifically, discursive change occurs through the reconstruction of relationships between different discursive practices within and across social structures (institutions), and through the shifts in boundaries within and between orders of discourse (Fairclough 1989; Fairclough, 1992a). To control orders of discourse is to maintain ideological harmony both within orders of discourse and with each other. This is what defines the discursive relations of power (Fairclough, 2001). Fairclough (1989) puts emphasis on the discursive nature of social change and power and the political nature of discourse. Specifically, discourse is seen as a political and ideological practice which can constitute, naturalize, sustain and challenge power relations (Fairclough, 1989; Fairclough, 1995a). Such political and ideological implications of discourse draw on Gramsci's theory of hegemony (Gramsci, 1983). According to Fairclough (1989; 1995), the discursive nature of power is better explained by the asymmetries between discourse participants, especially in relation to the production, distribution and consumption of texts. In other words, the exercise of power (hence power abuse) is achieved through ideology (Fairclough, 1989).

These notions are at the core of Fairclough's three-dimensional analytical framework (Fairclough, 1989), according to which any discursive event consists of three layers embedded in each other: discourse as text, discourse as discursive practice and discourse as social practice (Fairclough, 1989; Fairclough, 1995b; Titscher et al., 2000). The first layer, discourse as text, involves the description of potentially ideological features in discourse, such as specific lexical choices or certain grammatical structures. These features are the textual realization of text producers' choices, which are never innocent

or value-free (Fairclough, 1989). In fact, ideologies lie in such selections of discourse, reproducing unequal power relationships between and among social groups through the way they represent things and position people (Fairclough, 1989; Fairclough, 1995a). The emphasis on selections of discourse assigns equal significance to features that are present in the text and those that are absent, as the latter may also be relevant indicators of the sociocultural context of discourse (Fairclough, 1989; Fairclough, 1992a). In this sense, Fairclough's approach to CDA is rooted in the Hallidayan Systemic Functional theory (Catalano and Waugh, 2020).

The second layer refers to the analysis of text production, distribution and consumption in relation to the text (Fairclough, 1989; Fairclough, 1995a). For instance, a news report requires the collective effort, among others, of a group of correspondents, reporters and editors for it to see the light of day. Fairclough's assumption is that such processes of text production leave cues in the text for interpretation (Fairclough, 1992b). In fact, this stage of analysis can also be referred to as 'the interpretation' (Fairclough, 1989:109). At this stage the author calls for an in-depth analysis of how participants in discourse not only produced but also interpreted the texts under study. In this sense, intertextuality and interdiscursivity are considered significant tools to achieve a thorough understanding of the processes at play (Fairclough, 1992).

The third layer, discourse as social practice, relates discourse to ideology and power (Fairclough, 1989). This stage of analysis is also called 'the explanation' (Fairclough, 1989:109). Ideologies are representations of aspects of the world establishing, maintaining and changing relations of social power, domination and exploitation (Fairclough, 2003). They are most effective whenever they achieve the status of common sense through their naturalization (Fairclough, 1992b). The interpretation of discourse is intertwined with ideologies in the sense that ideological meanings are produced through the process of interpretation. This means that texts are open for diverse interpretations, each potentially carrying different ideological implications (Fairclough, 1992b). To summarize, these three stages of analysis can thus be seen as (1) the description of text, (2) the interpretation of the relationship between text and interaction, and (3) the explanation of the relationship between interaction and social context (Fairclough, 1989; Catalano and Waugh, 2020).

In particular, while discussing the last two stages (interpretation and explanation), Fairclough (1989) asserts that the relationship between text and social structures is mediated by the discourse connected to the text, in contrast for instance with van Dijk's socio-cognitive and Wodak's psycho-cognitive approach. Fairclough (1989) claims that common ground and background assumptions allow discourse participants to understand each other. However, people are not aware of this interdependence between the discourse and the background assumptions nor of the ideological implications of such assumptions, linking them to social struggles and relations of power (Fairclough, 1989; Catalano and Waugh, 2020). Thus, interpretation and explanation serve as 'procedures of unveiling or demystification' (Fairclough, 1989:141) of these ideological implications (Catalano and Waugh, 2020).

In the late 1990s Fairclough further developed this theoretical framework, positioning CDA within linguistics and even wider social theories (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999). The aim was to combine a (micro)linguistic analysis of discourse with a (macro)social analysis (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999). In other words, to use linguistic items description to interpret and explain the social. In fact, the first step of such analysis would be to identify a social issue that is partly or wholly related to discourse or other semiotic aspects. The second step involves linking the discourse to its immediate context of production and consumption to investigate how it is interpreted; while the third step entails the analysis of particular social practices related to the texts. Finally, a fourth step is added in this new version of CDA, namely a final analysis of discourse proper (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999).

1.3.2 Teun A. van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach

Like Fairclough, van Dijk started to develop his interest in CDA in the early 1980s, initially focusing on the reproduction of ethnic prejudices and racism in news discourse (Catalano and Waugh, 2020). His early CDA works emphasize the articulation of unequal power relations by means of ideological discourse (van Dijk, 1991; van Dijk, 2003). In his theoretical framework, social power is defined in terms of mind control (van Dijk, 2003), while ideologies are the fundamental social representations of groups (van Dijk, 2006). According to van Dijk (van Dijk, 2003: 354-355), "groups have (more or less) power if they are able to (more or less) control the acts and minds of (members of) other

groups”. This dominance can be legitimately achieved by means of naturalization or less so by means of manipulation. For this reason CDA must critique the discursive reproduction of dominance, making its sociopolitical stance explicit (van Dijk, 1993).

Building on this foundation, it is crucial to examine how these power dynamics manifest themselves. According to van Dijk (1989), power and dominance are institutionalised so that power elites typically have privileged access to certain types of discursive and other resources (van Dijk, 2000). Discursive access serves the ideological purpose of controlling the minds of others in accordance with the interests of the powerful groups (van Dijk, 2000; van Dijk, 2001). These dynamics of discursive access may lead to the exclusion of less powerful groups from the process of text production, or even to the underrepresentation of minorities in discourse (van Dijk, 1991). These notions become particularly relevant when opposite ideological stances occur, as often happens in the recounting of hard news (Bell, 1991).

Ideologies, like social representations, probably take on the form of mental schemas reflecting group aims, beliefs, attitudes and knowledge (van Dijk, 1991). Through personal and social cognition, members of groups and their actions are located along so-called ‘ideological squares’ (van Dijk, 1991; van Dijk 2006), which are crucial for the legitimization of unequal power relations (dominance). The reproduction of dominance requires discourse-based strategies of justification or legitimization (van Dijk, 2006). One way to apply these discursive strategies involves claiming that certain power relations are natural or even denying their existence (van Dijk, 1993a; van Dijk, 2006). Justification of inequality entails a representation of groups along Us versus Them ideological squares, with a positive Self-representation and a negative Other-representation (van Dijk, 1991; van Dijk, 1993; van Dijk, 2006). This contributes to the formation of (personal and social) mental models according to which people define the representation of certain groups and their actions (van Dijk, 1991). Finally, such discursive persuasive strategies (hence manifestations of dominance) are achieved by means of a certain lexical style, storytelling, rhetorical figures or use of credible sources (van Dijk, 2006; van Dijk, 2015).

Van Dijk, however, emphasizes that the control of minds is not directly achieved, as there is no direct link between text and social structures (van Dijk, 1993). Instead, these two dimensions are mediated by personal and social cognition, allowing the understanding of how societal structures influence discourse and how discourse, in turn,

legitimizes, confirms or challenges these structures (van Dijk, 2006). In other words, Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach entails a triangulation of society/culture, (personal and social) cognition and language/discourse (van Dijk, 1993), crucial for grasping how ideologies are sustained and reinforced in contemporary societies.

1.3.3 Ruth Wodak's Discourse Historical Approach (DHA)

Early in her career, Ruth Wodak became acquainted with Critical Theory and the Frankfurt School, especially Habermas' ideas on systematically distorted communication and the ideal speech situation (Catalano and Waugh, 2020). She was also influenced by Horkheimer and Adorno, who argued that relying on a single approach while doing critical research could lead to a distorted picture of reality. Instead, they advocated for a combination of several analytical methods complementing one another (Wodak, 2001b). Wodak also integrated van Dijk's concept of ideological squaring (van Dijk, 1989) into her theoretical framework, along with Halliday's Systemic Functional Theory, Bourdieu's concept of 'symbolic capital' and Foucault's idea of 'orders of discourse' (Foucault, 1971; Titscher et al., 2000; Reisigl and Wodak, 2001).

From the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s a methodological convergence of discourse analysis and sociolinguistics led to equal attention towards text (or discourse) and context. "Discourses are historical and can only be understood with reference to their context" (Wodak, 2009:20). Wodak stated that, as context explicitly includes socio-psychological, political and ideological elements, a multi-faceted approach was required. As a matter of fact, this integration of concepts from various domains such as sociolinguistics, sociology, psychology and history reflected Wodak's commitment to interdisciplinary research (Catalano and Waugh, 2020). Interdisciplinarity is the main pillar of the Discourse Historical Approach, developed by Wodak and her associates at the Vienna School, as the result of various works on antisemitic discourse in post-war Austria (Catalano and Waugh, 2020). On her website page at Lancaster University, the Discourse-Historical Approach is defined as "an interdisciplinary, problem-oriented approach which analyses the changes of discursive practices over time and in various genres"¹. DHA triangulation combines interdisciplinary, multi-methodological analysis of empirical data

¹ <https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/linguistics/about/people/ruth-wodak> (last access August 23rd, 2024)

with a focus on contextual and historical embedding (Wodak, 2001a; Wodak, 2001b; Reisgl and Wodak, 2016). Its aim is to integrate all available background information in the analysis of discourse, contrasting linguistic manifestations of prejudice with historical facts, especially in the explanation and interpretation of data (Reisgl and Wodak, 2001).

A key element within this framework is the use of discursive strategies. They are more or less intentional discursive practices adopted to achieve specific social, political, psychological or linguistic objectives (Wodak and Meyer, 2001). According to Wodak (1991; 2001), discourse analysis starts by defining the categories of analysis, which involves (1) identifying the topic of discourse (e.g. racism, sexism, etc.), (2) establishing the discursive strategy (e.g. argumentation, persuasion, etc.) and then (3) examining the linguistic realizations of discriminatory stereotypes (Zaher, 2009). Wodak's work within the framework of the Discourse Historical Approach specifically focused on compiling an inventory of discursive discriminatory strategies, drawing on van Leeuwen's theory of representation of social actors (van Leeuwen 1996).

1.3.4 Van Leeuwen's social semiotic (SocSem) approach to CDA

Theo van Leeuwen is one of the major contributors to the social semiotic approach to CDA. Social semiotics (SocSem hereafter) draws especially on Halliday's SFL and Critical Linguistics, exploring the way we use language to shape society as well as the way society creates language (Catalano and Waugh, 2020). Other influences come from various sociological and linguistic theories, such as Bordieu, Malinowski (Wodak and Meyer, 2009), Foucault's notion of discourse (1971) and French semiotics. Particularly, the SocSem approach to CDA focuses on the description of the available choices of signs used in all kinds of communication (e.g. images, sounds, gestures, etc.), with emphasis on the verbal and visual use of semiotic resources (Catalano and Waugh, 2020; Machin and Mayr, 2012). SocSem sees all communication as having underlying patterns and conventions defining why we do and say certain things as well as how we do and say them. The main objective is to examine how these patterns are used in certain settings to do or say certain things (Machin and Mayr, 2012). Drawing on Austin's speech act theory (1962), SocSem tries to unveil the reasons why sign-makers would want the signs to mean and do what they do as well as what specific features are employed in the creation of these meanings.

For this reason another crucial notion within this approach – and especially in van Leeuwen’s theory of SocSem - is that of ‘semiotic resource’ (van Leeuwen, 2005). Considering language as a social semiotic resource, emphasis is placed on the dynamic nature of its meaning-making – it shapes (and is shaped by) the social context it is embedded in. Building on these concepts, semiotic resources do not have fixed meanings but rather a semiotic potential that can be applied differently in different contexts (Abousnougga and Machin, 2013; Catalano and Waugh, 2020). Meaning-making is a dialectical process according to SocSem: meaning should always be seen as negotiated, not just imposed on the recipient by the meaning-makers.

Van Leeuwen has tried to compile an inventory of tools for the analysis of the representation of social actors (van Leeuwen, 2005; van Leeuwen, 2008). Like Fairclough, Wodak and van Dijk (Fairclough, 1989; Wodak, 2001b; van Dijk, 1991), van Leeuwen sees discourses as transformations of social practices (van Leeuwen and Wodak, 1999). The representation of social actors is based on what people do; thus texts can be interpreted as representations of social practices (Catalano and Waugh, 2020). Van Leeuwen further emphasizes how some features of representation are typically more salient than the social practice itself (van Leeuwen, 2008; van Leeuwen, 2016). For instance, when we receive information about an event, it is likely to have been prepared by someone else, meaning that what we are watching or reading is not the actual event, but someone else’s recount of it (e.g. the journalist’s in the case of news reports). Different aspects of a single event are more likely to be foregrounded according to the source that is organizing the information. That is why, for instance, protestors can be presented as politically engaged citizens in certain news reports or as the lazy left in others (Machin and Mayr, 2012; Catalano and Waugh, 2020). In newspaper choices need to be made with regard to time and space constraints, previous political stances and ratings (e.g. newspapers’ financial well-being). However, it is the interest of the text producer in depicting events in a certain way that takes precedence.

1.3.4.1 Van Leeuwen on the use of referential strategies

Meaning-makers have a range of choices available to them for how they wish to represent individuals and groups of people, typically referred to as ‘social actors’ or ‘participants’ (Machin and Mayr, 2012). As there is no transparent way to depict social actors, these

‘representational strategies’ (Fairclough, 2003) typically draw attention to certain aspects of their identity, while omitting others. In fact, whenever these processes are at play there is always some ideological work involved (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001). Van Dijk (1988a; 1988b) has shown how news contributes to our alignment against or alongside certain social actors by means of what he calls ‘ideological squaring’. Referential choices can be used to create opposites, over-simplifying the complex, multi-faceted nature of reality.

In SocSem approaches the focus is on social rules (e.g. agency) instead of linguistic/grammatical categories. Van Leeuwen offers an inventory of the ways one can classify people and their relative ideological effect (van Leeuwen, 1996; Machin and Mayr, 2012). This inventory was updated in 2008 (see van Leeuwen, 2008). A brief account of relevant referential strategies is hereby presented. It references key works by van Leeuwen (1996; 2008) and the summary by Machin and Mayr (2012). Referential choices may involve ‘personalization’ vs ‘impersonalization’, typically concealing actual agency:

(1) Professor John Smith requires students to attend classes.

(2) The university requires students to attend classes.

Social actors could also be referred to as individuals or collectively. Little empathy arises from collectivization, while individualised social actors are brought closer to the reader. This is even more evident when additional personal information on the subject is provided. For instance, if the soldiers in the examples below were also referred to as caring fathers and sons, the readers would more likely feel empathetic towards them.

(1) Two soldiers, John Smith and Jim Jones, were killed today by a car bomb.

(2) Militants were killed today by a car bomb.

Participants may be represented as specific individuals or through generalization. This strategy is sometimes used to create a sense of ‘otherness’.

(1) A man, Ayman Hussein, confronted police officer John Smith today.

(2) A Muslim man confronted police officer John Smith today.

Other examples oppose nomination to functionalization - people are referred to in terms of who they are as opposed to what they do. Functionalization can provide the social actor with legitimacy and officiality, whereas nomination might sound more personal.

(1) Joe Biden said the US will support Israel.

(2) The American president said the US will support Israel.

Representation of people can also be achieved by using 'functional honorifics' (Machin and Mayr, 2012), which suggest a certain degree of respect toward the social actor involved. Thus the level of authority assigned to a certain social actor can be strategically downplayed by omitting honorifics (see examples below).

(1) A government spokesperson said that the UK is not involved.

(2) The Minister of Foreign Affairs said that the UK is not involved.

The dehumanization of social actors can be realized using strategies of objectification, anonymization, aggregation and/or suppression. Objectification occurs when participants are represented through a single feature (Machin and Mayr, 2012). This strategy is typically employed in ideological squaring, for instance whenever women are reduced to their physical appearance. Anonymization is common in newspaper (e.g. a source said, some people think, etc.): it is common journalistic practice to guarantee anonymity whenever sources explicitly ask for it. However, while readers rely on the legitimacy of journalistic sources, anonymization can sometimes conceal the unequal access to journalists experienced by certain social groups.

On the other hand, strategies of aggregation may be one of the most brutal ways to represent social actors. When aggregation occurs, people are treated as mere statistics (e.g. many hundreds of immigrants disembarked in Lampedusa yesterday; one of the few suspects was arrested). The reader gains the impression of an objective account and scientific credibility, even when not receiving specific numbers. How much is 'a few'? (van Dijk, 1991; Machin and Mayr, 2012). As regards suppression, what is absent in a text is as important as what is present (Fairclough, 1989). Through this strategy general processes, which are not agents themselves, appear natural and unquestionable (Machin and Mayr, 2012). The category of suppression entails the exclusion of social actors or part of an event from the text (Catalano and Waugh, 2020), for example, globalization is not

going away, or economies are growing faster than ever. From a social-semiotic perspective, the choices journalists make to define how people are represented lie in their interests and underlying ideologies (Machin and Mayr, 2012; Catalano and Waugh, 2020). Hence, a careful description of referential strategies, according to the categories shown above, is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of social actors' representation.

1.4 Newspaper discourse and CDA

As this dissertation is mainly concerned with newspapers' representation of social actors and actions, an overall account of CDA applications to newspaper discourse is required. While news outlets claim neutrality in their supposedly impartial account of events (Fairclough, 1992; Fairclough 1995), CDA research has shown this assumption to be misguided on multiple occasions (Fairclough, 1995b; van Dijk, 1988a; van Dijk 1988b; van Dijk, 1991). Newspaper discourse is always a site of significant ideological struggle, even when its language may seem transparent (van Dijk, 1991; Fairclough, 1995b). Among the CDA scholars, who have shown most interest in media and newspaper discourse analysis we find Teun A. van Dijk, who mainly explore racism and ideology in the press (van Dijk, 1991).

A linguistic interest in news stories first arose during the 1980s, with van Dijk applying his discourse analysis framework to the study of news reports (see van Dijk 1988a, van Dijk 1988b). As highlighted before, between the 1970s and the 1980s, CDA was in its development. It was a time when linguistic research primarily focused on sentence-level analysis, while discourse analysis looked more at texts and discourses (Bell, 1991; Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). As far as van Dijk's contribution to this field is involved, Bell (1991) identifies his key contributions as the concepts of 'macrorules' and 'news schemata'.

1.4.1 The structure of news stories

News stories are made up of 'macropropositions', which can be intended simply as 'topics' (van Dijk, 1988b). Van Dijk (1988a) identifies three kinds of macrorules: deletion of information, generalization and construction. For instance, construction consists in summarizing several actions under an umbrella word. 'Military assault' might encompass various details, like how the event occurred, what weapons were used and whether anyone

was injured. Macrorules serve the purpose of summarizing the text, much like the processes used in editing of news stories. In fact, they approximate the strategies used by news workers to extract a lead paragraph from a more detailed text (van Dijk, 1988a; Bell, 1991). These rules can be applied repeatedly, until the resulting summary reflects the thematic structure of the original text (van Dijk, 1988a; van Dijk, 1988b; Bell, 1991).

This thematic structure reflects the semantic structure of the text, consisting of its topics and their organization (van Dijk, 1988a; Bell, 1991). However, attention must also be paid to the syntactic structure of news stories, that is, ‘news schemata’ (van Dijk, 1988a) – “a set of characteristic categories, organized by rules” (van Dijk, 1985 in Bell, 1991:163) and which normally take the shape of a tree diagrams. In other words, news schemata consist of typical categories and relationships that people expect to find in a news story (e.g. who is involved, what happened, where and why). These categories and their organization are known (unconsciously) by text producers and consumers, which facilitate people’s understanding (van Dijk, 1988a).

However, for how much relevant these categories can be, the structure of news stories is not limited to the notions of macro-propositions and news schemata. With reference to various approaches, Bell (1991:169) also defined the constitutive elements of news texts: abstract, attribution and the story proper.

1.4.1.1 The abstract

The abstract comprises the headline and the lead, both obligatory in hard news (Bell, 1991). Bell (1991:150) defines headlines as ‘the primary abstract’ of news stories. Headlines are typically not included in the news agency copy and writing them is left to subeditors, not journalists (Bell, 1991; Bell, 1998; Reah, 1998). On the other hand, the lead typically includes the main event, sometimes a second event and some evaluative comment, and it serves as a summary of the text, encapsulating the core of the story (Bell, 1991; Reah, 1998). In fact, when writing an article, journalists are mainly concerned about crafting a good lead, constantly asking themselves how and why a certain story is newsworthy (Bell, 1991). The lead typically offers the main point of the story in a single opening sentence. From there, readers decide whether they want to continue reading that text or not (Bell, 1991; Bell, 1998; van Dijk, 1988a). Sometimes attribution of what is the source is included in the lead. When this happens, it typically consists of the agency credit

and/or journalist's byline, plus time and place (Bell, 1991, Bell, 1998). In particular, international agency stories are often credited through the dateline, which specifies the place from which the story was filed to the news agency.

Finally, leads - and even more so, headlines – serves as the lens through which readers gain access to the story (Bell, 1991; Reah, 1998). This can have ideological implications, as the most important information is typically placed at the beginning of the article, either in the headline or the lead. According to van Dijk (1988a), people tend to form mental models of interpretation when approaching a news story. In these cognitive structures, leads and headlines contain the most memorable information, which readers are more likely to recall in the future (van Dijk, 1988a; van Dijk, 1988b). To conclude, the contents included in headlines and leads are worthy of further analysis in terms of their ideological charge. This is the reason why the abstract is the fundamental core of the news story – it gives us insights on what information is considered more newsworthy than others, and thus more relevant to the general structure of the story. This also means that a first orientation, with information about the actors and the setting of the event(s), must be included in it. Orientation, obligatory for news stories, consists of the basic facts presented at the beginning of the story. It answers to the 5Ws journalistic rule, giving information on who, what, when and where, even if such information is expanded later in the 'story proper' (Bell, 1991; Bell, 1998).

1.4.1.2 The story

Bell (1991), probably relying on his own journalistic experience, describes the journalists as the 'professional storytellers of our age', claiming that they do not write articles but stories. A story consists of one or more episodes, which may in turn be divided into one or more events. On one hand, episodes must present the actors, the actions and the setting of story (orientation) – all constituents of the structure of news stories (Bell, 1998; Reah, 1998). On the other hand, events typically encompass some additional categories: the follow-up, the background and the commentary (Bell, 1991; Bell, 1998). The follow-up is any action subsequent to the main action of an event; the background offers information about prior events; while the commentaries express the journalist's or news actor's viewpoint on a certain event, normally by means of contextualization, explicit evaluation or expectation (Bell, 1991; Bell 1998; Reah, 1998).

1.4.2 Main linguistic features of news stories

News stories are never created from scratch. On the contrary, news outlets normally rely on international news agencies to provide information from all around the world. However, in their copies might not always be clear where elements such as attribution, setting, context or evaluation are located within a certain story's structure (Bell, 1991). For instance, the original text, then subjected to multiple editing processes, may be voluntarily ambiguous about what statement was attributed to what source, where there was a shift in setting or whether a certain evaluation applies to a single event or more (Fairclough, 1995b). This confusion comes from the fragmented nature of news writing, where the cohesion between the paragraphs is typically blurred or absent (Bell, 1991).

This is partially due to the so-called 'instalment method' (van Dijk, 1988b), where an event is introduced and then revisited two or more times later in the story. This is possible because the time structure of news stories does not follow a chronological order, due to its somehow blind obedience to news values rather than traditional narrative rules (Bell, 1991; 1998). The elements of the structure are normally organized according to their newsworthiness, following the so-called 'inverted pyramid' schema (Schudson, 1982). In the case of news stories, pieces from different sources are assembled into the final text, providing insights into how readers comprehend these stories. In particular, news comprehension is not only a cognitively demanding task but can also be easily manipulated through the ordering of topics and information within the structure of the news (Bell, 1991; Fairclough 1995).

1.4.3 News values

As mentioned before, the structure of news stories is inextricably linked to news values, which are the journalists' leading factors when they organize a story. By relying on these values, certain events are judged more newsworthy than others, typically reflecting ideologies in the meanwhile (van Dijk, 1988a; Bell, 1991). With reference to Galtung and Ruge's foundational work, Bell (1991) identifies a dozen of news values, each included into one of three macro-categories: values related to news actors and events, in the news process and in the news text.

1.4.3.1 News values related to actors and events (Bell, 1991)

Among the news values related to news actors and events, negativity often takes precedence. The idea that ‘a falling tree makes more noise than a growing forest’ is especially relevant to journalism. Even a casual newspaper reader could confirm that conflicts between people, nations or political parties are among the most recurrent topics in the news (Bell, 1991). Alongside conflict and war reporting, deviance also rates high in newsworthiness (van Dijk, 1988a) for the same reason. Another important news value is recency - more recent news is prioritized, as news outlets typically cover events that fit within a 24-hour period. Other important news values include consonance, or how well a story meets preconceptions about a certain social group or nation, and unambiguity, according to which straightforward stories are more likely to be reported. Unexpectedness is another key factor, since unexpected events draw greater readership, thus selling more copies. Superlativeness then ensure that events with the most extraordinary features are more likely to make the news (e.g. world records in sport news). Van Dijk (1988b) also introduced the news value of relevance, asserting that events closer to the audience’s experiences or interests are more likely to be featured in newspapers.

Common news values include personalization, according to which events depicted in more personal terms take precedence over abstract concepts or processes, and eliteness - actions or statements by elite figures generate greater newsworthiness than those by ordinary people. For instance, a statement by the U.S. President on the on-going Israeli-Palestinian conflict is more likely to be covered than a similar statement made by a doctor. Finally, two additional news values are worth mentioning: attribution and facticity. Attribution refers to the preference for highly valued news sources over freelance journalists, while facticity refers to figures, facts and any element conveying an impression of objectivity, especially in hard news.

1.4.3.2 News values in the news process and in the text (Bell, 1991)

These news values mostly relate to the processes of news gathering and news production. First, continuity – ‘news breeds news’ (Bell, 1991: 159) – implies that if a topic is already in the news, it is more likely to remain there. Competition is another key factor, as news outlets long for exclusive scoops. In fact this competition occurs on two fronts: competition over exclusivity, but also over the market coverage. For instance, a news

already covered by another news outlet or by an early edition of a newspaper is less likely to appear in it. Composition refers instead to the tendency of newspapers to offer a wide range of news types, even if sometimes they are brought together as common threads (Bell, 1991; Fairclough, 1995b). Then, while predictability means that if an event can be pre-scheduled, journalists are more likely to cover it, and thus report it; prefabrication addresses the fact that ready-made texts are more likely to appear in the news.

As for news values linked to the text itself, news texts that present clarity, brevity and colour are preferred over those lacking these qualities. These factors are cumulative, meaning not only that stories combining more news values are more likely to be picked, but also that the lack of one of these categories can be counterbalanced by possessing another (Bell, 1991).

1.5 Review of related literature

After reviewing the essential notions for a well-grounded study in newspaper discourse analysis, this dissertation introduces a case study, that is, how the first six months of the 2023-2024 Israeli-Palestinian conflict was covered in the US, Arab and British press. Despite the conflict being one of the most frequently reported globally, CDA scholars have largely overlooked this sociopolitical issue. The existing literature consists mainly of PhD thesis (Kandil, 2009; Zaher, 2009) and outdated analysis (Wenden, 2005; Kandil, 2009; Zaher, 2009). Moreover, CDA works on this issue cover limited time spans (Amer, 2017) or analyse a small number of texts (Amer, 2017; Wenden, 2005), typically focusing on a few selected events or topics (Wenden, 2005; Kandil, 2009; Zaher, 2009). Comparison across countries (Sabido, 2015) and across newspapers (Wenden, 2005) has been overlooked as well. This dissertation seeks to address these limitations and to provide a valuable contribution to the field, even with the typical constraints of a Bachelor thesis.

However, it is important to acknowledge how the methodology and findings of these works influenced my interpretation and explanation of the data of this dissertation. Exploring a corpus of 40 news stories published in UK and US prominent newspapers, Amer (2017) found that Israeli officials were the most represented actors, whereas Palestinians were totally identified with Hamas. Hence, this aligns with Israel's claim that the war is exclusively directed against Hamas rather than against all Palestinians.

Moreover, in his diachronic study, Zaher (2009) shows that, even if effort was made to report the exact numbers of victims on both sides, there was still a difference in status between Israel and the Palestinians. The former are represented as belonging to a national state, whereas the latter are thus far stateless. This difference in official status led to a biased representation of violence as well: while Israel's acts of violence were institutionalised ('military action'), Palestinians' were represented as simple 'militancy'. Zaher's (2009) discussion of Davis and Walton's (1983) notions of moral closure and moral consensus also provided valuable insights during the explanation of the data. Sabido (2015) instead illustrates how the concept of Orientalism (Said, 1978) applies to the media representation of Palestinians in UK media. They are normally located in the 'them' position within van Dijk's (1988a; 1988b) ideological squaring, with the 'us' being the Israelis. Not only are Palestinians constantly represented in negative terms, but their perspective is largely absent from the narrative. Wenden (2005) instead advocates for an inclusion of linguistic perspectives in interventions aimed at achieving social peace. This helped me defining more practical advice for journalists based on the findings of this study, in the attempt to encourage a more balanced representation of the conflict. On a more methodological level, Kandil's application of Scott's (1997) concept of keyness led to the refinement of the methodology applied in this study.

Yet, a fil rouge ties all these works together: the representation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is biased in favour of the Israeli social actors, mostly due to a lack of historical contextualization (Wenden, 2005; Kandil, 2009; Zaher, 2009; Sabido, 2015; Amer, 2017).

1.6 The current study

The current study aims to explore how social actors and events have been represented in the UK, US and Arab press during the first six months of the 2023-24 Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Newspapers with diverse positions in the political spectrum have been chosen as regards the UK and the US press. The primary aim is that of answering two fundamental research questions - how the narrative on the 2023-24 Israeli-Palestinian conflict varies across national and regional areas; and how and to what extent different political orientations influence the representation of the conflict in the national news. Fairclough's three-dimensional model informs the whole dissertation, in the attempt of providing a

micro linguistic analysis capable of informing a wider social analysis (Fairclough, 1989; Fairclough, 1995a). The analysis of discourse as text, discursive practices and social practices will follow three steps: first, the description of specific lexical choices and syntactical structure. Van Dijk's 'ideological squares' (van Dijk 1988a; van Dijk, 1988b, van Dijk, 1991) and van Leeuwen's referential strategies (van Leeuwen, 1996; van Leeuwen, 2006) will be used for this purpose. Moreover, during a first content analysis, the concept of keyness (Scott, 1997) rather than van Dijk's 'macrorules' (van Dijk, 1988a; van Dijk, 1988b) will be applied, as the former is deemed more suitable to a larger corpus of data. Bell's (1991) 'news values' will serve instead the qualitative analysis of selected news stories. The second and third steps of Fairclough's model involve the interpretation and the explanation of the linguistic data. This phase will be unfolded during the comparison of the selected newspapers. In this sense, discursive practices, such as news consumption and news production, will be integrated into this theoretical framework, while leaving out concepts such as 'orders of discourse' (Foucault, 1971) and 'social cognition' (van Dijk, 2006). This is explained through the primary linguistic nature of this study. As for Wodak's DHA, particular attention will be devoted to proper historical contextualization.

Chapter 2 Methodology

This chapter starts by addressing the main critiques to CDA, which have led to the development of Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS). After outlining these critiques, the chapter introduces CADS and evaluates its contributions and limitations within the field of Discourse Analysis. The focus then shifts to the description of the key features of concordance software, especially since these are the tools that were used to conduct this study. This is followed by the description of the process for collecting and selecting the texts included in the corpora. Then the chapter also discusses the methodology employed in this dissertation, which combines Corpus Linguistics and CDA, alongside the criteria used for the choice of the newspapers to study. Speaking of newspapers, the chapter will also provide a brief account of the historical and ideological background of each news outlet. It will end with a general historical context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, from the late 19th century to the present-day conflict.

2.1 Critiques of CDA

Despite being quite a young approach, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has been the objective of several criticisms, on different levels. CDA researchers are generally referred to as the first to glimpse workings of power in discourse and to consider them worthy of further investigation. In this regard, Toolan (1997), who declares that he is more in favour than against CDA, points out that the interest in the relationship between ideology and language can be traced back to Plato and Aristotle, long before the advent of CDA. Also, both Volosinov and Bakhtin had already looked at all instances of language as ideological, following Marxist theories of language and ideology (Catalano and Waugh, 2020).

Building on these foundational ideas, contemporary scholars have further criticised CDA for its preference for interpretation over explanation; partiality in the selection of data and excessive qualitative methods; neglect of the processes of production and consumption as well as cognition. Widdowson (1995; 1998), one of the most outspoken critics of CDA, considers CDA not a method of analysis but rather an erudition concerning interpretation, characterized by the fact that “interpretation in support of beliefs takes precedence over analysis in support of theory” (Widdowson, 1995:195). He

argues that CDA prefers certain meanings of the texts, while neglecting alternative articulations. O' Halloran (2003) states that there are two key stages in CDA – interpretation and explanation. He argues that CDA focuses only on explanation to connect text to socio-cultural practices, at the expense of explanation. Widdowson (1998) shows concern as CDA analysts tend to look at the texts and making a hypothesis and then uses CDA analytical tools to demonstrate that it is more than a simple interpretation. Similar concerns have been vocalized by various scholars (Sympson and Mayr, 2009; Schegloff, 1997; Widdowson, 1998) according to whom CDA analysts would 'cherry pick' a text or type of discourse that did not require an in-depth analysis to assess its contentiousness. The risk is that the linguistic analysis becomes a mere supplement to what the analysts decided a priori about the text. CDA itself was regarded as ideologically driven and thereby selective. Research is not naïve but starts from conceptions of what is worth investigating and why certain phenomena take precedence over others. However, most scholars in the field of humanities and social sciences (see Popper, 1934; Foucault, 1962) agree that scientific investigation is always conducted within arbitrary and culturally bound paradigms of knowledge.

In addition to theoretical critiques, methodological concerns have also been raised. For instance, the fixation over certain meanings of the texts, rejecting any other option available, typically takes ordinary people's understanding and comprehension of the texts out of the equation (Widdowson, 1998). In fact, CDA has also been criticised for ignoring readers and listeners in its theoretical framework(s). Since CDA aims to uncover, resist and challenge the discursive practices enacted by powerful groups, one may expect that such practices' effects on ordinary people should be accounted for. Richardson (2007) addresses text production and consumption as underdeveloped areas with the CDA framework, referring to the overlook of news gathering and reporting processes. This criticism has been addressed by Wodak (2001a), according to whom CDA should consider the theorization and description of the social processes and structures leading to the production of a text as well as the interactional creation of meaning through what Gadamer would call 'an encounter of horizons' between the readers and the text.

Many scholars, in this sense, advocate for an integration of ethnographic methodology into the CDA methodological framework. Among others, Widdowson (1995) while referring to Fairclough's so-called 'baby book analysis' (Fairclough, 1992a:169), spoke

in favour of ethnographic observations in the context under study, as to integrate the beliefs, values and desires involved in the process of text production into the analysis. Others acknowledged the need to interview journalists and editors when approaching to the study of newspaper discourse (Machin and van Leeuwen, 2007). This perspective has been already integrated into a few CDA research (Wodak, 2001b; Machin and van Leeuwen, 2007).

Furthermore, despite Fairclough and Wodak's (1997:259) claims of CDA's adherence to "standards of careful, rigorous and systematic analysis", ongoing critique warrant against making generalizations about social representations and social change without sufficient linguistic evidence (Stubbs, 1997; Garzone and Santulli, 2004). Garzone and Santulli (2004) claim that, in the attempt to analysing larger discursive units of texts, CDA tends to neglect linguistic analysis proper. In addition, CDA has been criticised for its qualitative methods, supposedly lacking reliability. Widdowson (2003) considers concepts and methods of CDA vague. He also questions the objectivity and representativeness of the data selected for the analysis. Stubbs (1997) contests that CDA's interpretations are not based on standard criteria that can be replicated and tested for checking the reliability of results. He also suggests that not only not much data is analysed in traditional CDA research, but data are normally fragmented, extracts of individual articles aiming at representing a larger corpus (Stubbs, 1997).

2.2 Introduction to Corpus-Assisted Discourse Analysis (CADS)

As mentioned above, a common critique of CDA studies concerns the reliability of results, since researchers were often found to choose only those data that match their presuppositions or the argument they intend to make (Catalano and Waugh, 2020). In this sense, CDA was also criticized for lacking an empirical dimension to be approached with quantitative and comparative methods (Machin and Mayr, 2012), apart from the criticisms on the lack of systematic linguistic descriptions (Widdowson, 1998; Baker, 2006). In response to these critiques, scholars sought a methodological solution that could combine the strengths of CDA's qualitative focus with a more empirical, data-driven approach. This search for a more robust framework led to the integration of Corpus Linguistics and Discourse Analysis, giving rise to what is now known as Corpus-Assisted Discourse Analysis (CADS) (Catalano and Waugh, 2020). Baker (2006) defines CADS

as a method of triangulation combining quantitative and qualitative methods to linguistic analysis.

In particular, since CDA's main objective is to uncover the ideological meaning underlying the linguistic structure of texts (Fairclough, 2003; Fowler, 1991; Wodak, 2011), it focuses on the analysis of textual and discursive patterns in relation to their social contexts. To achieve this purpose, CDA tends to choose a limited number of texts as its sample. In this sense, Corpus Linguistics has proved to be of great support to CDA, allowing for larger corpora to be analysed with the help of its computerized technology (Baker et al., 2008; Mautner, 2008; McEnery and Wilson, 1996). Emerging in the mid-1990s, the combination of Corpus Linguistics and CDA has led to significant advancements in discourse analysis, although it has also faced criticisms. The next paragraphs will delve into the details of how CADS can help linguistic analysis, while addressing its main critiques.

2.2.1 Critiques of CADS

Critiques of CADS address three main aspects: the loss of contextual details, CADS representativeness (thus the reliability of its results) and the lack of interpretation. According to Baker (2006), Corpus Linguistics would abstract the text from its context, underplaying the relevance of the social conditions of its production and consumption. Similar accusations were moved by Widdowson (2000), who stated that, since the data are stored in the form of a text, Corpus Linguistic tends to neglect paralinguistic contextual information. Partington (2004) addressed these criticisms, saying that specialized corpora make discourse studies feasible. This is because in a collection of texts of similar types, the contextual details remain reasonably constant or are, at least, relatively predictable. In addition, the concordance software used in CADS studies display words and grammatical items within their context, which can be expanded, thanks to the strings of concordances, up to the whole text. Stubbs (2001), further emphasized this aspect while addressing the same critique, stating that Critical Linguistics is essentially a theory of context, as its main tool is, in fact, concordance.

When the main concern is, instead, the representativeness of the samples and, thus, the reliability of the results, it is crucial to bear in mind that a corpus, however large or balanced, cannot be exhaustive (Baker et al., 2008). This means that what we can ask to

a corpus is merely to document textually attested language, what language users have actually produced rather than an account of all the possible or contextually appropriate linguistic choices (McEnery et al., 2006; Widdowson, 2000). In this sense, Stubbs (2001:151) argues that Critical Linguistics is a “theory of the typical”, which does not provide evidence of every possible use of the language in a particular context, but of what frequently and typically occurs. It is then up to the analyst to provide alternatives and possible interpretations, which makes of crucial importance that there is a ‘synergy’ between quantitative and qualitative methods (Baker et al., 2008).

As for the lack of interpretation, some scholars have argued that, since critical interpretations require historical knowledge and human sensitivity, the use of computers only might entail some loss of meanings (Fowler and Kress, 1979). In other words, corpora can certainly yield findings, but they can barely provide explanation. This is the reason why any corpus-based analysis still requires the researcher’s own interpretation and explanation of the data (Baker, 2006). This means that, even if the analytical tools offered by concordance software (collocations, keywords, frequency lists, etc.) allow for the extraction and identification of relevant linguistic features, qualitative methods must be involved in the analysis as well (Baker et al., 2008). This is if we want reliable results rather than mere statistics. Hence, the need to address human bias. In this regard, Baker (2006) suggests choosing a particular analytical technique to use, with precise methodological steps and tools, and clear-cut methodological boundaries, to minimize the risk of biased results. On the other hand, with respect to the criticism of CADS being too broad, several scholars (Fairclough, 1992; Stubbs, 1996; Mautner, 2008) recommend the compilation of smaller, more localized and specialized corpora, which is what this study has taken into consideration when collecting the texts for the qualitative analysis.

Nevertheless, despite criticisms, it is important to notice that these emerge especially from CDA scholars themselves, as part of reflexive practice within the scholarship; thus, with the main purpose of making CDA work better (Catalano and Waugh, 2020). In any case, there is widespread agreement within Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) that the combination of Corpus Linguistics with Discourse Analysis is beneficial to both fields (Baker et al., 2008; Stubbs, 2001; Mautner, 2008; Widdowson, 2000). This integration highlights how the benefits of combining these approaches not only can effectively address the criticisms but also counterbalance them.

2.2.2 Contributions of CADS

CADS addresses concerns on the objectivity of CDA research, its sample representativeness, the reliability and validity of its findings, as well as the possibility to draw conclusions from empirical data. All this while it makes the analysis faster and more manageable for the researchers. In fact, the integration of Corpus Linguistics enriches Discourse Analysis with an empirical dimension, which in turn enhances the neutrality of its analyses and interpretations. Apart from granting the possibility of exploring larger amounts of linguistic data in a less time-consuming fashion, the use of computer technology enables to minimize researchers' bias (Baker et al., 2008). A computer does not prefer certain patterns over others, which means that it allows to verify whether and to what extent the findings of preliminary qualitative analyses can be generalized (Zih and El Biadi, 2023). Concordance software also produce more objective and valid results, finding other examples of already-noted patterns or revealing those previously unthought of. In other words, they can sustain, reject or revise the researcher's intuition and show how much of it was actually grounded in empirical data (Partington, 2003). This kind of quantification benefits CDA, as it can provide enhanced reliability and validity to its result, while allowing for generalizations (Baker et al., 2008). In addition, the integration of an empirical dimension to CDA allows for the replication of corpus-based CDA studies by applying the same techniques to the same or similar corpora used in other studies. Last, the Corpus Linguistics techniques, together with the digital availability of texts, makes the statistical quantification of the linguistic variables, especially passivation and nominalization, easier and faster. To conclude, the advantages of CADS are widely recognized in the CDA scholarship, as they help in the systematic identification of linguistic patterns in larger corpora, limit researchers' bias by pointing out counter-discourses; facilitate statistical quantification of the linguistic variables under study; and provide solid basis for the generalization of findings.

2.2.3 Features of concordance software

CDA can especially benefit from the use of concordance software programs, whose primary purpose is to display words or simple grammatical items with their surrounding context. They offer a number of tools to enhance the effectivity of a CADS research, such as frequency lists, keyword lists and collocation lists.

2.2.3.1 Frequency lists

Frequency lists comprise all the words in a corpus of text along with their overall frequencies. They are particularly useful in revealing the writer's choices in terms of lexical patterns, which are key to CDA researchers' focus on in the study of the ideological use of language (Fairclough, 1989; van Dijk, 2015). Moreover, the fact that the process is computerized makes the task easier and faster, yielding more reliable results. In this study, the identification of the most frequent words in each newspaper corpus was supplemented by a more in-depth qualitative analysis. Search terms used to select the articles were excluded, as they had a higher frequency for obvious reasons.

2.2.3.2 Keyness, keywords lists and key-keyword techniques

Automated keyword techniques are crucial for the quantitative analysis of linguistic data. First introduced by Mike Scott (1997), key-keyword techniques serve the identification of recurrent topics in a corpus by focusing on the salience of words rather than their mere frequency. In fact, these techniques reflect what the text is really about, leaving out insignificant details (Kandil, 2009).

Keyword lists are produced by comparing the frequency of each word in the target corpus to its frequency in a broader, more general reference corpus. This helps to identify the expected frequency of a word within a certain genre, such as hard news reports. To ensure accuracy, statistical tests such as the chi-square test and the log likelihood test (Dunning, 1993) are employed. This accounts the total number of words in both corpora is considered, thus providing more reliable results. The concordance software used for this study automatically incorporates these statistical measures. Nevertheless, Baker (2006) warns that, especially when a corpus is made up of multiple texts, words can show up as keywords not because they are pervasive throughout the corpus, but rather because they are overused in one or very few texts. This issue can be addressed by using the key-keyword technique, which provides an overview of how many texts a particular word is key of. Researchers must then decide whether to include such words based on this information.

In other words, keyword lists help to define the topics, ideas or stylistic details of a corpus. They are therefore, the most effective tool for identifying recurrent topics in a set of newspaper articles and tracking changes in topic salience over time.

2.2.3.3 Collocation lists

Collocations are statistically significant associations between words within a text or a group of texts or, as Stubbs (2001:41) puts it, they are “a lexical relation between two or more words which have a tendency to co-occur”. In particular, collocations lists display the words (collocates) that tend to occur around a given word or phrase (Kandil, 2009). The collocation window approach was chosen for the purpose of this study. It helps in identifying “the consistent aura of meaning with which a form is imbued by its collocates”, otherwise referred to as ‘semantic prosody’ (Louw, 1993:157). This technique specifically identifies the connotations that are most frequently attributed to a certain term, the verbs involved, and the grammatical structures employed around it. Given that CDA aims at unveiling the ideological implications underlying the use of language (Fairclough, 1989; Wodak, 2001b; van Dijk, 2015), collocations lists can show how a word can acquire different meanings according to its patterns of association.

2.3 The corpora

With the term ‘corpus’ we refer to ‘a finite-sized body of machine-readable text, sampled to be maximally representative of the language variety under consideration’ (McEnery and Wilson, 1996:24). Digital storage of corpora allows for a faster and more manageable analysis through the use of analytical tools offered by computer software (Mautner, 2009). Corpora are processed using Corpus Linguistics software, which offers both quantitative and qualitative insights on data. This includes analyzing frequencies, statistical significance, individual occurrences of words, collocations environments, relevant semantic patterns and discourse functions (Mautner, 2009).

2.3.1 Text collection and selection

In one of his greatest works, Bell (1991) advises that when gathering a corpus of media language, researchers should consider three main factors: the genres of media content, the media outlets to include and the time period. He categorizes news genres into service information, opinions and news (Bell, 1991). For this research, only hard news reports were included in the corpora, including some editorials, since they typically reflect the newspaper’s stance on a certain issue. This is because hard news is defined as the core of news product, with the other news copies measured against it (Bell, 1991). Opinion pieces

and reader letters were excluded from the sample. Moreover, since news contents are likely to be externally produced and it is impossible to discern their origin, the samples were not tailored by news source origin. The research, in fact, focuses on how actual representations affect readership rather than whether they are able to identify the origin of news.

As for the selection of news outlets, it was based on the researchers' own interests and the need to compare like with like. For instance, while *The Guardian* in the UK is a left leaning national prestige daily, there is no direct counterpart in the U.S. political landscape. Typical criteria to select news outlet include geographical area, audience size or type and publication time. This research compares different geographical areas, aiming at understanding how the representation of certain events varies across three distinct regions. In this sense, audience size and type were also crucial factors in selecting the newspapers for this study. In fact, the ultimate goal of this work is to assess whether the representation of events provided by five internationally prominent newspapers conveys any kind of ideological bias. However, this is not a goal per se but rather a first step in understanding how ideologically charged narratives may affect readers' behaviour and shape their beliefs on such events by providing frames of interpretation. For this reason, only high-circulation, elite newspapers were included in the research. Nevertheless, the newspapers were all treated equally during the analysis, regardless of their audience size or circulation.

The main source for the collection of data were the newspapers websites, which did not raise additional concerns about geographical distribution. In fact, these sites are accessible to readers in their respective countries and beyond. Additionally, while some newspapers' websites have separate national and international domains, this research focused on articles published on the national domains. This decision was made because part of the study aims to link the newspapers' modalities of event representation to their national sociopolitical contexts. Bringing all these elements together, the corpus of this research consists of hard news reports on specific topic (including editorials, but excluding opinion pieces and letters), published online by UK, Arab or US news outlets. These articles were drawn from national editions published between 6 a.m. and midnight, Monday to Sunday, over a six-month period from October 7, 2023 to April 7, 2024.

2.3.1.1 Sampling

When building a corpus, the first step is always to check the availability of the data. That was easily accomplished by checking the newspapers' websites. Then it is essential to limit the research to a single genre or subgenre – in this case, news reports and specifically hard news. This was to sample only part of what was initially identified, to better suiting the purpose of the research. As for the collection of the texts, I used the top-down approach as explained by Mautner (2009) in one of his most famous articles. I started from the realm of all the possible texts, and then I progressively narrowed down the number of the texts until saturation was reached. This approach is tailored to obtain specialized, topic-oriented and diachronic corpora (Mautner, 2008), which was what this research required. Of course, the selection process was interrupted from time to time to run small-scale sample analyses. This allows the modification and/or creation of hypotheses, which are then going to inform the next step of the analysis. Additionally, it prevents the cherry-picking of data, while also avoiding going down a dead end. Furthermore, since different kinds of contents are published on different days of the week, reflecting a weekly cycle activity, the sample does not contain news published on consecutive days of the week or even consecutive news published within the same day. In fact, this kind of sampling is more likely to skew the data by over-representing certain kinds of contents (Bell, 1991). This happens because major events might occur that skew the news contents for days or even weeks; or simply because different kinds of contents are published on different days of the week (Bell, 1991). To overcome this issue, content analysts suggest including every second day of the news week in the analysis, if the sample only cover a month, which actually means 15 days of coverage. This method of sampling seems to reflect content proportions that are extremely similar to those of the entire month (Mintz, 1949 cited by Bell, 1991: 23). Finally, a last check was required to ensure that there were no identical or almost identical repeats of news items, as they may bias the quantitative analysis of certain linguistic features (Bell, 1991).

To sum up, for this study the data were drawn from five corpora of news reports, one per each newspaper website. Bell (1991) suggests that having access to the data through physical press archives or libraries. Of course, having digitally available data, through the news outlets' websites or online archives, made the collection process easier and faster. Websites took precedence over printed news not only because they were more accessible,

but also because several reports indicate that the use of internet to access news contents has been increasing in the last decades, especially in the countries this study focuses on (Global Web Index, 2019; Reuters Institute, 2024). Specifically, two US newspapers with divergent political stances were included in the analysis, namely *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*; and the same happened for the UK, including *The Guardian* and *The Times* in the sample. Instead, to represent the most followed English-language news service in the Arab world the study relied on the *Al Jazeera English website*. Each corpus contains 150 news reports on the 2023-2024 Israeli-Palestinian conflict, from October 7 to April 7. Fifteen articles were extracted from the corpora, five per each corpus, to undergo further qualitative analysis.

2.4 Methodological framework of this study

2.4 Choice of Newspapers to Study

For this research, the news website of *The Guardian*, *The Times*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *Al Jazeera* have been selected as representatives of British, U.S. and Arab media. This selection was based on several criteria, including average daily circulation, trustworthiness, political orientation, long-standing tradition and international reputation as high-quality press. One of the research questions tries to explain if and how the political orientation of these newspapers may influence their representation of the events. For this reason, also the newspapers' political orientation was a significant criterion in the selection process. The following paragraphs will provide a brief historical account of each newspaper, including details on their readership and reputation. Finally, a review of previous research concerning their coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will be included as well.

2.5 Background to the selected newspapers

2.5.1 The Guardian

2.5.1.1 Historical background

The Guardian is one of the most prestigious daily British newspapers published in London and Manchester. It is owned by *the Guardian Media Group*, whose sole stakeholder is The Scott Trust, founded in 1936 (Bell, 1991). It was founded in 1821 in Manchester and was weekly published under the title of *The Manchester Guardian* until

1959. It became a daily newspaper after the abolition of the Stamp Tax in 1855. In 1905, after the death of its previous editor, John Edward Taylor, Charles Prestwich Scott bought *The Guardian*. Scott's 57-year long contribution made *The Guardian* into the nationally acclaimed newspaper we know today. In 1936, the paper was then acquired by The Scott Trust, which ensured the newspaper's editorial and financial independence (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020; Bell, 1991; Global Media Finances Map, 2024). In 1959 the paper came to be known as *The Guardian* to reflect its national readership and coverage (News Media Coalition, 2024). In 1995 *The Guardian* opened its first website, followed by a series of other sites, later merged into *The Guardian Unlimited*, the predecessor to today's theguardian.com (News Media Coalition, 2024). *The Guardian US*, *The Guardian Australia* and *The Guardian New Zealand* were founded respectively in 2011, 2013 and 2019.

2.5.1.2 Political orientation, readership and circulation

The Guardian's editorial stance is considered less conservative than that of its main competitors in London, namely *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Times* (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020). It is a left-leaning national prestige daily (Bell, 1991; All Sides, 2024; Ad Fontes, 2024), generally considered 'to represent the mainstream left of British political opinion' (Global Media Finances Map, 2024). Based on the latest data available from 2021, its average monthly circulation was equal to 3.2 million for print issues and 18.4 million in terms of digital readership (PAMCo, 2021). According to the 2024 Digital News Report by Reuters Institute, *The Guardian* has over 1 million paying supporters. It also scored high in reliability, with a 40.83 evaluation out of 64 in the most recent Ad Fontes' (2024) analysis. Moreover, according to the News Consumption Report by Global Web Index (2019), 48% of internet users described *The Guardian* as trustworthy. Among conservatives, the newspaper received a trustworthiness score of 31%, while 36% of Labour sympathizers expressed trust in its news reporting. Within the scope of this research, *The Guardian* emerged victorious in the comparison with *The Independent*. Unlike *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, founded in 1986, lacks both the historical depth and the prominence to significantly influence the British leftist ideological landscape, despite having quite similar trustworthiness scores (Reuters Institute, 2024).

2.5.1.3 *The Guardian and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict*

As for its coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Daphna Baram's *Disenchantment: The Guardian and Israel* (2008) serves an excellent starting point. In the foreword, Oxford Professor Avi Shlaim discusses how *The Guardian* has faced accusations from Israel's sympathizers of anti-Zionist or even antisemitic bias in its reporting of the conflict. Despite its more recent critical stance towards Israeli government policies, *The Guardian* has been undoubtedly linked to the British Zionist movement since its start. It is no mystery that *The Guardian* former owner, Charles P. Scott, was an ardent Zionist himself and played a key role in the diplomatic efforts leading to the Balfour Declaration in 1917. Baram (2008:39) defines Scott as "something of a father figure" for the Zionist British Palestine Committee, made up of the Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann and *The Guardian* journalists Henry Sacher, Samuel Herbert and John D. Sidebotham (Baram, 2008; Vercelli, 2020). C. P. Scott retired in 1929, and his successor was *de facto* William P. Crozier, who turned the paper into a tool for Zionist advocacy during the 1930s and the early 1940s (Baram, 2008). The next editor, Alastair Hetherington, guided the paper from 1956 to 1975, translating his personal support into the newspaper's editorial stance. The Six Day War in 1967 represented the turning point in the representation of Israel in *The Guardian*, even if what is said of the paper can also be extended to liberals and leftists in the UK at that time (Baram, 2008). In front of Israel's relentless annexation of Palestinian territories, disillusionment started to spread regarding the achievement of peace in the Middle East. This was especially evident in the paper's bitter disappointment during the invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and during the first and the second Intifadas (Baram, 2008). Similar developments occurred among members of the UK Labour Party: from the praise of a great socialist experiment in the 1940s (Vercelli, 2020) to disgust for Zionism in the 1980s (Baram, 2008). In conclusion, even if supporters on both sides of the conflict have accused the paper of hostility and misrepresentation, Baram's analysis (2008) revealed that, even if somewhat bias exists, *The Guardian* cannot be regarded as a Zionist or antisemitic newspaper. In fact, it is true that more recent editors have been less partial towards Israel, though nonhostile, and that efforts were perfused to achieve a fair and balanced representation of both sides of the conflict. Still some flaws remain, including the lack of Palestinian voices from Gaza, the West Bank and Israel.

2.5.2 *The Times*

2.5.2.1 *Historical background*

The Times is one of Britain's oldest and most influential newspapers. Together with *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph*, it enjoys wide recognition both in the UK and abroad (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2024). Founded in 1785 by John Walter as *The Daily Universal Register*, it started as a penny newspaper, beginning to publish commercial news and notices in 1788 (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2024), when its title was changed into *The Times* (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2024). The paper's international reputation as Britain's daily historical journal was established under the guide of John Walter II and John Walter III between 1803 and 1896 (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2024). During Thomas Barnes' tenure from 1817 to 1841, *The Times* earned the nickname of '*The Thunderer*' (The Times, 2024) for its independent and influential stance, becoming Britain's leading newspaper. After turbulent years, from 1908 the paper was made financially secure by Alfred Harmsworth's sensationalist press, though at the expense of its editorial reputation (The Times, 2024; Encyclopedia Britannica, 2024). Harmsworth's editorial intervention transformed the paper into a modern publication, but also shifted its focus toward journalism, seen as a commercially driven form of mass entertainment (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2024). From 1952 to 1967, Sir William Haley became editor of *The Times*, which at that time was judged the most important and influential position in British journalism. He introduced several editorial changes, including permanently putting news on the newspaper's front page, starting from 1966 (The Times, 2024). In the same year, the paper started to be published by *The Times Newspaper Ltd* under the ownership of Roy Thomson (The Times, 2024; Encyclopedia Britannica, 2024). In 1978 its publication was suspended due to issues between management and labour on the implementation of modern typesetting and printing equipment (The Times, 2024; Encyclopedia Britannica, 2024). Nonetheless, *The Times* maintained its reputation and continued to grow in the following years. In 1981 Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation acquired *The Times Newspaper* (The Times, 2024); later in 2013 ownership of the paper was transferred to the reconstituted News Corporation. As of today, *The Times* is owned and published by News UK, a subsidiary of News Corporation that also owns *The Sunday Times* and *The Sun* (The Times, 2024). During his tenure, Murdoch applied a proven editorial formula

for boosting newspaper sales, with a conservative editorial line that emphasized crime, sex and scandals through bold headlines (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2024).

2.5.2.2 *Political orientation, readership and circulation*

The Times' editorial stance is leaning right (YouGov, 2017; MBFC, 2022). According to Media Bias Fact Check (2022), it rates high in factual reporting and credibility. *The Times*, together with the *Sunday Times*, counts a total of 558.000 digital-only subscribers in 2024 (Reuters Institute, 2024), while in 2021 its daily average circulation was equal to 365,880 copies. It also ranks 4th among the most popular printed newspapers in the UK and 3rd among the most trusted (Reuters Institute, 2024). Needing a newspaper with a lean-right political stance for this research, trustworthiness was the deciding factor. Both the *Sun* and *The Daily Mail* rank higher in popularity, but their fame is not matched in terms of trustworthiness. The *Daily Mirror* barely reaches 22%, while the *Sun* stops at 15%; respectively, 48% and 63% of newspaper readers do not trust these publications, compared to only 20% for *The Times* (Reuters Institute, 2024).

2.5.2.3 *The Times and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict*

Despite it being one of the most reliable British publications, little research explored *The Times*' stance on one of the most relevant conflicts on the geopolitical chessboard. The author of this text could only gain access to Ruth Sanz Sabido's work on the representation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the British press, which traces the narrative of the conflict diachronically from 1948 to 2009. While the author's main objective was 'to identify the extent to which (post)colonial history and responsibilities are visible in British contemporary discourse about the conflict' (Sanz Sabido, 2015: 5), the article also offered some insights into *The Times*' editorial position. In the reporting of the events occurred in 1948, the British press, including *The Times*, tended to represent the British as right and the Zionists as 'fundamentally wrong' (Sanz Sabido, 2015: 16). It was achieved through a narrative that forgot to mention the colonial implications of the British Mandate in Palestine, which was never presented as a colonial endeavour (Sanz Sabido, 2015). However, there were instances of Jewish settlements referred to as colonies. In 1967, when it was clear that Israel was judged the legitimate power in the conflict, the words 'Jews' and 'Jewish' left room for the more frequently used 'Israel', implicitly reinforcing Israel's legitimation as a state (Sanz Sabido, 2015). In this corpus,

the lack of historical contextualization coexisted with the recontextualization of previous stages of the conflict (Sanz Sabido, 2015). In 1987, Sabido's analysis (2015) revealed an increased frequency of the term 'Palestinians', suggesting that Palestinians gained visibility, even if they were consistently portrayed in a negative light. Also in this case, historical decontextualization takes the lead, as media representation fails to address the historical causes and consequences of the reported events (Sanz Sabido, 2015). In her 2009 corpus, Sabido showed how reference to the British Mandate of Palestine was largely ignored by *The Guardian*, the *Daily Herald*, the *Sun* and the *Daily Mirror*, but mentioned twice by *The Times*. However, this historical reference is strongly decontextualized and offered without further details on the British role in the early developments of the conflict (Sanz Sabido, 2015).

2.5.4 Al Jazeera English

2.5.4.1 Historical background

Al Jazeera is a public news network established in 1996 in Doha, Qatar, by the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad ibn Khalifah Al Thani (Amireh, 2023). In 2006, *Al Jazeera English* was launched, followed by *Al Jazeera America* in 2013, although the latter stopped broadcasting in 2016, continuing its services online (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2024). With over 70 bureaus worldwide, *Al Jazeera* reaches audiences in more than 150 countries (Al Jazeera, 2024). In 2017 following the airing of an investigative report of Britain's Israel lobby, the Ofcom –Britain's Office of Communications– received complaints from British supporters of Israel. The network was accused of antisemitism, but the quarrel was cleared by Ofcom's declaration that it was not antisemitic but was, in fact, investigative journalism.

2.5.4.2 Political orientation, readership and circulation

Al Jazeera has been classified as a lean-left and highly popular source of news by Media Bias Fact Check, AllSides and Ad Fontes Media. In particular, Ad Fontes Media assigns a significant score of 41.48 out of 64 in reliability to the network's website. In addition, apart from the Arab world, *Al Jazeera* enjoys considerable readerships in UK, Croatia, Kenya, Morocco, Nigeria and South Africa (Reuters Institute, 2024).

2.5.4.3 *Al Jazeera English and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict*

Al Jazeera describes itself as “an independent news organization funded in part by the Qatari government”³. However, despite claims of independence, it has often been considered as “the mouthpiece for the Qatari government” (Abdulmajid, 2019), particularly in its Arabic-language broadcast, where it has shown reluctance to criticize Qatari policies (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2024). *Al Jazeera* is considered a pro-Arab platform, critical toward the Israeli occupation (MBFC, 2023). It asserts that many of its journalists and collaborators have paid the price for truthful reporting with their lives (Amaireh, 2023), due to being targeted by the IDF⁴. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)⁵ and Reporters Without Borders (RSF)⁶ support *Al Jazeera*’s claim and have stated that the scale and the circumstances of the killings are evidence that reporters in Israel, Gaza and West Bank are being targeted. Israel rejects such claims. According to the CPJ, at least five journalists were directly targeted by Israeli forces, including *Al Jazeera* reporters and collaborators Homza Al Dahdouh, Ismail Al Ghouls and Rami Al Refee. In this sense, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) informs that some of the target killings of journalists in Gaza are currently the subject of a complaint before the International Criminal Court (ICC). Also, to provide the reader with a complete picture of *Al Jazeera*’s engagement with the coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Israeli shut down of the *Al Jazeera* network should be mentioned. The decision raised concerns among several global organizations dedicated to protecting journalists. In particular, the Foreign Press Association (FPA)⁷ strongly contrasted Israel’s decision to shutter the network, warning that it could set a dangerous precedent for arbitrary suppression of news agencies at the expense of the freedom of press and information.

³ <https://www.aljazeera.com/about-us> (accessed September 5, 2024)

⁴ <https://network.aljazeera.net/en/press-releases/al-jazeera-condemns-assassination-hamza-aldahdooh> (accessed September 5, 2024)

⁵ <https://cpj.org/2024/09/journalist-casualties-in-the-israel-gaza-conflict/> (accessed September 5, 2024)

⁶ <https://rsf.org/en/ismail-al-ghouls-killing-targeted-and-discredited-palestinian-journalists-suffer-double-punishment> (accessed September 5, 2024)

⁷ <https://foreignpressassociation.online/2024/05/06/statement-by-the-foreign-press-association-regarding-al-jazeera-closure-may-5-2024/> (accessed September 5, 2024)

2.5.5 *The New York Times*

2.5.5.1 Historical background

The New York Times is one of the world's most widely-read newspapers. Considered the US newspaper of records, it counts more than 130 Pulitzer Prizes. But this kind of success was not always at its reach. In fact, it was founded in 1851 as a penny paper with a restrained and objective reporting style. Its aim was to reach a cultured, intellectual readership instead of mass audiences. However, this editorial model proved unhelpful against the paper's competitors. In 1896, just when *The Times* was about to drown in its financial issues, Adolph Simon Ochs decided to acquire the paper and changed its fate. During Ochs' tenure, *The New York Times*' motto was 'all the news that fits to print', as he introduced full reporting of the news of the day, maintained and emphasized international coverage, left out the fiction from the paper, and refused what he considered dishonest advertisements. He also saved the paper for a second time, bringing back its price to a penny and attracting a segment of the market of his more sensationalist competitors. During these years, the paper became an internationally praised and respected daily. After Ochs' death in 1935, his son-in-law, Arthur Hays Sulzberger, took over the leadership of the newspaper, until in 1961 his son, Orvil Dryfoos, succeeded him. *The New York Times* definitively enhanced its prestige and reputation, providing its readership with an exhaustive coverage of the Titanic's tragedy. In 1971 the paper published a series of controversial reports based on the so-called Pentagon Papers on the U.S. engagement in the Vietnam war, which led to the newspaper's first Pulitzer Prize in 1972. In 1995 *The Times*' online edition was launched and, starting from 1977, colour photography was included in the print editions. In 2006 the company launched *The Times* Reader, allowing its subscribers to download the paper, while in 2011 it introduced a subscription plan for its digital edition, with limited free access to its content.

2.5.5.2 Political orientation, readership and circulation

As for its political stance, *The New York Times* is a leaning-left publication according to several studies and analyses (AllSides, 2024; MBFC, 2022). It scores 41.95 out of 64 in reliability (AllSides, 2024) and rated high in factual reporting and reliability in 2022 (MBFC, 2022). Counting over 10 million subscribers in 2024, it is the first newspaper for weekly usage, both in its printed format and online. In fact, it is the first U.S. newspaper

for weekday circulation, with 555,200 copies (Statista, 2023). As if it was not enough, when the researchers of the Reuters Institute asked their U.S. interviewees to name a news brand, *The New York Times* was the first and only newspaper to be mentioned (Reuters Institute, 2024). It does not disappoint even in terms of trustworthiness, being the most trusted newspaper among U.S. citizens, with 50% of the Reuters Institute sample relying on its high standards of journalism (Reuters Institute, 2024).

2.5.5.3 *The New York Times and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict*

The New York Times' engagement with the coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been largely explored in different fields, particularly within that of discourse and content analysis (Slater, 2007; Dente Ross, 2003; Jackson, 2023). In his qualitative comparison between *The New York Times* and *Haaretz*, one of the most popular Israeli publications, Jerome Slater (2007:119) stated that U.S. media in general, including *The Times*, "rarely are as critical of Israeli policies as are the Israeli media". With reference to a number of historical events, including the failure of Camp David negotiations and the 2005 Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, *The Times* has continued to cover the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from a pro-Israel stance, both in its editorials and in its news coverage (Slater, 2007). Slater (2007) also emphasized an improvement in the coverage of the occupation on Palestine starting from 2005, even if some subtle distortion remained. For instance, even when critical of Israel policies, the paper typically downplays the criticism with even stronger criticism of the Palestinians, represented as the only responsible for the failure of the peace process. This effect is achieved by overlooking historical accounts and thus the distinctions between the occupier and the occupied (Slater, 2007). Similar results emerged from Dente Ross's research (2003) on *The Times* editorials after the 9/11. She stated that *The New York Times* lack of editorial support for the Palestinians could be evidence of the paper's embracement of U.S. political interests (Dente Ross, 2003). Jackson (2023), instead, focused on a large-scale content analyses of the news report on the two Palestinian Intifadas issued by *The New York Times*. She claims that during the First Intifada the NYT staff overall aligned with Israel's perspectives and claims. For instance, the Executive Director of the paper himself admitted in his memoir that he wrote many of the NYT commentaries "from a pro-Israel perspective" (Frankel, 1999:401). Jackson's main findings suggest that the NYT referred to Palestinians in the passive voice

more than twice as often as they did Israelis, and in more negative tones. This has the rhetorical effect of minimizing the responsibility of Israeli aggressors, which aligns with Zaher's (2009) and Kandil's (2009) findings.

2.5.6 The Wall Street Journal

2.5.6.1 Historical background

Founded by Charles H. Dow of Dow Jones & Company to primarily cover business and financial news, *The Wall Street Journal* was first published in 1889 (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2024). Since the start, its accuracy and depth of analysis granted the paper respect and success. It was only after World War II that it expanded beyond business and economic news, starting to print two feature articles on page one. As for today, the paper covers a much broader range of topics, including politics, general and foreign news. While its print edition still exists, the paper centred its business model on digital subscriptions, reaching 3.5 million at the beginning of 2024 (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2024). In 2007 the News Corporation, owned by Rupert Murdoch, acquired the Dow Jones & Company, publisher of The Journal (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2024). Later, in 2013 the corporation decided to divide its print and television and film holdings into different conglomerates; and the ownership of the paper was transferred to the reconstituted News Corporation, much like what happened to *The Times* (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2024).

2.5.6.2 Political orientation, readership and circulation

The Wall Street Journal is considered a centre-right publication (AllSides, 2024; Ad Fontes, 2024; MBFC, 2022). It scores 43.33 in reliability according to public benefit corporation Ad Fontes Media (2024). In addition, in 2022 Media Bias Fact Check classified *The Journal's* reporting as mostly factual and highly reliable. It counts more than 10 million subscribers in total, with loyal worldwide readerships (Reuters Institute, 2024). *The Journal* also ranks 4th as the most weekly used both in the category of printed and online newspapers. Lastly, it rates high in trustworthiness, being the 2nd most trusted newspaper by US respondents in the latest Reuters Institute Digital News Report (2024). According to Statista (2023), its average weekday print circulation amounted to 555,200 copies.

2.5.6.3 The Wall Street Journal and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

In the coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict *The Wall Street Journal* tends to reflect its broader editorial tone of centrist-to-conservative values, with a focus on Western security interests. Throughout the years, the paper tended to frame Israel's military response as directly related to its national security, emphasizing Israel's right to self-defence. On some occasions, it has raised concerns on the impact of Israel's military action on civilians and infrastructure in Gaza. On the contrary, Palestinian military groups are generally portrayed in a negative light whose tactics complicate efforts towards peace.

2.6 Historical context

For the purpose of this study, some historical references are necessary. However, it should be acknowledged that the following historical overview of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is only meant to provide contextual information to the end of what is primarily a linguistic study. This account is by no means exhaustive and should not be considered as a comprehensive history of the conflict. To better contextualize the linguistic analysis of news reports, and without delving into excessive detail, this historical overview will start with the origins of modern Zionism in the late 19th century and end with a brief summary of the ongoing conflict in the 21st century.

2.6.1 From the late 19th century to 1948

2.6.1.1 The rise of the Zionist movement

The roots of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict trace back to the late 19th century, when ideas of equality among all citizens before the State were already emerging. This led to several liberal innovations, including the overcoming of segregationist policies, which, for the Jews living in Europe, meant the introduction of the so-called 'acts of emancipation' and the abolition of Jewish ghettos (Vercelli, 2020).

In contrast to the liberal innovations in Western Europe, the situation in the Russian Empire was significantly different. Here, socio-economic underdevelopment would prove to be the Tsar's Achilles' heel. In the 19th century, 80% of Jewish people lived in Europe and around 35% of them lived under the Tsarist Empire (Vercelli, 2020:33), serving as a buffer between Russia and the West. The pervasive antisemitism of the Tsarist Russia actually paved the path for the rise of the Zionist movement, also through a gradual

process of Jewish politicization. In this context of persecution, the Judaism evolved into a cultural-historical category of its own. Although this did not necessarily lead to the birth of Jewish nationalism, it certainly made it possible (Gelvin, 2007:54 cited by Vercelli, 2020:19). Between 1881 and 1914, around 2,5 million Jews migrated from Russia because of the so-called pogroms⁸. Of those, 70,000 fled to the Ottoman Palestine (Vercelli, 2020).

At this point, the need of a land where the Jews could gather became more and more a concern for the Jewish community worldwide, especially in light of rising nationalist sentiments around the world. In response to these growing needs, Leon Pinsker published *Auto-Emancipation* in 1882, which attributed the persistency of antisemitism to the lack of ‘national home’ for the Jews (Vercelli, 2020). On the same path, in 1896, the Austro-Hungarian journalist Theodor Herzl published *The State of the Jews*, which became the *opera summa* of the nascent Zionist movement (Vercelli, 2020; Zaher, 2009). In his book, Herzl viewed the establishment of a Jewish state as the only viable solution to the problem of antisemitism. However, in its early stages Zionism remained a marginalized movement: many Jews living in Europe were already integrated into their society and showed little interest in the Zionist project. Meanwhile, those living in the Ottoman Empire feared potential repercussions from the Sublime Porte. Building on Herzl’s renewed politic agenda, the first Zionist Congress convened in Basle in 1897, marking a significant step forward for the Zionist movement. The World Zionist Organization, the Jewish National Fund, a national anthem and a national flag came as products of this meeting (Vercelli, 2020; Zaher, 2009). The Congress also adopted a political programme with the aim of securing a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine (Zaher, 2009).

2.6.1.2 *The British Mandate in Palestine*

In the meanwhile, the Ottoman Empire was weakening, and Palestine was becoming the centre of competing territorial claims and political interests (Beinin and Hajjar, 2014). Britain, interested in the dismantlement of the Sublime Porte, moved on intricate diplomatic paths, to say the least. During World War I, the British instigated an Arab

⁸ ‘Mob attack, either approved or condoned by authorities, against the persons and property of a religious, racial or national minority. The term is usually applied to attacks on Jews in the Russian Empire in the late 19th century and early 20th century’. (Encyclopaedia Britannica, accessed September 7, 2024).

revolt against the Ottoman Empire, which was aligned with Germany in the war (Beinin and Hajjar, 2014; Vercelli, 2020). In exchange for this military action, Henry McMahon, the British High Commissioner in Egypt, promised to Husayn ibn Ali, the patriarch of the Hashemite, that it would support the establishment of an independent Arab state in the Ottoman territories, including Palestine (Beinin and Hajjar, 2014). It should be mentioned, however, that the details of how it would have happened were never properly defined (Vercelli, 2020). When the Arab revolt defeated the Ottomans, Britain took control over its territories. Nevertheless, Britain made other promises: in 1917, thanks to Weizmann's and C. P. Scott's diplomatic work, Britain's Foreign Minister, Lord Arthur Balfour, issued the Balfour declaration, supporting the establishment of 'a Jewish national home in Palestine' (Beinin and Hajjar, 2014; Baram, 2008; Vercelli, 2020). Vercelli (2020:38) argues that it was the first time that a European government had stood in favour of the Zionist movement. Still a third promise bound the British, that was, the 1916 Sykes-Picot secret agreement, named after its signatories. This pact would carve up the provinces of the deceased Ottoman Empire and divide the control of the region (Beinin and Hajjar, 2014). According to Vercelli (2020:37), at this stage Palestine was not seen as a territory on its own but as a mere buffer to protect the Suez Canal. It should seem no mystery that such diverse interests on the same territories were to collide somehow.

At the San Remo conference in 1920 the League of Nations granted British quasi-colonial authority over the areas of today's Israel, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and Jordan (Beinin and Hajjar, 2014; Zaher, 2009). The next year, the region was divided in two: the Emirate of Transjordan, the eastern part of the Jordan river, and the Palestine Mandate, the western part of the Jordan river (Beinin and Hajjar, 2014). The Arabs felt betrayed as no Arab independent state was created, contrary to what Britain had promised (Vercelli, 2020; Zaher, 2009). At the same time, the Jewish settlers kept purchasing land in Palestine, fuelling fear among Palestinian Arabs about the potential establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine (Beinin and Hajjar, 2014; Zaher, 2009). Land purchases from absentee Arab owners continued in the 1920s, and so did the eviction of the people who lived there (Zaher, 2009; Beinin and Hajjar, 2014). In 1928 Arabs and Jews clashed in Jerusalem over their religious rights on the Wailing Wall, resulting in hundreds of casualties for both sides in a single week (Zaher, 2009; Beinin and Hajjar, 2014). When Hitler became the Chancellor of Germany in 1933, European Jewish immigration kept

increasing more and more, eventually leading to more land expropriations and Jewish settlements (Zaher, 2009; Bein and Hajjar 2014). This rising tension fuelled the Arab revolt of 1936 and 1939, which was suppressed with the help of the Zionist militias and the complicity of the other Arab states (Bein and Hajjar, 2014). In 1939, Britain issued the White Paper⁹, limiting future Jewish immigration and land purchases. This political statement marked the end of the British-Zionist alliance and opened a season of Zionist militant groups' attacks against both Britons and Arabs (Ovendale, 1999).

After the closure with the British, the Zionists focused on gaining the sympathy of the U.S. administration. At the end of the day, it was not difficult for the U.S. to identify themselves with Zionism, as Zionist projects somehow resembled those that the U.S. settlers enacted in the West. In this sense, Arabs were nothing more than aboriginal who need an introduction to the march of progress (Zaher, 2009). In 1941 the American Palestine Committee was founded, together with the Zionist emergency Council, which supported the establishment of a Jewish army and unrestricted Jewish immigration into Palestine (Ovendale, 1999). The next year, during the American Zionist Conference in New York, David Ben-Gurion succeeded to Weizmann in the leadership of the Zionist movement.

2.6.1.3 The United Nations Partition Plan

After World War II, Britain decided that it was not prepared to stand the Zionist attacks anymore and withdrew from Palestine, handing its future to the recently established United Nations in 1947 (Ovendale, 1999; Bein and Hajjar, 2014). The same year the UN founded the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) with the aim of compiling a report on the future of Palestine. Britain was not disinterested and probably hoped that the UN, once proved unable to reach a solution plan, would turn Palestine back to the British government as a UN trusteeship (Bein and Hajjar, 2014). The UN Partition Plan, voted in November 1947, divided the country into two states, one Arab and the other Jewish. The division happened in such a way that 'each state would have a majority of its population', with the area of Jerusalem and Bethlehem under international trusteeship

⁹Similar documents were issued before: in May 1922, when Britain reassured the Arab population that it was not considering the conversion of Palestine into a Jewish state; and in 1928, with the publication of the so-called Passfield White Paper, which imposed restrictions on Jewish immigration to the land of the Mandate (Zaher, 2009; Ovendale, 1999).

(Beinin and Hajjar, 2014:13; Ovendale, 1999). The Zionist, despite their private hopes to expand the borders assigned to the Jewish state, accepted the UN proposal, whereas the Palestinians Arabs and the neighbouring Arab states rejected the plan. Many argued that the question of Jewish statehood was on the international agenda solely due to Britain's permissive policies towards Zionist settlements, while, in fact, before 1947 the Jews only owned 10% of the Palestinian land, representing less than a third of its population. In addition, many Arabs complained about the fact that, according to the UN Partition Plan, the Jewish state would have been allotted around 56% of Palestine, including the most strategic areas (Ovendale, 1999), while the Arab state would only cover around 43% (Beinin and Hajjar, 2014). Clashes began between the Arab and the Jewish residents of Palestine soon after the adoption of the Plan. Zionist military forces, despite being numerically inferior, had a fully equipped, well-trained army that, by the spring of 1948, had already taken control of the territory allotted to the Jewish state by the UN (Beinin and Hajjar, 2014).

On May 15, 1948, Britain evacuated Palestine, while David Ben-Gurion proclaimed the state of Israel, provoking the military response of the neighbouring Arab states, namely Egypt, Syria and Lebanon. During the fighting, apart from their regular military force, the Zionists could also count on some thousands of fighters gathered around the Irgun and the Stern gangs, which terrorized the Arab population into leaving their homes and their lands (Ovendale, 1999). The 1949 armistice agreements in Rhodes divided the Palestine into three parts: 77% of the land was granted to the state of Israel (21% more than what had been envisioned by the UN), the area of East Jerusalem and what is now known as the West Bank were assigned to Jordan, while Egypt took control of the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula (Beinin and Hajjar, 2014; Ovendale, 1999). The Palestinian Arab state envisaged by the 1947 UN Plan was never established.

However, once Israel was proclaimed, sociodemographic imbalances between the Arab and the Jewish populations within the territories of the Mandate (Pappe, 2006) challenged the Zionists' intent of establishing a Jewish State. According to Morris (2007:39). Zionists had three main options: establishing a State where a settler minority ruled over an exploited native majority, following the South African model; dividing Palestine into two different States; or to transfer all or most Arabs outside Palestine. After the termination of Britain's Mandate of Palestine and Israel's declaration of independence

in 1948, the enactment of the Israeli *Plan Dalet* led to the systematic expulsion of the Palestinians from their land (Pappe, 2006; Morris, 2007), marking the beginning of today's Palestinian refugee problem.

2.6.2 From 1948 to the Six Day War (1967-1970)

Even if there was an armistice, after 1949 the conflict continued, with an escalating arms race. Following the 1955 Israeli raid of the Gaza Strip, Nasser decided to increase Egyptian military forces, but when the West refused to grant him a loan to proceed with his plan, he nationalized the Suez Canal to use its revenues instead (Zaher, 2009). The next year, Israel, France and Britain joined their military efforts against Nasser, and Israel captured Gaza and the Sinai Peninsula, even if it was forced to evacuate back to the armistice lines, under UN pressures. After the defeat, Nasser became convinced that he needed to maintain the peace on the borders with Israel. This is why, when the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) was formed in 1964, Nasser provided the PLO with instructors and equipment, while ruling out the possibility of a future war between the Arabs and Israel (Zaher, 2009). In the meanwhile, Nasser also lost the war over propaganda: while the Zionists succeeded in making the Western public forget the Irgun and Stern attacks against British and Arabs in Palestine, Nasser's anti-Western propaganda alienated him and Arabs from Western sympathies (Zaher, 2009). This granted Israel wide coverage on Western media, while little to no attention was reserved to Arab and Palestinian voices (Zaher, 2009). As for the PLO, despite diverse ideological orientation, the majority of Palestinians regarded it as their representative, in the person of Yasser Arafat, the leader of Fatah, the largest group in the Organization (Beinin and Hajjar, 2014).

When, in 1967, the Soviet Union misinformed the Syrian government about an imminent Israeli attack from the north (Beinin and Hajjar, 2014), Egyptian forces entered the Sinai Peninsula and occupied Sharm al-Shaykh, proclaiming the blockade of the Israeli port of Eilat. On June 5, 1967, Israel pre-emptively attacked Egypt and Syria, and then Jordan, which joined the fighting belatedly (Beinin and Hajjar, 2014). In less than a week, Israel captured the West Bank from Jordan, the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt and the Golan Heights from Syria (Beinin and Hajjar, 2014; Zaher, 2009).

On November 22, 1967, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 242, calling for Israeli withdrawal to its pre-June 1967 borders.

Following the Six Day War, Israel established a military administration over the OPT, whose practices included curfews, house demolitions, the closure of roads and imprisonment of Palestinian political activists (Beinin and Hajjar, 2014). This is because, according to Israel, Palestinian terrorism includes all forms of opposition to the occupation, including non-violence (Beinin and Hajjar, 2014:18). Also, Israel has repeatedly rejected the definition of the West Bank and Gaza as ‘occupied territories’, claiming that they were never part of any sovereign state. Thus, Israel is nothing but a legal administrator of territories whose status has yet to be determined (Beinin and Hajjar, 2014; Vercelli, 2020). The international community tend to reject these claims.

2.6.3 The Israeli-Palestinian conflict between the 1970s and the early 1990s

2.6.3.1 The October 1973 war

Nasser’s successor was appointed in 1970, in the person of Anwar El-Sadat, who declared to be open to sign a peace agreement with Israel in exchange for the Sinai Peninsula. At this point, for Sadat war was the only viable option, so that after obtaining military aid from Moscow, decided to cross the Suez Canal in October 1973. Joint attacks by Egypt and Syria were carried out in the Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Height, catching the Israeli military force off guards. A few days later, the U.S. and the Soviet Union drafted a ceasefire agreement, which was accepted by both sides (Zaher, 2009). It was broken later on by Israel; thus, another ceasefire was signed on October 24. After the war, the U.S. pursued a diplomatic strategy of bilateral agreements between the parts, trying to avoid more difficult discussions on other topics, such as the OPT. While in 1975 there was prospect of achieving a peace agreement, Sadat’s visit of Jerusalem in 1977 opened new paths for diplomatic negotiations.

In 1978, the U.S. President Jimmy Carter invited Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin to Camp David, in Maryland (Beinin and Hajjar, 2014), with the aim of signing two agreements: one between Egypt and Israel, the other on the possibility of granting autonomy to the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. The Egyptian-Israeli peace agreement was implemented, but the Palestinians and the other Arab states rejected

the agreement on Palestine, as it did not envisage Israeli withdrawal from the areas captured in 1967 or the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.

2.6.3.2 *The 1982 Lebanon invasion*

In 1982, the attempt to shoot the Israeli ambassador in London from part of a Palestinian militant group was used as a pretext by Israel to start a war against Lebanon. Soon enough after the invasion, Israel besieged and bombed Beirut for two months (Zaher, 2009; Vercelli, 2009). At this stage, Israel declared that the siege would end if the PLO fighters left Lebanon as surrenderers. This is why the PLO was expelled from Lebanon and relocate in Tunis (Beinin and Hajjar, 2014). Previously, fighting in Jordan between 1970 and 1971, had fled the PLO to Lebanon (Beinin and Hajjar, 2014). The arrival of the Palestinians in Lebanon, nevertheless, changed the composition of its population, shifting from a Christian majority to a Muslim majority population (Zaher, 2009). When this led to the civil war in 1975, the PLO engaged in the conflict.

The lowest point of this war were the Israeli attacks against the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila, which led to international condemnation. From a mediatic point of view, Israel may have won the war on the ground, but utterly lost the PR one. The invasion of Lebanon, even more than the 1967 war, induced disenchantment towards Israel political and military actions, especially from Western media.

2.6.3.3 *The first Intifada*

In December 1987, the Palestinian population of the OPT took out the streets in mass uprising against the Israeli occupation (Zaher, 2009; Beinin and Hajjar, 2014). In addition to the frustration caused by the expansion of Jewish settlements in the OPT and ongoing occupation practices, other key factors behind the uprisings included the failure of Arab states to address the Palestinian question and the PLO's inability to achieve Palestinian self-determination. Forty years after the *Nakba*, amid the ongoing occupation, a new generation was born out of relentless and constant disenchantment, seeing Israel not only as an occupier but also as a colonizer. The practice of *sumud*, perceived as resilience by the 'Nakba generation', was gradually redefined as an anticolonial mode of resistance (Awayed-Bishara, 2023; Vercelli, 2020). A more agentive, committed and fearless notion of *sumud* emerged, with the intent of undoing colonial fear (Awayed-Bishara, 2023).

This evolving definition of *sumud* – now seen as an active, anticolonial form of resistance – may have helped fuel a widespread engagement in the Intifada. As a result, the uprising involved thousands of people, many with no previous resistance experience, whose actions were often unorganized and unarmed (Zaher, 2009). At the beginning, the uprising involved acts of civil disobedience, such as general strikes, boycotts of Israeli products and refusal of paying taxes. Later on, it also included throwing stones and Molotov cocktails as well as the erection of barricades to limit the movements of Israeli military forces (Beinin and Hajjar, 2014). These actions were coordinated by popular committee under the patronage of the United National Leadership of the Uprising, made up by the four PLO parties (Fatah, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Palestine Peoples Party). Israel successfully suppressed the Intifada with force, power and blows. By 1990 most of the UNLU leaders had been imprisoned and the Intifada, despite continuing for several years, had lost its cohesive force (Beinin and Hajjar, 2014).

2.6.3.4 The Gulf War and the Madrid conference

In the meanwhile, political divisions within the Palestinian community escalated, especially the rivalry between the PLO and Hamas. In 1990 the Israeli Parliament passed a vote of no-confidence against Shamir's government, which resulted in institutional void and, thus, in a halt of negotiations (Zaher, 2009). After the killing of 7 Palestinians in Tel Aviv, the Intifada fuelled again, helped by Arafat's calling to protest.

In 1988 the Palestinian National Council (PNC), the Palestinian government in exile, gathered in Algeria. On this occasion, it proclaimed the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in the OPT, renounced terrorism and recognized the state of Israel. Nevertheless, Israel still rejected any possibility of negotiations with the PLO, amid U.S. compliance (Zaher, 2009; Beinin and Hajjar, 2014).

The US and Israeli inability to elaborate a meaningful response to PLO's moderation resulted in the group's opposition to the U.S. attack on Iraq in 1991 (Beinin and Hajjar, 2014). The Palestinian militant group supported Saddam Hussein, believing that the conflict was an opportunity to challenge the regional status quo and draw attention to the question of Palestine. However, this stance did not yield the desired results. While the Gulf war diverted the world's attention away from the Intifada, the PLO's support for

Saddam Hussein damaged its credibility, leading to diplomatic isolation (Zaher, 2009; Bein and Hajjar, 2014). On the other hand, after the Gulf war, the US needed to stabilize its position in the Middle East by sponsoring a resolution for the Arab-Israeli conflict. Hence, Bush administration convinced Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Shamir, to reopen negotiations with the Palestinians and the Arab states in the multilateral conference of Madrid, in 1991. Israel refused to talk with the PLO and asked for the Palestinian aspirations to independence and statehood not to be addressed during the talks. Little to no progress was made in Madrid, nor later in Washington.

2.6.4 From the Oslo Agreements to the early 2000s

2.6.4.1 A new political subject: Hamas

Years of crashed hopes left the Palestinians and the Israelis with deep disenchantment for diplomatic solutions (Vercelli, 2020). After the Soviet Union's dismantlement, between 1990 and 2000, Israel had to face the mass immigration of almost a million Russian Jews into the country (Vercelli, 2020). At the same time, radical Islam, in the political organization of Hamas, started gaining more and more consensus in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT). For the first time since its foundation, the PLO had to face a political competitor (Bein and Hajjar, 2014; Vercelli, 2020). Long before the Intifada, Israel itself financed Hamas' activities, with the purpose of fragmenting the Palestinian political landscape in the occupied territories (Bein and Hajjar, 2014). Eventually, the situation backfired, and the Israeli Prime Minister Rabin, elected in 1992, and his successors came to believe that Hamas would pose more of a threat to Israel than the PLO (Bein and Hajjar, 2014). Hamas came to adopt an orthodox anti-Zionist stance, considering the presence of a Zionist entity over Islam land as a historical usurpation. Its main objective was the creation of an Islamic republic, where the class struggle would be outpaced by the hybridization of jihad and Fatah's popular-nationalist discourse (Vercelli, 2020).

2.6.4.2 The Oslo agreements

The fear of radical Islam brought the Rabin government to reverse the Israeli refusal to entertain negotiations with the PLO. Thus, secret negotiations between the parts started in Oslo, in 1993. As a result, the same year, Israel and the PLO, under the sponsorship of

the Clinton administration, signed a Declaration of Principles in Washington (Oslo I), which included mutual recognition and the willingness to work together for the achievement of peace in the region. However, the parts failed in defining the details of this agreement, due to divergent views on its significance: for the Palestinians, it represented a first step towards the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, while for the Israeli, it was to bring about Palestinian self-rule but without any sovereignty (Zaher, 2009). Roy (1986) also emphasized that there was a power imbalance between the two parts, with the Israeli being the controllers of all aspects of the Palestinians' lives.

The principles of the Declaration were then implemented by the Cairo agreement, signed in 1944. It entailed the Israeli withdrawal from Jericho and Gaza, where the Palestinians obtained the control of internal affairs. In 1996, with the election of Benjamin Netanyahu as Israel's Prime Minister, negotiations reached a halt. The new PM strongly opposed the establishment of a Palestinian state, and, during the negotiations, he even authorized the building of new settlements in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem (Zaher, 2009; Beinin and Hajjar, 2014). According to Rabbani (2001), during the Oslo process (1993-2000), the settler population in Gaza and the west Bank increased by 77% and the Israeli settlements started to be connected by means of bypass roads, which further limited Palestinians' freedom of movement, not to mention the systemic humiliation that they had to undergo (Rabbani, 2001). These land expropriations were authorized by Netanyahu and continued to be so with Barak, elected as Israel's Prime Minister in 1999.

Despite Palestinians' hope for the achievement of statehood, the Oslo process proved to be fundamentally flawed once its outcomes became clear. Following the criteria of 'progressivity', the Oslo accords set up a negotiating process without specifying a proper outcome. This resulted into an Israeli interim withdrawal 'that left the Palestinian Authority with direct or partial control of some 40% of the west Bank and 65% of the Gaza Strip' (Beinin and Hajjar, 2014:25). These territories were basically small, non-contiguous enclaves under Israeli jurisdiction, as the latter controlled all Palestinians' key resources, especially water (Zaher, 2009).

2.6.4.3 Camp David II

In 2000, the U.S. President invited Barak and Arafat to Camp David, Maryland, with the purpose of concluding the negotiations, but the timing was less than ideal. Both sides

were pressured domestically not to make compromises, and their representatives were well-determined not to (Zaher, 2009; Bein and Hajjar, 2014). While the Palestinians asked for the dismantling of the Jewish settlements and a state in the OPT, Israel insisted that it would not withdraw to its pre-1967 borders and would annex blocs in the West Bank, as they contained 80% of the Jewish settlers (Zaher, 2009; Bein and Hajjar, 2014). The most critical points, however, were those concerning Jerusalem and the refugees – Israel did not want to relinquish control of East Jerusalem nor being held responsible for the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem (Bein and Hajjar, 2014). The divergence of opinion and views made it impossible to reach an agreement at the Camp David summit. However, while Arafat came back home with enhanced reputation for refusing to yield to American and Israeli pressure, Barak was harshly criticized for offering the Palestinians too much (Bein and Hajjar, 2014).

2.6.4.4 The Al-Aqsa Intifada

Both the Oslo delusion and Palestinian daily frustration and humiliations contributed to fuel the second Intifada in late 2000 (Bein and Hajjar, 2014; Vercelli, 2020). When, during a visit to Temple Mount, Likud's leader Ariel Sharon said that Israel would never give it up, Palestinian protests started in Jerusalem, only to spread to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Both sides employed greater force than they had during the first Intifada (1987-1991), throwing both Palestinians and Israelis into a spiral of self-perpetuating violence. Israel's attempts to control demonstrations of unarmed Palestinians attracted the criticism of the United Nations, which approved a resolution, with the abstention of the U.S., a month into the uprising. When the world's attention, especially the U.S., diverted to the 9/11 attack, Israel raided Jericho on September 12 and Gaza three days later. It can be argued that the attacks are interestingly timed. Despite leaving 9/11 out of their sample, it is interesting to note what Durante and Zhuravskaya (2018) suggest. That is specifically that Israeli authorities time their attacks to minimize their coverage in next-day newscasts with the aim of reducing its negative impact on the perception of Israel's image by US public opinion (Durante and Zhuravskaya, 2018). They also added that, while there is evidence of strategic timing for predictable newsworthy events and for military actions likely to generate criticisms, there is not for urgent matters (Durante and

Zhuravskaya, 2018). The negative correspondence between US news and Israeli attacks, instead, is unmatched for Palestinian attacks (Durante and Zhuravskaya, 2018).

Attacks on both parts continued throughout 2002 and 2003, despite the U.S. pressured for a ceasefire. In 2003 the Bush administration announced the Road Map Plan for the peace in Middle East, which for the first time after years envisioned a Palestinian state. In the meanwhile, Israel started to build a security fence around the Palestinian territories in the West Bank, despite international criticism. The same year, the UN General Assembly issued the ES-10/13 resolution, calling for the fence dismantling. In 2004, Israel Prime Minister announced a unilateral disengagement plan from all Israeli settlements in Gaza in exchange for the formal annexation of all the Jewish settlements in the West Bank. Israel, thus, continued its expansion through house demolitions in the West Bank and Jerusalem. In August 2005, Jewish settlers started to evacuate the Gaza Strip, while Israel continued to bomb targets in Gaza and to raid the West Bank. When Hamas won Palestinian parliamentary elections in 2006, Israel ruled out any possibility of dialogue, while the US and the EU stopped sending financial aid to the Palestinian Authority. Meanwhile, in the attempt to attack Hamas all crossings to Gaza were closed, resulting in a severe shortage in food and medicines.

2.6.6 The Israeli-Palestinian conflict today

2.6.6.1 The expansion of Israeli settlements

The early 2000s seemed marked by the disenchantment towards the possibility of a peace agreement. It was a low-intensity conflict, with an alternation of violent uprisings and periods of relative tranquillity. What weighed most at this stage of the conflict was the increase of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, especially along the Green Line. In 2020, the West Bank counted 421,000 Israeli settlers; more than 42,000 people had established themselves in the Golan heights, 300,000 in the East neighbourhoods of Jerusalem (Vercelli, 2020). The 1979 resolution by UN Security Council declared that

the policy and practice of Israel in establishing settlements in the Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied since 1967 have no legal validity and constitute a serious obstruction to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. (Security Council Resolution 449, 1979)

Israel repeatedly contested allegations of violating the Geneva Conventions and established criteria to define the legal status of Jewish settlements in the West Bank. These settlements were generally considered as lacking sovereignty, meaning there was no state that could claim their restitution. Israel can thus claim its right to self-defence over these territories, as it maintains effective control over them.

During the last thirty years, Israel built its reputation as the start-up nation of the Middle East, claiming a leading role in scientific innovation. In 2020, its population was over 9 million people, with a majority of Jewish citizens (around 80%) and a minority Arab population (20%). In 2018, 2 million people of Arab descent lived in the West Bank and 1,85 million in the Gaza strip. In the OPT (West Bank and Gaza), 83% of the population is Arab (99% in Gaza), with the remaining portion of the population being Jewish settlers (Vercelli, 2020). In more economical terms, while Israel experienced economic growth and wealth, starting from 1980 the economy of the OPT was irremediably damaged by a combination of factors, including Israeli policies of fragmentation of the OPT, institutional corruption and population growth. The situation in Gaza has worsened with the election of Hamas as Palestinians' political leader and thus the blockade of the economic funds from the quartet (UN, US, EU and Russia) and from the Arab League, as well as the naval blockade imposed by Israel. In the meanwhile both Israel and Egypt have built barricades at the borders with the Gaza strip, further limiting Palestinians freedom of movement. All these factors progressively made the Gazan population more and more dependent from international aid agencies.

2.6.6.2 A series of diplomatic efforts (2007-2016)

Within this socio-demographic framework, the Bush administration sponsored the Annapolis Conference in 2007, wanting to achieve a two-States solution, but nothing resulted from this attempt, if not a joint statement. At this stage, violence between the two sides had already outpaced diplomatic action, leading to terrible death tolls, especially from the Palestinian side. Instead, the following attempts of negotiations sponsored by the Barak administration between 2009 and 2017 had to face the political stalemate among Jerusalem, Ramallah and Gaza. At that point, diplomatic relations were needed not only between the two conflicting parts but also within the

Palestinian factions, given the raising tension between Fatah and Hamas. It was not the impossibility to negotiate, but the inability of keep faith to their commitment that led to the failure of the 2010 Sharm Al-Shaykh summit. Between 2008 and 2020 at least six IDF military campaigns have been launched. Despite Obama's intentions of assigning high priority to the conflict, no significant advancement has been made. While the NPA, weakened by internal fighting, has been asking more and more for international community interventions, Israel has given precedence to bilateral diplomatic relations, deeming traditional diplomacy ineffective. At this stage, while the hope for the two-State solution faded, the attempts of reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas also did so. In 2012 the UN General Assembly accorded to Palestine non-member observer State status. In the stalemate of diplomacy advancements, the both the Jordan and the Washington summit failed. In the meanwhile, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu assured that Israel's territorial protection, especially from Hamas, is the number one priority on the political agenda. In these circumstances, violence between both sides kept increasing. The high death toll of civilian casualties caused harsh criticisms towards Israel for its disproportionate use of force. The last diplomatic act of Obama administration was the abstention of the U.S. representative to the resolution that condemned Israeli expansion in the West Bank.

2.6.6.3 The Trump administration (2017-2019)

Starting from 2017, despite confirming U.S. traditional support to Jerusalem, the Trump administration lacked a clear vision on the future of the negotiations. Already in 2017, the Russian Federation had recognized West Jerusalem as Israel's capital, while reaffirming its engagement for the achievement of an agreement, which would proclaim East Jerusalem the capital of a nascent Palestinian State. In the same year, the U.S. embassy was moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, not without international concerns, achieving the official recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, one and indivisible. In May 2017, Hamas declared its openness to the establishment of a temporary Palestinian State in the OPT as an intermediary step to the liberation of Palestine in its entirety. It still did not recognize Israel's right to existence. The so-called 'Trump plan' for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict entailed the closure of the

Palestinian diplomatic office in Washington and the 2019 declaration, according to which Jewish settlements in the West Bank are not illegal for the U.S. administration (Vercelli, 2020). They suggested that the Palestinians accepted a residual portion of territories for the establishment of an independent State, without militias, economically sustained by the U.S. and the international community. NPA firmly rejected this proposal.

2.6.6.4 The 2018 Israeli Basic Law

In 2018, the Israeli Knesset approved Basic Law, of constitutional nature, on 'Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people'. This choice officially identified its Jewishness as the essential trait of Israel's national identity, opening what Raffaella del Sarto (2007) calls cleavages, probably with reference to Rokkan's theory of cleavages (1968). According to Del Sarto (2007), Israel's systematic inability to make significant advancements regarding the Palestinian question may be linked to its unresolved national identity. Achieving peace with the Palestinians, and thus Israel's withdrawal from the OPT, would inevitably force a fundamental shift in how Israel perceives its national identity, requiring the country to prioritize one identitarian element over the others. This would likely provoke strong reactions within its political and social spheres. In addition, given the polarized nature of Israeli politics and society, often resulting in weak coalition governments, political decisions on identity-related issues either produce political oscillations or result in a decisional stalemate (Del Sarto, 2007).

2.6.6.5 The ongoing conflict

As of today, violence and attacks between both sides of the conflict have continued, reaching a critical turning point on October 7, when Hamas killed around 1,200 Israelis and kidnapped more than 250¹⁰. Although some have misleadingly portrayed this event as isolated and unexpected, in fact, it significantly escalated already-existing violence to a tragic new level. On October 11, the Israeli government declared the complete siege of Gaza, preventing electricity, food and fuel from reaching the strip. Palestinians were instructed to flee southward in anticipation of

¹⁰ This data refers to Israeli officials' declarations following the attack.

imminent Israeli attacks. The Israel Defence Force (IDF) has been targeted hospitals and refugee camps, claiming they are being used as Hamas operational centres. This has fuelled pro-Palestine protesters to take to the street worldwide against the massacre in Gaza. The death toll has been one of the highest in decades for Palestinians in Gaza. To further complicate the situation, tension in the Middle East has also risen between Israel and the Houthi militias in Yemen, the Hezbollah and Iran. At the time of writing this thesis, the violence between the parties continues unabated.

Chapter 3

Data analysis

This chapter presents the results of the study and tries to answer to the research questions. It first offers some general statistical information on the data, as well as the information on the notions which the analysis focused: lexical choices and transitivity structures. Then it moves to the analysis proper, presenting the results one newspaper at a time. Every national (or regional) press is analyzed separately to facilitate the comparison between the national newspapers with divergent political orientation (*The Guardian* and *The Times*; *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*). Final conclusions are drawn at the end of the chapter, trying to compare all five newspapers and give an overall assessment of the state of the art on the coverage of the 2023-2024 Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

3.1 Lexical choices and Transitivity

3.1.1 Lexical analysis

One of the linguistic levels that this thesis wants to examine is that of lexis. The main function of lexis is to enable people to name and recognize the things that surround them. Such nominations and attribution reveal how people see things and how they represent them, and they may differ according to the ideologies of different groups of people. As a result, one may argue that the analysis of the lexis used by journalists in worldwide spread publications allows one to reconstruct how the world is presented by a particular news outlet. Kress and Hodge (1993) argue that people use systems of classification organize their thoughts to control their perceptions of reality. They also state that these perceptions can vary across different groups and typically change gradually in the long run (Kress and Hodge, 1993), especially since they are culturally dependent. Understanding these systems of world decoding is key to grasp how reality is represented in the minds of language users and how they form part of their ideologies (Kress and Hodge, 1993).

As previously mentioned, words are never neutral, as a choice from a range of possibilities is always implied, meaning that there must be some reason why language users decided to pick one linguistic realization over another to create a certain meaning (Fairclough, 1989; van Dijk, 1991). In these terms, choosing one word over another may signal the opinions, emotions or a special position of the writers. Ideology is crucial when

it comes to the positive representations of certain groups and the negative representation of others. One way to materialize ideology in discourse linguistically is through the choice of certain lexical items over others with reference to individuals, groups and actions. Thus, lexical choices play a significant role in how people and their actions are perceived, which is even more important in a context of war, especially if it is as ideologically charged as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is. In other terms, lexical choices used to represent social groups involved in the 2023-2024 Israeli-Palestinian conflict can serve ideologically in the representation of different sides of the conflict and the legitimization or delegitimization of their actions, depending on the ideology of the newspaper.

For this reason, the lexical investigation will turn to certain lexical items used in the discourse on the conflict, which are considered either problematic or ideologically charged, such as *occupation* (Ackerman, 2001), *terrorism*, *settlements* and *neighborhood* (Khalid, 2009). In addition, since one of the main critiques that CDA literature addresses to Western media (and media in general) was the lack of historical contextualization, historically connotated lexical items, such as *Nakba* and *Holocaust*, are also investigated.

3.1.2 Transitivity analysis

In the previous chapters, van Leeuwen's theory of representational strategies (1996; 2006) was presented, but the way we perceive social actors can also be influenced by the representation of transitivity. In particular, transitivity reflects the way such social actors are acting or not acting, showing who has an important role in a particular clause and who, instead, receives the consequences of that action (Machin and Mayr, 2012: 104). In this sense, the concept of transitivity for verbs goes beyond taking or not taking direct objects. Transitivity is, in fact, considered one of the best indicators of how people represent social reality (van Leeuwen, 1996; Teo, 2000). In particular, Michael Halliday made great use of this concept in his Systemic Functional Linguistics, which sees the language as social semiotic – a means to create meaning within a particular social context (Zaher, 2009). It is interested in how people create meanings and how language is organized to enable meanings to be made. This system sees language as a system of meanings, expressed by forms. It is the writer who chooses what forms to use in what context in order for a certain word to mean something. In other words, when constructing meanings, speakers of any language make choices. By choosing one transitivity model

over another, the responsibilities of authorities might be systematically downgraded or omitted, while agency and responsibility for actions remains implicit. For instance, van Dijk (1988a; 1988b) argues that the effects of an action can be downplayed if placed later in a sentence or if they are expressed through passivation.

Transitivity interests three aspects of meaning construction: participants (or those who do the action and those who receive it), processes expressed by verbs, and circumstances – adverbial groups or prepositional phrases specifying where, when and how something happened (Machin and Mayr, 2012). Transitivity analysis entails two steps: the identification of the participants and that of the process types employed. The range processes expressed in sentences as verbs have been classified in several categories (Kress and Hodge, 1993; van Leeuwen, 1996; Machin and Mayr, 2012). Only those relevant to the current study will be addressed in this paragraph. First, mental processes, which encompass verbs of cognition (*to think, to believe, to understand, etc.*), verbs of affection (*to like, to dislike, etc.*) and perception (*to see, to smell, to hear, etc.*). Machin and Mayr (2012) argue that these kinds of verbs can encourage the readers to have empathy towards the actors that reflect them, as these processes provide with a particular insight into the feelings and the state of mind of certain participants. In a context of war, for instance, it can help in humanizing the occupying forces and can be key in representing the humanitarian discourse of war (Machin and Mayr, 2012).

Another category of verbs expresses verbal processes (*to say, to confirm, to deny, etc.*). According to Machin and Mayr (2012), they have three participants: the sayer, the one that receives the information being said and the verbiage, or the nominalized statement of the verbal process. Understanding whether a certain social actor or a specific social group is represented as a “doer” or a thinker may have important implications for the definition of agency.

Relational and existential processes, instead, are refer to things that exist in relation to others (i.e. *to refer to, to represent, to stand for, etc.*) and things that simply exist or occur (i.e. *to exist, to occur, to arise, etc.*), respectively. The first may allow for the representation of opinions as facts, while the second may have the effect of obscuring agency and responsibility, as they are typically accompanied by *there are* or *there is*, thus leaving the agents out of the equation.

On the other hand, material processes express actions that have a material effect. Kress and Hodge (1993) distinguished the way material processes can be linguistically realized into two models: the transactive and the non-transactive model. The first involves an actor, a process and an affected entity (or goal), clarifying causal relationships between the parts involved. On the other hand, the non-transactive model only involves the affected entity and the process, with no actor. This is normally realized by means of passive clauses, but can also be expressed through middle voices, especially when the action represents an abstract process (i.e. *the death toll has risen to 100*). The vagueness of the non-transactive model obscures the complexity of the processes at hand and fragments causal links, blurring the agency in the meanwhile (Kress and Hodge, 1993; Machin and Mayr, 2012).

Van Leeuwen (1996) added to Kress and Hodge's theoretical framework, arguing that transitivity may also refer to whether social actors are represented as activated or passivated. Particularly, being activated may foreground agency, contributing to the representation of power. In fact, according to van Leeuwen (1996), the greater the power a social actor possess, the greater the range of goals it may affect. On the contrary, passivation lacks such characteristics, presenting the actors involved in such processes as weak participants (Teo, 2000). Another important contribution in terms of transitivity is made by Richardson (2007). He argues that prepositional phrases (i.e. *in the airstrikes, at the checkpoint, after the attack*) and subordinate clauses typically provide context for dominant clauses. For instance, they can be frequently found in newspapers' headlines with the aim of mitigating responsibility for certain actions (i.e. *three civilians killed in Russian airstrike*). In this instance, the emphasis is put on three civilians, while who has killed them is downgraded through the prepositional phrase. The same action could have been written as "*Russia kills three civilians in airstrike*", better defining agency and responsibility for the killings. In this case, the passivation became an activation, making the actor clearer while keeping the information about the process itself and the affected entity. Once actor, affected entity and process are in place, further circumstantial information can be used to provide context, without altering the agency assessment.

Another important concept in the analysis of transitivity is that of nominalization. According to Kress and Hodge (1993) nominalizations involves transforming sentences or parts of sentences into nouns and nominal groups, which leads in the loss of clear

identities for both actors and those affected by their actions. This linguistic strategy generates a world of abstract entities and objects which are capable of acting and being acted on. As a result, the original sentence structure becomes harder to recognize, as nominalizations change the meaning from a process to a state, from an activity to an object, or from something specific to something general. Being nominal groups, nominalizations can serve as agents, resulting in the obfuscation of processes and causal relationships (Kress and Hodge, 1993; Machin and Mayr, 2012). For this reason, this strategy is typically used to mitigate or transfer responsibility (i.e. *The war has led to a lack of clean water supplies*). *The war* is not an agent per se and cannot perform actions, yet the responsibility of *the lack of clean water supplies* is blamed on it.

Transitivity is mainly concerned with how people's experience or idea of the world is linguistically realized. It uncovers how material and mental worlds are represented as processes, who are the participants involved in them and the broader context they are associated with. It can be easily understood how this kind of analysis is crucial to this study, since it allows one to examine the way the events of the conflict have been constructed in news reports in terms of processes, participants involved and circumstances around them. Many scholars value the contribution of Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (Fairclough, 1989; Wodak and Meyer, 2001; van Leeuwen, 2006), arguing that it provides CDA with the tools to unveil and interpret systematically the underlying motivations, intentions and purposes of text producers, along with the attitudes, perceptions and stereotypes that influence them. Thus, the manipulation of transitivity patterns can be significant in terms of language and power. In this respect, van Leeuwen's analysis of social actors and social actions in discourse (van Leeuwen, 1996; van Leeuwen, 2006) is extremely helpful to discuss the way participants and their actions are represented in different newspapers and what are the ideological implications of such modalities of representation.

3.2 *The Corpora*

As anticipated above, the data for this research is drawn from five hard news corpora: *The Guardian* corpus, *The Times* corpus, *Al-Jazeera English* corpus, *The New York Times* corpus and *The Wall Street Journal* one. Each corpus includes hard news reports and analyses the coverage of the 2023-2024 Israeli-Palestinian conflict over a period of six

months (183 days). The relevant articles were extracted from the newspapers' websites via query terms such as *Israel-Gaza war*, *Middle East conflict*, *War on Gaza*. Search results were manually checked, and news reported that was deemed as not directly related to the conflict were excluded. These were mainly opinion pieces, letters to editors, articles on domestic affairs that did not show a direct link to the conflict. On the contrary, articles that explained or analysed the conflict were included in the corpora, as one of the goals of this study is understanding whether news frames may influence people's behaviour. Non-expert readers would turn to these kinds of pieces to seek answers, as they present the information in a more digestible fashion. Table 1. shows some of the general statistics on the corpora. Each corpus contains 150 reports. Each news article was saved in a separate text file in each corpus and dated (i.e. November 28 – AJ). The total number of words is 148,806 for *The Guardian*, 131,033 for *The Times*, 227,650 in *The Wall Street Journal*, 149,064 for *The New York Times* and *Al Jazeera* 116,752.

3.3 Newsworthiness of the 2023-2024 Israeli-Palestinian conflict

As shown in Table 2, the first general statistical information on the five corpora offers an insightful start for an initial analysis of the data, especially in relation to the newsworthiness of the 2023-2024 Israeli-Palestinian conflict. *The Guardian* published the highest number of articles on the issue in the selected period, with a general average of 479.3 published articles. Its average number of publications on the conflict is 2,6 per day. However, as shown in Table 2, publications started to reduce the amount of space dedicated to the topic as one of its news values – its recentness – started to vanish. This a widely used strategy by news outlets, whose main profits come from advertisement, which means that the higher the number of visitors the higher the profits for the news outlets. When media understand that the public attention is being catalysed towards a single event, they tend to take advantage of the situation by publishing more and more contents. Sometimes this also means publishing the same content from a slightly different perspective multiple time. This is done to maximize its websites traffic and, thus, the profits they can make out of a particular story. This is not necessarily the reason for a decrease in attention towards the issue, but it may have had an impact on editorial decisions. Even though the average article length on the other news outlets is higher than that of the articles from *Al Jazeera*, it still devotes significant space to the Israeli-

Palestinian conflict. On the other hand, the similarity in the amount of space dedicated to the issue by the two liberal newspapers and the two right-leaning newspapers, respectively, suggests that the choice of publications was appropriate for the purpose of this study. In particular, it may imply that political orientation does play a role in determining the perceived newsworthiness of the topic and, thus, may have influenced the representation of the conflict. This similarity, visually shown in Table 2, was also confirmed by the average of published articles on the topic during the period from October 7 to April 7. Once again, the right leaning *The Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* had a similar result (83 and 83,5, respectively). The same happened for *The Guardian* and *The New York Times* (479,3 and 430,8 respectively), the more left leaning news outlets among those selected. On average, over the selected period, *The Guardian* posted 2.6 articles per day, while the average number of related articles is 0,5 on *The Times* website, 2,4 on *The New York Times* web page, 0,5 for *The Wall Street Journal* and 2,3 for *Al Jazeera English*. The finding that *The Guardian* devoted more space to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict than *The Times* or *The Wall Street Journal* is not surprising. What is interesting, however, is that it published more articles, on average, than *Al Jazeera* and *The New York Times*. Considered the U.S. involvement in the ongoing war, with its diplomatic support to Israel, not to mention the influences that the conflict has on its foreign policies, one would expect the topic to receive greater attention in the United States than in Britain. The same could be argued for *Al Jazeera English*, as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is the top priority on the foreign policy agendas of many Arab countries. However, it is worth mentioning that the difference can be appreciated especially during the first months of reporting, while from December onwards these three newspapers seemed to devote more or less the same space to the issue. Even if these data are not enough to make generalizations on the scale of the newspapers' newsworthiness, this initial result suggests that the readership of news reports from *The Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, both deemed conservative or right leaning newspapers, receive significantly less information about the ongoing conflict than the readers of *The Guardian* or *The New York Times*, their liberal counterparts.

As for the topics addressed in the corpora, a first "flavour of the data" is provided by means of keyness (see from Table 3.1 to 3.5 for more details). Some of these topics were further analysed using a combination of concordance software and in-depth readings.

Notably, the word *hostages* is within the first ten keywords for the Western newspapers, (6th for *The Guardian*; 5th for *The Times*, 9th for *The New York Times* and 10th for *The Wall Street Journal*) while it is the 90th for *Al Jazeera*. The Times, for instance, is the only newspaper to present *IDF* and *defence* among its first ten keywords. This might suggest that great attention is devoted to the topic of Israel's right to self-defence as well as to IDF agents.

3.4 Frequency

To compare the frequency of word families (i.e. for occupation it includes *occupied*, *occupiers*, *occupy*, *occupying*, etc.) across the five corpora, the root of the semantic family was inserted into AntConc with an asterisk at the end (i.e. for occupation, *occup**). This indicates to the software that the analyst is interested in each word starting with *occup**, regardless of its desinence. Of course, data were double-checked to ensure that no other words apart from those related to the occupation semantic were included in the count. Due to the corpora difference in length, the frequencies showed by the concordance software could not be used to make comparisons among them. For this reason, the resulting raw frequencies were normalized or adjusted in order to obtain more comparable figures. The selected basis of norming was 100,000 words as all the corpora contain less than a million words. The normed numbers are obtained by dividing the raw frequencies by the total number of words in the corpus (which are different from the tokens provided by the concordance software). Then, the resulting figures are multiplied by a 100,000 to show how often occupation words occur per a ten thousand words in each corpus.

In addition to comparing the frequencies of word families across the five study corpora, another comparison was made between the total frequency of these words in each corpus and their total frequency in a reference corpus – a broader corpus containing a great variety of texts from a particular genre or language variety, and thus being more representative of that genre (Baker, 2006). Frequency data were compared to the sample of the newspaper section of the COCA corpus, counting 1,389,761 words.

3.4 *The British press*

3.4.1 *The Times*

3.4.1.1 *Lexical analysis*

As mentioned above, lexical choices can reveal much about ideologies underlying the discourse on the conflict, especially when their use is contested by one of the sides involved in the violence. One of the most controversial families of words used by *The Times* reporters refers to what is regarded by most of the states in the world as the Israeli *occupation* of Palestinian territories. The root *occup** appears 41 times in the corpus (54 normalized). On some occasions, the word *occupying* is indirectly attributed to Israel by the reference to the Geneva Conventions, according to which “*an occupying power has a duty to supply food and medical aid to a besieged population*”. The reference to Israel is inferred by the context. Many of the occurrences do not refer to the actual Israeli occupation of West Bank and East Jerusalem, but they rather point to a potential siege of Gaza city, which Israel more than once declared not to be in its intentions (i.e. *Israel denies an interest in occupying Gaza; Binyamin Netanyahu said Israel had no intention to occupy Gaza*). Both the words *settlements* and *neighbourhood* are used in relation to this topic.

As for the reference to the semantic family grouped under the root *terror**, it accounts for 202 hits (265 normalized) in 91 articles in *The Times* corpus. The words that it forms mostly refer to Hamas, which is described as a *terrorist group* or *organization*. On the contrary, no such words are used to describe Israeli violence, not even when its actions kill Palestinian civilians. The main collocates (1L; 3R; min. freq. 5) of *terror** are *attack, groups, October, group, Hamas, attacks* and *organization*. This makes the recurrent link between Hamas and terrorism abundantly clear. *Hamas*, in particular, figures among the main collocates for *Israel*. Specifically, the expression *Israel and Hamas* occurs 30 times in 22 articles (39 normalized). This expression is often preceded or followed by conflict-related lexical items such as *the war, the conflict, hostilities*. The conjunction *and* between *Israel* and *Hamas* is almost exclusively used when violence is represented as mutual or when the articles introduce the topic of negotiations. Nevertheless, negative lexical items such as *massacre* or *atrocities* are almost exclusively used with reference to Hamas’s attack on October 7 (29 times out of 32 total occurrences for the word *massacre* and 16

out of 18 for the word *atrocities*). No such expression is used in relation to the Israeli killing of Palestinians, despite the even higher death toll (i.e. *Last weekend's atrocities in Israel were the biggest massacre of Jews since the Holocaust*). Specifically, this word appears 32 times in 25 different articles of the corpus (42 occurrences if normalized). A similar word in terms of negative connotation is *assassination* (7 raw occurrences, 9 if normalized), but is exclusively reserved to the Israeli killings of Hamas and Hezbollah members (i.e. *after the assassination of Saleh al-Arouri, the deputy leader of Hamas*).

While Hamas is exclusively regarded as a terrorist group, the main words associated to the adjective *Palestinian* are *prisoners* (50 occurrences, normalized), *authority* (43 hits) and *state* (24). A potential Palestinian state is mentioned through Palestinians' quotations or only virtually by verbal processes. As for Palestinian prisoners are mentioned in negotiation talks for hostage deals (i.e. *Hamas released more than 100 hostages in exchange for Palestinian prisoners*). However, one of the main images of Palestinian is that of militants and that is clear in expressions like *Palestinian gunmen* (10 occurrences, normalized), *Palestinian militants* (5), *Palestinian fighters* (8). The Palestinian Authority is mentioned as Palestinians' main political institution, even if the way in which it is portrayed sometimes undermines its credibility. It is presented as the political entity partially controlling (not *ruling* or *governing*) the West Bank and as a viable solution to the post-war re-assessment of Gaza. However, even when it is described as an official institution, it is also accused of terrorism (i.e. *He [Israel's Prime Minister] has rejected both proposals, accusing the Palestinian Authority of terrorism*), its officials are almost ironically referred to as *juniors* (i.e. *Notably, the two officials he met in Israel were relatively junior*) and it is also called *the already infirm Palestinian Authority*. With regards to the Israelis, instead, The Times presents them as institutionalized, as they are represented as a military force. This is evident in expressions such as *Israeli troops*, *Israeli military officials*, *Israeli forces*, *Israeli army*, *Israeli intelligence*, etc. Officials are identified both by name and institutional capacity (i.e. *Binjamyn Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister; Yoav Gallant, the Israeli defence minister*). Israeli officials are represented as justifying the attacks and commenting them.

Lexical items are equally important in the way history is recalled and framed, especially when the sides in conflict have different interpretations of the same events. Notably, *The Times* has the highest occurrence for the term *Holocaust* among the selected

newspapers (16 raw occurrences, 21 normalized). On the contrary, the Nakba is mentioned just once. In an article published on October 29, *The Times* refers to 1948 as the year of Israel's *War of independence* and then as the *Nakba* for Palestinians. However, while the historical events accounting for Israel's *War of independence* are recounted, little additional information is offered on the *Nakba*, apart from the English translation of the word (i.e. *The 1948 war [...] developed into a fierce conflict that erupted after the state of Israel was declared and the territory was invaded by several Arab League neighbours; 700,000 Palestinians were displaced*). No agency nor responsibility is assessed in this sentence, while the Arab-Israeli 1948 war is presented as a spontaneous phenomenon through a metaphorical process (*to erupt*). This is what van Leeuwen would call a suppression strategy (van Leeuwen, 1995; van Leeuwen, 1996). The other occurrences of the term *Holocaust* are used to underline that October 7 was *the deadliest day for Jews since the Holocaust*. Despite the horribly high Palestinian death toll, no similar expression is found in the corpus for the Palestinian counterpart.

Lastly, at times the otherness of Palestinians and their allies is emphasized by the association with the term *Muslim*, a collectivization strategy (van Leeuwen, 1995; van Leeuwen, 1996) that is used to depict them as the out-group (i.e. *The Muslim world: Arab countries have intensified their calls for a ceasefire*).

3.4.1.2 Transitivity analysis

The Times tends to use transitivity structures that mitigate Israeli responsibility by portraying violence as spontaneous or mutual. For instance, the killing of Palestinians is often naturalized through the use of middle voices (i.e. *More than 240 Palestinians have died in the West Bank; about 50 people had died in the territory overnight*). The article published on November 16 reported the consequences of the Israeli attack on Al-Shifa Hospital, which was shelter to many Palestinians. This strategy was also widely adopted in the news report on the so-called flour massacre, which happened on March 1. Although the events had yet to be clarified, *The Times* reported the casualties as *deaths* and wrote that *most Palestinians had died in a stampede*. The same linguistic strategy is applied to the casualties directly caused by lack of functioning hospitals, food supplies and/or medicines (i.e. *at least 15 children have died from dehydration and malnutrition*). Famine, malnutrition and lack of health devices are addressed in the article, but the same

cannot be said for the causes of such shortages, that, if mentioned, are always expressed through nominalizations and without further contextualization (i.e. *blockade*). The result of such suppression strategy (van Leeuwen, 1995; van Leeuwen, 1996) is that these crises seem spontaneous, something that simply happens (i.e. *Famine stalks ruins of Gaza amid faltering ceasefire talks; famine could already be potentially present in some areas of the Gaza Strip*).

The middle voice is also used to represent the death of Israeli soldiers and hostages (i.e. *A total of 219 Israeli soldiers **have died** since the start of the ground incursion; 132 hostages remain in Gaza, and that 25 of them **have died** in captivity*). This is somehow a recurrent pattern in all the selected Western newspapers, where a certain bias towards Israel does exist. Hence, it may be attributed to the necessity to downgrade the killing of hostages and soldiers, being those sensitive topics among the Jewish community, already igniting protests and indignation in Israel. However, this assumption needs further investigation, as this linguistic strategy may also represent a broader journalistic strategy to depersonalize violence in general.

The mitigation of Israeli responsibility is also achieved through the use of agentless passives (i.e. *More than 31,270 Palestinians **have been killed** since the war began; 100 Palestinians were said to **have been killed** during a rush on an aid convoy*). When activation is used, Israeli actors are often represented using verbal and mental processes (i.e. *Israel reported, suggested, agreed, claimed, insisted, responded*). Instead, as for violent material actions, Israel's deeds are represented as never directed to human agents, unless they are Hamas or Hezbollah fighters (i.e. *Israel conducted targeted airstrikes **on the southern city**; Israel launched its offensive **on the enclave**; Israel launched airstrikes **in retaliation***). Description of Israeli operations, when presented through activation, are always either justified (i.e. *Israel launched the war **after Hamas gunmen in Gaza raided Israeli towns on October 7**; Israel launched its offensive on the **enclave in response to the Hamas terrorist attack on October 7***), approximative (i.e. *Israel attacked an underground area used by Issa in the Nuseirat refugee camp*) or counterbalanced by accounts of Palestinian or Hamas violence (i.e. *And, even as Gazans were counting their dead, two Israelis were shot dead by Palestinian gunmen as they sat in their cars at a petrol station*). In this case, readers are not told what the consequences of such actions were nor additional details are provided. On the contrary, Hamas's Oct. 7 attack is

constantly mentioned and seems to have never lost its recency in *The Times* news reports. In particular, *October 7* is mentioned 242 times (317 normalized) in 104 articles out of 150.

This high number of occurrences might be explained by the need for justifying Israeli actions against Palestinians civilians, especially since Hamas's military actions seem to be incomparable to those of Israel, both in terms of operational effectiveness and consequences for Israeli civilians. Nominalizations are also employed, turning actions into a thing or an abstract state and thus mitigating Israeli agency. For instance, the present participle killing is used to represent Hamas's attacks against Israelis (i.e. *The attack in Jerusalem involved Hamas gunmen killing three Israelis; Hamas gunmen scoured the site of the festival, killing and kidnapping hundreds*) or even Israeli violence against what are considered legitimate targets (i.e. *Israel said its troops had entered the hospital compound after **killing** militants outside*). The process is nominalized when the reference is to the casualties of aid workers, civilians or Hamas members (i.e. ***The killing** of seven foreign aid workers; **This killing** must stop; **His killing** represents the biggest hit yet to Hamas's top leadership*).

As for the representation of Palestinian violence against Israel, on some occasions Hamas's actions have been attributed to the Palestinians as a whole though what van Leeuwen calls *generalization* strategies (van Leeuwen, 1995; van Leeuwen, 1996). This re-enforces the misleading equation between these two groups (i.e. *When the **Palestinians** entered southern Israel, videos filmed by residents show them [...] **shooting at passers-by**; [...] **Palestinian fighters** began their most daring and brutal raid on Israel in decades*). This example is extracted from an article recalling the events of October 7. Apart from this tragic episode, Hamas's actions are commented on, but no justification or explanation is provided for them. Particularly emblematic is one of *The Times'* editorials published on November 28. It starts by defining Hamas as a *malign terrorist organization that deserve no political or moral credit for the present truce*. This perfectly fits into van Dijk's ideological square theory, as what might be considered a positive action from part of the perceived out-group is not only downgraded but also neutralized by *The Times'* counternarrative of the events. Then, by means of *aggregation* (van Leeuwen, 1996) all Palestinian prisoners released in a hostage deal at the end of November 2023 are represented as criminals (*There is no equivalence. The men, women*

and children being held in Gaza are in every sense hostages, bargaining chips to be traded for Palestinians held after conviction of offences). Additional clarification is provided, even if what those offences is not clarified, but the cure seems worse than the disease (i.e. *Admittedly some of those released from Israeli prisons are not terrorists but often minors caught up in stone-throwing*). Again, the causes of such *stone-throwing* are not presented.

Palestinians are often portrayed as victims, but their voices are seldom included in the reports (i.e. *over 100 Palestinians **killed** in an Israel-organised aid convoy that ended in tragedy as desperate Gazans massed around the lorries*). No responsibility emerges from the agentless passive structure of the sentence. The responsibility of the so-called flour massacre was hotly debated for days, and Palestinian witnesses never agreed to Israel's account, insisting that the IDF had opened fire on the crowd. This last information is not included in the article, if not through an Israel's statement. The representation of the killings of Palestinian does not always have a clear agency structure (i.e. *Israel has brushed off pressure to end the **war**, **which has killed** more than 30,000 Palestinians*). In this instance, agency is concealed through a nominalization (*war*). In addition, the mention of Palestinian losses in the war are often accompanied by reference to Hamas's attack in southern Israel (i.e. *So far, **2,670** Palestinians **have died in airstrikes** since Hamas launched its incursion into Israel, **killing 1,300 Israelis***). In this example, the difference in the representation of violence depending on the side who is performing the action. The middle voice *have died* is used for Palestinian casualties, making it seem a spontaneous process. A circumstantial (*in airstrikes*) gives further details on the process under examination, although without clarifying the responsibility. Israel's involvement can be deducted from the context, but its agency remains concealed. On the contrary, Hamas's responsibility for the violence against the Israelis is clearly represented through the use of the active voice *killing*. These strategies may fall within the framework of van Dijk's (1988a; 1988b) ideological squares, since the negative actions of the out-group are emphasized, while those of the in-group are concealed or, at least, mitigated.

3.4.2 *The Guardian*

3.4.2.1 *Lexical analysis*

Lexical choices often contain the very core of ideological discourses, especially when the issue at hand is deemed as controversial. In *The Guardian* corpus, for instance, the words falling into the semantic family of *occupation* words, which have been searched by means of a specific query (*occup**), occur 94 times in 54 articles (137 normalized). The word *occupied* is mainly followed by the words *West Bank* (28 occurrences, normalized) and *Palestinian territories* (11 occurrences), although without references to the Golan Heights and East Jerusalem. Nevertheless, some instances of *occupation* words are used in relation to Israeli power and forces. Even if in the first case the expression *occupying power* is mainly related to obligations under international laws, both instances are presented by means of surface markers of detachment (Stubbs, 1996), which serve the writer to distant the reader from the text as well as to avoid responsibility for using controversial terminology. The phrases *occupying forces* and *occupying power* are always mentioned either by means of quote unquote or through expressions such as *he said, he admitted*, that help avoiding attribution of responsibility for what is being said or admitted (i.e. “*Israel, as the **occupying power**, has the obligation to ensure the provision of food and medical care [...]*”; *At first he said he was unsure if Israel was legally the **occupying power** in Gaza*). In this regard, Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories is also expressed by the use of the word *settlements*, which are typically regarded as *illegal*. The alternative word would have been *neighbourhood*, but in *The Guardian* corpus it is mainly used with reference to Gazan and Palestinian neighbourhoods soon to be devastated by Israeli military forces (i.e. [...] *in a **strike** on the central **neighbourhood** of Zawayda*).

Instead, with respect to the semantic family of terrorism-related words, the cluster analysis of the root *terror** revealed that the words *terrorist* and *terrorists* are preceded by *Hamas* and, while most of the times the writers distance themselves from this pattern, there are some instances where no surface markers of detachment (Stubbs, 1996) are used (i.e. *since the **Hamas terrorist attacks** on 7 October*). This aligns with most of the Western newspapers’ representation of Hamas, which may sometimes become slightly grotesque when objectification is involved (van Leeuwen, 1995; van Leeuwen, 1996; Machin and Mayr, 2012), even when it is reported between brackets (i.e. [...] *they had*

struck “approximately **200 Hamas Terror targets**”). Strategies of dehumanization (Bandura, 2011) can also be found in the Israeli Prime Minister’s and the U.S. President’s speeches, even if *The Guardian* once again reports them by means of surface markers of detachment (i.e. *Benjamin Netanyahu, said: “No one will stop us, not The Hague, not **the axis of evil** and no one else.”*; *Biden gave one of the most visceral, heartfelt speeches of his presidency, denouncing “**an act of sheer evil**” by Hamas*). The effect is that of morally justifying the response to such evil acts. In fact, Bandura (2011) explains that “the strength of moral self-censure also depends on how the perpetrators regard their foes”. Self-censure for harmful behaviour can be downgraded or even neutralized by depriving the out-group members of their human attributes. It could be achieved, for instance, by assigning them demonic or animalistic traits (Bandura, 2011).

As for historically relevant words such as *Nakba* and *Holocaust*, both events are acknowledged and occur respectively 12 and 11 times (18 and 16 normalized). The term *Nakba* is primarily linked to political speeches that invoke or fear a *second Nakba*. Nevertheless, there are some efforts to better situate this historical event, in the acknowledgement of Palestinian history (i.e. *Palestinians called **the exodus and eradication** of much of their society inside Israel the **Nakba**, or “catastrophe”, and it remains **the traumatic event at the heart of their modern history***). As for the *Holocaust*, the word is typically used as a standard of comparison for the October 7 attack (i.e. *an Israeli government spokesperson, said there was a “**Holocaust denial-like phenomenon**” about the scale of atrocities; [Hamas’s savagery] were the worst crimes committed against Jews **since the Holocaust**,” he said*). In addition, *The Guardian* being a British newspaper, it was deemed interesting to search for references to the British Mandate of Palestine in order to see whether Britain’s historical responsibility was acknowledged. It is in fact mentioned twice, but no punctual information is provided on its involvement in the conflict back then (i.e. *But the starting point for many people is the United Nations’ vote in 1947 to partition land in **the British mandate of Palestine** into two states [...]*).

However, while *The Guardian*’s effort with respect to the conflict’s historical contextualization should be recognized, still no such contextualization or explanation is offered in relation to Hamas’s October 7 attack against Israeli civilians. The assault is mentioned 249 times in 108 articles (371 normalized) out of 150, with detailed figures of killed, injured and kidnapped civilians, making the horrendous effects of such violence

clear. However, no further details are provided to explain the reasons for such a horrific attack, with the result of portraying unmotivated and discretionary violence (i.e. *Since Hamas's horrific attack on Israel on 7 October [...]; [...] since the war broke out after Hamas's 7 October attack on Israel*). In the same way, Palestinian sufferance is presented as a direct consequence of the October 7 assault, bypassing Israel's accountability in what could be defined a strategy of attribution of blame (Bandura, 1999; Bandura, 2011). According to Bandura (2011), "blaming one's foes for bringing the suffering on themselves by their provocative behaviour" is a form of self-exoneration. This is because violent actions toward provocateurs or compelling circumstances are perceived not only as excusable, but one can even feel self-righteous in inflicting such harm. However, among Hamas's the clusters found with a right sort of the word Hamas, there is the prepositional phrase *by Hamas*, which likely appears to attribute agency and responsibility, occurring 126 times (189 if normalized), while the expression *against Hamas* only appears 30 times (45 if normalized). While Hamas's responsibility is primarily shown through passivation, which might suggest a downgrading of its impact, it is also subject to over-lexicalization. According to van Dijk's ideological squares, negative actions by an outgroup are typically over-lexicalized, either to address controversial topics or to highlight negative features of one's foe. Therefore, the over-lexicalization of Hamas's violent actions might suggest that it is likely to be represented as the out-group in *The Guardian* corpus.

In this regard, a negative assessment of enemies' actions could further reinforce the effect of the attribution of blame strategy. Words such as *atrocities*, *assassination* and *massacre* appear in *The Guardian* corpus in relation to different social actors. In particular, *atrocities* is used to describe the violence on both sides of the conflict, especially Israel's, although it is typically inserted in quotations from various political figures or humanitarian agencies (i.e. *[...] Israel's allies to call on it to "stop its atrocities"*). Nevertheless, on some occasions, when the word is used with reference to Hamas's assault, *The Guardian* tries to counterbalance such a representation by mentioning Israel's response to the attack (i.e. *Nderitu highlighted the atrocities committed by Hamas on 7 October and made no criticism of Israel [...]*). The word *massacre*, instead, is mainly employed in relation to Hamas's October 7 assault on Israel and only in three occasions refers to Israeli violence against Palestinian (i.e. *UN experts*

condemn Israeli ‘**massacre**’ of Palestinians collecting flour; the violence they say was unleashed by Israeli forces last week on Palestinians gathered in Gaza City to collect flour as a “**massacre**”). As for *assassination*, the word is almost exclusively used with reference to Hamas’s leaders being killed by Israeli military forces (9 raw occurrences out of 12 total hits).

As for the representation of Israeli and Palestinian social actors, the adjective Palestinian, it is mainly associated to words such as *prisoners*, *civilians*, *people*, but also *fighters*, *gunmen* and *militants*. This might misleadingly blur the distinction between Palestinians and Hamas and thus implicitly attribute Hamas’s responsibility to all Palestinians. It would be preferable to refer to Hamas with the name of the group to avoid this kind of effect. On the contrary, Israeli actors are institutionalized as they are portrayed as a political and military force. This is clear in expressions like *Israeli military*, *Israeli troops*, *Israeli soldiers*. In addition, the Israeli Prime Minister and the defence minister are frequently mentioned through nominalization (i.e. *By 9.20am Yoav Gallant, the Israeli defence minister, said; The foreign secretary urged Binyamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, to protect Palestinian refugees*). Israelis are mostly represented as justifying their attacks or commenting on it. On two occasions there is also mention of the Palestinian health ministry, although without nominalizations, while the only other Palestinian political institution being referred to is the Palestinian Authority (33 raw frequencies). Its president, Mahmoud Abbas, is mentioned 12 times (raw frequency) in 10 articles.

3.4.2.2 Transitivity analysis

The Guardian transitivity analysis showed a slight bias towards Israel. For instance, the middle voice *died* is used almost exclusively in relation to Palestinian victims. The use of middle voices helps in concealing agency and responsibility, as the process expressed by the verb appears a natural, spontaneous one (i.e. *Palestinian boy had died after being shot by Israeli border police*). On some occasions, the middle voice is combined with some forms of aggregation, through which Palestinian victims are treated as mere statistics (i.e. *Hundreds of people are reported to have died in a massive explosion at a hospital in Gaza City; Hundreds of civilians died*). In particular, Palestinians who died as a consequence of malnutrition are treated as natural deaths, thus described by means of

middle voices (i.e. *The local health ministry said on Sunday that 16 children **had died from malnutrition and dehydration***). Such casualties are seldom linked to the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip, for instance. Malnutrition is not something that suddenly erupted in Gaza, it is the effect of more complex processes and actions, whose agents are thus concealed. The other instances where the middle voices is employed typically regard Hamas members, Hezbollah leaders and Palestinians, but some instances also refer to Israeli soldiers and hostages (i.e. *Arouri **died** in a neighbourhood that is a Hezbollah stronghold; Hamas has said on several occasions that **hostages have died** during Israeli strikes; He said “far too many” **Palestinians had died** [...]*). Nevertheless, most of the occurrences are in relation to the Palestinian side of the conflict, with the effect of mitigating Israel’s responsibility.

Mitigation of responsibility can also be achieved by means of nominalizations, such as *fighting, clashes, violence*, through which processes are turned into things or abstract concepts. This effect is sometimes reinforced by existential processes, involving phrases such as *there are, there is, there had been* (i.e. [...] ***clashes** in several areas **have erupted** between Palestinians and IDF troops; [...] **there had been repeated IDF raids** on Palestinian cities; The World Health Organization (WHO) said **there had been 11 attacks on Gaza healthcare sites***). The use of existential processes, especially with nominalizations, has the effect of presenting violent actions as if they were born out of nowhere, thus concealing or mitigating what caused them.

As for the representation of social actors, Hamas members are represented as militants and fighters through strategies of collectivization and functionalization (van Leeuwen, 1995; van Leeuwen, 1996), which may contribute to dehumanize them. The group typically speaks through officials and leaders commenting on their military action or denying accusations. In addition, in some instances the names of Hamas spokespersons are also mentioned, in what van Leeuwen (1995; 1996) would refer to as nominalization (i.e. *Hamas official Izzat El Reshiq said allegations its fighters were present were “baseless”*). Hamas actions are primarily represented through activation while performing speech acts (i.e. *Hamas has said, has announced, has presented, claimed responsibility, confirmed, demanded, denied*). Hamas, however, is also involved in material processes, such as *launching an attack, launching an onslaught, to attack, to fire rockets, to kill, to seize control*. The last choice of words is interesting, as *to seize power*

or control typically means taking something by means of the use of violence, thus, Hamas's victory in the Palestinian elections in 2006 is probably not being acknowledged. In this regard, Hamas's involvement in the Gaza Strip is expressed through phrases such as *Hamas-controlled* or *Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip*.

Something similar can be found in relation to Israel, represented only by means of active clauses and involved in both speech acts (i.e. *Israel agreed, responded, announced, declared, denied, requested, etc.*) and material processes (i.e. *Israel assassinated, bombed, expanded its ground invasion, targeted a convoy, had killed, had carried out strikes, launched an air offensive*). Israelis, on the contrary, are mainly involved in passive sentences (i.e. *Israelis were killed, were dead, were freed, have been arrested*). No instances of phrases such as *by Israelis* or *against Israelis* have been found during the analysis. The adjective Israeli, instead, is typically followed by words such as *military, troops, soldiers, hostages*. These actors are portrayed mostly through passivation (i.e. *an Israeli hostage has been found; Israeli hostages have been killed, Israeli hostages were wounded; Israeli troops have been pulled out, Israeli soldiers were killed*). This may be evidence of the fact that Israelis are primarily presented as the receiving end of Hamas's or Palestinian actions, although passivation mitigates agency and responsibility. In addition, it is also worth noticing that, as for the representation of the Biden administration, it is occasionally questioned in various articles of the British newspaper (i.e. *Even as Biden and guests savoured butternut squash soup, sarsaparilla braised short ribs and hazelnut and chocolate mousse cake, Israeli bombs were raining down on the people of Gaza*).

As for the Palestinians, they are mostly involved in passive clauses with expressions such as *have been killed, were killed, were freed*. When they appear in active clauses it is always through the use of middle voices (i.e. *So far, 2,670 Palestinians have died in airstrikes since Hamas launched its incursion into Israel, killing 1,300 Israelis; More than 240 Palestinians have died in the West Bank since the Hamas terror attacks of October 7*). Notably, most of the time, the Hamas attack is mentioned immediately after the Palestinian death toll. This might be a strategy of attribution of blame (Bandura, 2011), as it gives the impression that unmotivated violence started on October 7, without providing additional information on the reasons for the attack. Furthermore, the middle voice typically mitigates agency.

3.4.3 Comparing *The Times* and *The Guardian*

The lexical analysis of *The Times* and *The Guardian* provided some insights into how the Israeli-Palestinian is represented in two of the most widely-read British newspapers, with both similarities and differences. For instance, both publications use terms such as *occupied* and *settlements*, but with some differences. While *The Times* often tries to avoid direct attribution of *occupation* words to Israel by means of detachment strategies and quotations, *The Guardian* employs these words in a more explicit fashion, although still using distancing strategies like quotations marks and attribution to external sources. In this regard, one may argue that, while verbatim reports of other social actors may convey a sense of neutrality and objectivity, the ultimate effect is that of reiterating certain patterns over and over again, without questioning them. In addition, the difference between *The Times* and *The Guardian* in the lexical representation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is also made evident by the frequencies of occupation- and terror-related words. While occupation words are mentioned 94 times in *The Guardian* (see Table 4.1), they only appear 41 times in *The Times* corpus. In relation to Hamas, both newspapers often use the word *terrorist* to describe the Palestinian group, but *The Guardian* shows more caution in distancing itself from this term. Both publications highlight Hamas's violence on October 7, but while *The Times* uses harsher terms such as *massacre* predominantly in relation to Hamas's actions, *The Guardian* applies such terms to both sides of the conflict, albeit less frequently for Israeli actions. As far as historical contextualization is concerned, Palestinian history is only acknowledged in *The Guardian*, as some articles also tried to explain the historical roots of the present-day conflict. *The Times*, instead, only mentions the *Nakba* once and without further explanations. In both papers, however, Britain's responsibility in the origins of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is briefly mentioned.

With regard to the analyses of transitivity, both news outlets employ the middle voice (*died*) in relation to Palestinian casualties in a way that mitigates agency and portrays these deaths as spontaneous rather than as the result of specific actions. However, while *The Guardian*, for instance, relates Palestinians victims of malnutrition to words like *died* or *deaths*, without associating them to the Israeli blockade, *The Times* also employs agentless passives to portray violence as spontaneous. They both constantly associate Israeli violence to Hamas's October 7 assault. This may be perceived as a justification of

Israeli actions, especially when it is stated that the war started because of it. The reference, however, is often decontextualized and do not provide information on the state of the conflict before the Hamas attack nor do the newspapers provide any analysis of the reasons behind this attack. In addition, this constant reference may enact an attribution of blame strategy (Bandura, 2011). Moreover, *The Times* tends to depict violence as mutual and fails to adequately contextualize Palestinian actions. In other words, both newspapers apply strategies that have the effect of downplaying Israeli agency and accountability, but *The Guardian* demonstrates a stronger inclination to question the Israeli and the US framing of the conflict as well as to provide contextualization of the events.

3.5 The Arab press: Al-Jazeera

3.5.1 Lexical analysis

As previously mentioned, lexical choices can unveil much of people's ideologies embedded in discourse, especially when they refer to controversial questions. Terrorism is one of the main topics when it comes to the discourse on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as Palestinians had been typically regarded as terrorists by Western countries. In the *Al Jazeera* corpus words from the semantic family of *terror** (*terrorism, terrorist, terrorists, terror*) occur 55 times (64 normalized). The words typically refer to Hamas's actions (i.e. *The Israeli army said it had arrested more than 20 "terrorists" based on "intelligence indicating terrorist activity by Hamas in the hospital"*). There are also instances where Israel and the West are called out in terms of terrorism (i.e. *"Your strikes on Yemen are terrorism," said Mohammed Ali al-Houthi, a member of the group's political council. "The United States is the Devil."*). In both cases, these kinds of words are put into quotations as surface markers of detachment (Stubbs, 1996). These are linguistic strategies, as Stubbs explains in his book, aimed at informing that the meaning of a word is problematic, as it lacks general acceptance, or is technical or differs among different speakers.

As for the semantic family of occupation words, the root *occup** was inserted into the concordance software. The main collocates for these words are *West Bank* and *East Jerusalem*. 59 times out of 93 (69 out of 109, normalized) the West Bank is described as an occupied territory (i.e. *Noting also the "alarming" escalation in "militarised violence" in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem*). As shown by the previous

example, the same happens for East Jerusalem, where 20 hits out of 31 (23 out of 36, normalized) involve the word *occupied*. One might argue that this expression is overlexicalized (Stubbs, 1996): despite not always being directly related to the word *Israel*, the word *occupied* evokes and emphasizes Israel's negative actions. As a matter of fact, overlexicalization typically concerns more the out-group than the in-group. Thus, this finding may be signalling that Israelis are being portrayed as the out-group. The words falling into the semantic family of occupation appear 154 times (180, normalized) in 66 articles. Some instances of occupation words are also employed as adjectives for Israeli forces (see Table 4), even if they always occur in quotations by Palestinian actors or their allies (i.e. “*We condemn the **Israeli occupation forces**’ brutal targeting of the gathering of Palestinians [...]*”). However, Israel's practices of occupation are described extensively. For instance, in one article *Al Jazeera* explains what outposts are and how they are retroactively approved to make them fall under Israel's notion of legal settlements:

All outposts, like settlements, are illegal under international law. Israel, however, considers only the outposts illegal, claiming they were erected without government approval. Yet, outposts are often approved retroactively as settlements.

(*Al Jazeera English* website, March 19, 2024)

Speaking of settlements, this is one of the most contested words when approaching the Israeli-Palestinian question. *Al Jazeera English* exclusively refer to Jewish settlements rather than neighbourhoods (i.e. *the continued construction of Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem*). The word neighbourhood is reserved to Palestinian neighbourhoods, described as being *targeted and destroyed* (i.e. *Airstrikes and artillery strikes have already led to the **destruction** of large parts of densely populated **neighbourhoods** in Gaza*). Notably, in this instance agency is concealed by the use of inanimate objects rather than human actors as subjects of the clause (*airstrikes and artillery strikes have led*).

As for history-related lexical items, the word *Nakba* occurs 11 times (raw frequency) in 7 articles; the word *Holocaust*, instead, is used 12 times (raw frequency) in 10 articles. Whenever the Palestinian *Nakba* is mentioned, the term is always contextualized and explained (i.e. ***Nakba**, or catastrophe, the Arabic term for*

the forcible expulsion of about 750,000 Palestinians from what was previously the former British mandate-controlled Palestine during the creation of Israel in 1948). The word Holocaust, instead, is typically employed along with the Genocide convention of 1948 or Hamas's attack of October 7 (i.e. *the UN's **genocide convention**, signed in 1948 as the world's response to the **Holocaust**; "The savagery committed by Hamas [...] were the worst crimes committed against Jews since the **Holocaust**"*). However, in one of *Al Jazeera* articles there is also a less-than-ideal use of the word (i.e. *South Africa's case has been widely criticised in Israel, the state that rose from the ashes of the Holocaust*).

As for the connotation of lexical items, instead, words like *escalation*, *confrontation* and *clashes* are extensively used. This has the effect of representing the violence as mutual, concealing unbalanced distribution of power. Sometimes these terms are also accompanied by verbs (or even the nominalization of verbs) such as *to increase*, *to surge*, *to continue*, making the violence of the war seem like a spontaneous phenomenon, that naturally *breaks out*, *keeps growing* and eventually *ends* (i.e. *the increase in armed confrontations between resistance fighters and the Israeli military*). In this regard, in the *Al Jazeera* corpus Hamas members are typically described as *resistance fighters*, which also implies recognizing the existence of a Palestinian resistance to oppression and, thus, the existence of an oppressor. This might be an attempt of contextualizing and perhaps providing an explanation of Hamas's violent actions. Notably, this is inedited compared to how Hamas members are represented in the other selected newspapers.

The words *atrocities* and *massacre* are not only extensively employed in the description of Hamas's violence on October 7 (i.e. *Israel shows footage of Hamas killings 'to counter denial of atrocities'*), but also with reference to Israel's actions against the Palestinian population (i.e. *[...] the sustained mass atrocities endured by Palestinians in Gaza*). In both cases it happens through surface markers of detachment (Stubbs, 1996) such as *quote unquote*. The word *massacre* follows more or less the same fashion, as it is used to describe both Israeli and Hamas's actions (i.e. *UN experts condemn Israeli 'massacre' of Palestinians collecting flour; politicians and officials in the west [...] endorsed Israel's disproportionate actions as self-defence and an inevitable consequence of Hamas's horrific 7 October*

massacre). In the last instance, the newspaper calls Israel's actions *disproportionate*, while also acknowledging the *horrific* violence enacted by Hamas. *Al Jazeera* willingness to counterbalance Western narratives of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has in this sentence one of its best examples: the newspaper opposes what Western newspapers refer to as Israel's right to self-defence to Israel's *right to a reparation*, just in the same way as it opposes Hamas's Western representation as terrorists with the expression *resistance fighters*. This is made even more evident in another article, where the *Al Jazeera* journalist stated that *calling Hamas "terrorists" caught on much of the Western world – not as much for the rest of the planet*. In addition, the word *assassination* is used only with reference to Israeli violence, fitting van Dijk's ideological square (1988a; 1988b) dynamic of emphasizing the out-group's bad actions.

To sum up, the lexical analysis of *Al Jazeera*'s reporting reveals that its language tries to challenge dominant Western narratives, especially regarding the terminology used to describe Hamas and Israel's motivations for the war. It also tries to acknowledge Palestinian history and narratives, with some attempts at contextualizing historical terms such as *Nakba*. Furthermore, the overlexicalization of words such as *occupation* may signal an ideological position that emphasizes Palestinian perspective while critiquing Israelis, which are typically portrayed as the out-group.

3.5.2 Transitivity analysis

Al Jazeera tends to use transitivity structures that emphasize Israeli responsibility by portraying violence through activation when the perpetrator is Israel. Palestinian violence, instead, is more typically represented through passivation or nominalization. Israel's violent actions, in particular, are described in detail according to the ideological squaring proposed by van Dijk (1988a; 1988b), where the out-group's bad actions are generally emphasized. In fact, one of *Israel*'s collocates is *launched* (i.e. ***Israel launched*** *airstrikes, bombardments, a relentless bombing, a ground operation, a ground invasion, its war*). The last instance shows how the ongoing war is mostly attributed to Israel rather than distributed between the sides through references of mutual fighting (i.e. *Israel launched its war*). Despite some occurrences of the expression Israel-Hamas war, Israel's war seems to be

preferred in the corpus (i.e. *the number of Palestinians confirmed killed in **Israel's war** has surpassed 30,800*). Israeli victims are frequently presented through functionalizations (van Leeuwen, 1995; van Leeuwen, 1996), in what may be seen as an attempt to downplay the effects of Hamas's violence (i.e. *Israeli military 'encircles' Khan Younis after 24 **soldiers killed** in Gaza; among the 172 Israeli **soldiers killed so far***). As for the other Israeli actors they are mainly involved in the description of military operations. Their activity is typically represented by means of active clauses and material processes (i.e. ***Israeli forces** have been imposing restrictions, killed Palestinians, killed people, opened fire, raided cities, fired into crowds; **Israeli army** has killed people, fired a missile, has been bombarding*). Contrary to what happens with Hamas members, Israeli military-related actors are rarely associated to speech acts. This serves once again the purpose of emphasizing Israel's bad actions in the attempt to downgrade Hamas's or Palestinian violence. Nevertheless, in some cases, the affected entities are substituted with inanimate objects and expressed by means of nominalizations, strategies that are normally employed with the purpose of mitigating agency (i.e. *Israeli **air attacks and shelling** aimed at **houses and apartment buildings**; As people gathered in large groups waiting for much-needed aid, they were shot at **by all kinds of military equipment***). On other occasions, a combination of passivation, nominalizations and circumstantial phrases is preferred (i.e. *seven Palestinians **killed in an Israeli airstrike**; at least four people **have been killed in an Israeli air strike***).

On some occasions, agentless passivation is used to introduce Palestinian victims (i.e. *More than 100 children **have been killed** every day; at least four Palestinians **were killed** on Tuesday; Last Tuesday 23 Palestinians **were killed***). There are also some instances of aggregation (van Leeuwen, 1995; van Leeuwen, 1996) such as *scores of civilians have been killed in Israel's war on Gaza*. More generally speaking, Palestinians are involved in various actions and are both activated and passivated. Passive structures involving Palestinians as the affected actors typically refers to act of violence (i.e. *Palestinian have been **killed**, have been **displaced**, were **killed** in an attack, were **shot***). But Palestinians also *fled, evacuated, moved, were waiting for aid, have been sheltering*. Active structures used on *Al Jazeera's* reports, on the other hand, seem to underline Palestinians' sufferance and resilience.

On the contrary, Hamas is mainly involved in speech acts (i.e. *Hamas has said, agreed, condemned, denied, voiced concerns, says*), while to describe its violence *Al Jazeera* journalists tend to use nominalizations such as *Hamas's launched attack* (49 hits in 37 texts, 57 occurrences normalized). Moreover, Hamas's violence, especially when expressed through active clauses, is always accompanied by remarks of Israeli violence (i.e. *Since October 7, when **Hamas fighters attacked southern Israel and killed 1,200 people, the Israeli army has been relentlessly bombarding Gaza***). This finding, once again, locates *Al Jazeera* on a different position from its Western counterparts, as the selected Western outlets tend to over-lexicalize references to Hamas's October attack. *Al Jazeera*, instead, tend to emphasize what the newspaper perceives as Israel's disproportionate reaction to the abovementioned assault (i.e. *at least **1,400 people** were killed in Israel, while more than **3,700 Palestinians** have been killed by ongoing Israeli strikes in Gaza*). Notably, Israeli victims are simply referred as *people*, with a generalization (van Leeuwen, 1995; van Leeuwen, 1996) then further clarified by the circumstantial *in Israel*. Instead, Palestinians victims are represented more clearly through a collectivization (van Leeuwen, 1995; van Leeuwen, 1996), despite the additional specification (*in Gaza*).

However, it is worth noticing that, in the attempt of making such disproportionate reaction more evident, the newspaper has also produced some grotesque images by employing aggregation strategies (van Leeuwen, 1995; van Leeuwen, 1996), such as *A prudent estimate would put it at 3,500 fighters to date – **20 percent** of its front-line complement. This would mean a ratio of **20 Hamas fighters killed for each Israeli soldier***. Here, Hamas members are treated as nothing more than statistics. This is however an exception, as in the *Al Jazeera* corpus, Hamas is more frequently regarded as the group who *rules, governs* or *runs* Gaza, acknowledging their success in 2006 Palestinian elections by doing so. The other *group*. Hamas is, in fact, more frequently presented as an *armed (Palestinian) group* (42 occurrences in 37 articles, 49 if normalized). This expression seems to be over-lexicalized (Stubbs, 1996), even if it does not directly provide Hamas with positive characteristics. In fact, overlexicalization is normally employed to describe words that lack general acceptance. The reiteration of the expression *armed group* with reference to Hamas

is in opposition to the Western dominant view of the military group as a terrorist organization, which also emerge from the analysis of the other selected publications.

3.6 *The U.S. press*

3.6.1 *The New York Times*

3.6.1.1 *Lexical analysis*

When it comes to lexical choices, *The New York Times* uses a number of strategies that have the effect of concealing or mitigating responsibility. For instance, *occupation*-related words occur 80 times (raw frequency) in 39 texts (see Table 6.1). The main collocates for words such as *occupied* is *West Bank* (33 hits in 26 articles, raw frequency). No mention whatsoever of the occupation of other Palestinian territories. In most of these instances no surface markers of detachment are employed (i.e. *The Jenin refugee camp in the Israeli-occupied West Bank is a focal point [...]*; *In the volatile Israeli-occupied West Bank, where Mr. al-Arouri was born [...]*), contrary to what happens in the other selected Western newspapers.

Instead, terror-related words are mostly associated to the word *attack*, with reference to Hamas's assault of October 7th, for a total of 149 occurrences in 67 articles (see Table 6.2). In this regard, the reference to the attack could be seen as a metonymy: through the repetition of this pattern the negative connotation attributed to Hamas's actions is transferred to the group itself. On the other hand, patterns like *terrorist attack and terrorist organization* are over-lexicalized, resulting in an emphasis of Hamas's bad actions (i.e. *[...] started by last year's Hamas-led terrorist attack on southern Israel; [...] many of them are part of the Hamas terrorist organization*). Since in van Dijk's (1988a; 1988b) theory of ideological squares, overlexicalization is reserved to the outgroup's bad actions and the ingroup's good deeds, and a terrorist attack certainly cannot be classified among the latter, one may argue that Hamas is represented as the outgroup. In this regard, in *The New York Times* corpus Hamas is typically portrayed as terrorist group or an armed group launching terrorist attacks and they are said *to control Gaza* (i.e. *Professor Levy said aid convoys in Hamas-controlled Gaza were often guided by armed locals with ties to the militants*), contrary to the *Al Jazeera* corpus where they *rule or govern* the Gaza Strip.

The recurrency of this pattern might actually reflect the high number of occurrences of the phrase *October 7*, which appears 254 times in 108 articles (raw frequency). Once again, the reference is pervasive and typically situated after mentioning of Palestinian death tolls (i.e. *22,000 people have been reported killed in the weeks **since Oct. 7**, when a Hamas-led attack on Israel killed an estimated 1,200 people*). The reiterate use of the expression frames the war as caused by this single episode, without addressing the existing violence in Gaza before the conflict. This might be also classified as an attribution of blame (Bandura, 2011), resulting in a justification of Israel's response (i.e. *Israel says **the soaring number of civilian deaths [...] has been caused in part by Hamas's decision to hide its military fortifications and command centers inside civilian infrastructure***). To further articulate this claim is interesting to notice that the main collocate of the word *against* is *Hamas* (i.e. *[...] as he presides over the Israeli military's war against Hamas in Gaza; [...] Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza could escalate into a broader conflict*). In this regard, the phrase *Israel's war against Hamas* seems to be preferred over *Israel-Hamas war*, where the second would have had the effect of conveying a certain mutuality of violence. The over-lexicalization of the first expression might have the effect of reiterating that Israel's argument that the war is not directed against Palestinians as a whole.

Nevertheless, other linguistic strategies have been found that have the effect of downplaying Israeli violence. For instance, a number of strategies of suppression (van Leeuwen, 1996; van Leeuwen, 2006) by means of existing processes and verbs such as *to soar*, *to erupt*, *to grow* that make *violence*, *clashes* and *escalations* seem natural phenomena while also concealing any trace of agency (i.e. *the numbers [of deaths] **had soared**; Violence in the West Bank **has soared**; the death toll among Gazans from Israeli bombardments **continues to rise***). Also some euphemisms can be found in the corpus, such as *unintended harm to civilians*, which is frequently inserted in the bureaucratized language used by political figures. One may argue, however, that the word *terrorism* is always used in relation to Hamas's actions against civilians, but there is no instances of the words in relation to Israel's *unintended harm*.

On the other hand, as far as historical contextualization is concerned, the term *Holocaust* (5 raw occurrences) is used as a standard of comparison to *October 7th* (i.e. *On Oct. 7, that same state proved unable to prevent the worst day of violence against Jews*

since the *Holocaust*). In addition, the 1948 is presented as the year of Israel's war of independence, while the Palestinian *Nakba*, despite having the same number of occurrences than *Holocaust*, is briefly mentioned without any further information (i.e. *an event that Palestinians call "Nakba", or catastrophe, and consider a deep historic trauma*). In particular, the word is also employed with reference to the fear of potential "second Nakba" (i.e. [...] *Israel forcing Gazans to leave their homes during this war, and perhaps flee Gaza altogether, would amount to a second nakba*). In this instance the word is not even capitalized.

Furthermore, Israeli and Palestinian institutional figures are both always mentioned by name through what van Leeuwen (1996; 2006) would call personalizations or nominalizations (i.e. [...] *the military spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari said in a news briefing on Friday evening; Earlier Wednesday, Moussa Abu Marzouk, a senior Hamas official, told that his group had agreed to a temporary cease-fire*). Nevertheless, Israeli officials are mentioned together with their honorifics, conveying a certain degree of respect and credibility, while Hamas officials are reported by means of generalization (i.e. *Israel's defense minister, Yoav Gallant, said on Friday [...]; Ghazi Hamad, a senior Hamas official, said*).

3.6.1.2 Transitivity analysis

The New York Times transitivity analysis revealed that, despite some virtuous practices, such as that of mentioning the name of both Israeli and Palestinian officials, the corpus contains various linguistic features which may have the effect of downgrading accountability. For instance, various nominalizations have been employed through words such as *raids, fighting, killings, deaths* (i.e. *The fighting has sent tens of thousands of desperate men [...]; Israeli raids there usually occur overnight and involve bulldozers, which have destroyed much of the area's infrastructure*). This last example makes clear that *The New York Times* has the tendency of providing superficial descriptions of Israel's violence. In this article, in fact, there is no mention of the casualties caused by the attack nor the readers are told how bulldozers had been involved or how much is *much*. Moreover, Israeli violence is typically portrayed by means of passivation, especially agentless passive clauses such as "*At least 78 Palestinians have been killed in Israeli military raids*". Again, no further explanation of how the attack unfolded, as the

process itself has been nominalized (*raids*). In addition, agency is concealed by the use of passive voice, even if a trace of Israeli accountability can be found in the circumstantial (*in Israeli military raids*). A similar effect is achieved by including existential processes in the account of the events, especially when in combination with nominalizations (i.e. *there have been more Israeli military raids, more violent protests, more arrests and more Palestinian attacks on Israelis [...]*). Existential processes have the effect of eliminating both the affected entity and the perpetrator, thus utterly concealing agency. On some occasions Palestinian casualties are presented as a side effect of the war (i.e. *Israeli raid in Rafah rescues 2 hostages and kills dozens*). In this case, this title could also be classified as an example of aggregation, since while the number of the rescued Israeli hostages is specified, there is no figure for Palestinian casualties in the headline. The number will be then specified in the lead. This headline also provides an insight into the perceived newsworthiness of these events, as in hard news reports only the events with the highest newsworthiness make it to the headline. In fact, it might be that the rescue of the two hostages had been deemed as more newsworthy and thus important.

As regards the nominalizations realized through words such as *killings* and *deaths*, instead, they are primarily introduced in relation to Palestinian civilians, Israeli hostages, Israeli soldiers and to the seven aid workers killed in a strike in the beginning of April (i.e. [...] *Arab leaders who are increasingly frustrated by the soaring number of Palestinian civilian deaths in Gaza; The pivot stemmed from the killing of the seven aid workers, who were deployed in Gaza by World Central Kitchen [...]*). Nevertheless, the killings of Israeli soldiers, Israeli hostages and Israeli soldiers is connotated as *accidental*, that of Palestinian civilians is not (i.e. *The accidental killing of the aid workers [...]; the Israeli military released a summary of its investigation into the mistaken killing of three Israeli hostages in Gaza; with the killing of at least 18 Palestinians in the Israeli-occupied West Bank*). Palestinian victims sometimes are also portrayed by means of aggregation (i.e. *Scores of displaced Palestinians fled the grounds of a hospital in southern Gaza*). In addition, also in *The New York Times* corpus the word *deaths* is used to describe Palestinian casualties due to the lack of food or the lack of health facilities, making them seem spontaneous deaths caused by the course of illnesses. These casualties are never linked to the Israeli blockade. As for transitivity, Israelis mainly the agent of active speech acts (i.e. *Israel has said, reported, confirmed, denied* etc.). Israeli forces,

instead, are also associated with non-transactive models of transitivity (i.e. *Even in an extended conflict of 2008 and 2009, opened fire, Israeli forces entered Gaza*) and agentless passive structures such as *119 Israeli soldiers have been killed in Gaza*. In this instance, there is no affected entity, meaning that agency is totally concealed.

Something similar happens for Hamas's actions, represented through activated material processes and speech acts (i.e. *Hamas attacked Israel, agreed to a truce, seized control, launched an attack, invaded Israel, etc.*). Hamas fighters or militants, instead, *have denied accusations, have said little, have stated, have used human shields* etc. They are also said to have seized control of Gaza, suggesting a violent action to take the power over the Strip. No direct link is drawn with 2006 Palestinian elections. Additionally, Hamas members are always referred to as *militants* or *fighters* by means of functionalization (van Leeuwen, 1996; van Leeuwen, 2006) especially when their deaths are announced (i.e. *It reported detaining "14 wanted suspects, including three affiliated with Hamas," as well as some 60 others, and said it had "eliminated 10 terrorists"*). Instead, fitting van Dijk's ideological square model, Hamas's opulence is abundantly described in contrast to the misery and sufferance of the people of Gaza, emphasizing the outgroup's bad deeds (i.e. *Inside the house that Israel says belonged to the Hamas operative, a marble staircase hinted at a level of opulence*).

3.6.2 *The Wall Street Journal*

3.6.2.1 *Lexical analysis*

The lexical analysis of *The Wall Street Journal* revealed that the newspaper uses various euphemisms, with the effect of downgrading Israel's responsibility when it is involved in violent actions. It also maintains a sharp position on some of the most controversial terminology in the discourse on the conflict. For instance, among the *occupation* word group (53 hits in total, raw frequency) the term *occupation* is only used with reference to Palestinian leaders' statements or the statements of their allies (i.e. *"The occupation has been accustomed to fabricating such scenes to create a presumed victory against our resistance fighters"*). The word *occupied*, instead, is always referred to the West Bank and Gaza, but no mention of East Jerusalem or the Golan Heights.

As for the terror-related words (154 hits in 93 articles, raw frequency), while in the other Western newspapers the highest-ranking collocates for the word *terrorist* was *attack*

or assault, in *The Wall Street Journal* corpus the words related to the root terror- are exclusively referred to Hamas, with those being *organization* and *group*. Being this a controversial topic, the expression *U.S.-designated terrorist organization* is overlexicalized, maybe in the attempt to make distance from the claim. However, while it could be perceived as an objective evaluation, coming directly from the U.S. department, it is actually just a linguistic choice and as such it has alternatives, especially since the U.S. are deeply involved in the dynamics of the conflict. When analyzing the representation of Hamas members, van Dijk's ideological schema (van Dijk, 1988a; van Dijk, 1988b) can be applied, as any element that may evoke empathy towards them is neutralized, as it happens, for instance, in one of the articles of the corpus (i.e. *At some point during Sinwar's incarceration, Israeli doctors saved the Palestinian's life when he developed a **brain illness** and was operated on in an Israeli hospital*). Here, Israelis are represented as merciful towards one of their historic enemies, while Sinwar's illness is described as a generic *brain illness*, with no further explanation. It is evident from this extract that the focus of the article were Israel's good actions.

Palestinian casualties are often described by use of euphemisms (i.e. *Israel's campaign has left nearly 32,000 people dead* instead of *killed*; *[the strike] left the bodies of at least 126 people in the rubble*), suppression (i.e. *The **escalating** humanitarian catastrophe and soaring civilian death toll there have sparked global outcries*) and the middle voice *died* (i.e. *Authorities in Hamas-run Gaza say more than 18,400 **Palestinians have died** in Gaza*). Verbs such to erupt, to spark, to grow tend to absorb both the agent and the affected entity, thus suppressing any trace of agency (van Leeuwen, 1996; van Leeuwen, 2006). Other words used to downplay agency and to represent the violence as mutual are *clashes*, *escalation* and *violence*, which are typically realized by existential processes (i.e. *an **upsurge in violence** in the West Bank*; *The Israeli military and Hamas said **there were clashes** between troops and militants*). Furthermore, the token *deaths* and the nominalization *killing* are mostly referred to Palestinian civilians, Israeli soldiers, Israeli hostages and the aid workers killed in a strike on April 1 (i.e. *The **deaths of the aid workers** could derail that initiative*; *In discussing the **deaths of the soldiers**, Israel's military chief Lt. Gen. Herzi Halevi used the term "buffer zone."*; *The U.S. has been pushing Israel to do more to prevent **civilian deaths***). On the contrary, the phrase *the deadliest* is almost exclusively used for Israeli losses (i.e. *Israeli Military Suffers*

Deadliest Day since Gaza War Began). As previously mentioned with reference to other Western newspapers, the Holocaust is used as a standard of comparison for October 7th attack, which is in fact described as *the deadliest day since the **Holocaust***.

Speaking of history-related words, while the word *Holocaust* is used to stress that Hamas's attack of October 7th was the deadliest ever since (i.e. *In the immediate aftermath of the Oct. 7 attacks on southern Israel by Hamas, the single deadliest day for Jews since the **Holocaust** [...]*), the term *Nakba* is used three times, but again no contextualization is offered to the readers. In one of the instances, the *Nakba* is defined as *the flight of Palestinians from their homeland in 1948*, with a nominalization. No further attempts to historically situate these words is made whatsoever nor to provide extensive explanations of the historical events that led to the current situation. *October 7*, instead, is constantly repeated in every article, with the relative Israeli death toll. This may be interpreted as a strategy of attribution of blame, as it is generally mentioned after the Palestinian one. The purpose of this linguistic strategy is that of emphasizing what was the event that started the war. Nevertheless, once again, the situation of violence that pre-existed the ongoing war is greatly overlooked.

Furthermore not only is historical contextualization generally neglected, but sometimes the historical events are re-contextualized by means of omissions or euphemisms (i.e. *In 1948 after Israel's founding, tens of thousands of Palestinians **flooded** into the Egyptian border town of Rafah [...]*). In this instance, what for the Palestinians was a *catastrophe* and a forced displacement not only is not acknowledged, but it is also presented as a normal migration. The metaphor that compares the migrants to a flood is also over-used in the discourse on migration and has the effect of dehumanizing the migrants by describing them as an overwhelming, indistinct mass rather than actual individuals with different and personal stories, needs and rights.

3.6.2.2 Transitivity analysis

The analysis of transitivity revealed that *The Wall Street Journal* employs various transitivity models in his reporting of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, especially non-transactive and agentless passive structures. These strategies are mainly used to represent Israel's actions (i.e. *Israel began fighting from the eastern part of the city and has now **moved into** the southern part; around 90 Palestinians **have been killed** in the West Bank*

since the war began). The first instance uses a euphemism to refer to what may be seen as an invasion. The same happens in a number of other articles where Israel *plans to evacuate* the city of Rafah, while it may be seen, as it is among Palestinians, as a displacement. The last example cited above shows how Israel's violence is mainly described through passivation, especially employing agentless passive structures. Clauses similar to *n people have been killed since the start of the war* are over-represented in the corpus. While the majority of the other selected newspapers often used these kinds of structures together with circumstantial phrases that left proof of agency, *The Wall Street Journal* tends not to include Israel or Israeli military in the circumstantial, at least not to directly tie Israeli actions to their effects. For instance, while in the other newspapers one would find clauses such as *10 people has been killed in Israeli airstrikes*, in *The Wall Street Journal* the circumstantial typically includes nominalizations such as *the fighting, the clashes, the war*. This has the effect of neutralizing agency by giving an impression of mutual violence (i.e. *So far 15,000 people **have been killed in the war in Gaza**; 35 Palestinians in the West Bank **have been killed in clashes** with Israeli forces; Thursday that 7,028 people **had been killed in Gaza***). On the contrary, when Israel is activated, its actions are represented by means of nominalizations (i.e. *Israel's **campaign** has killed over 11,000 people in Gaza; Israel's **response** has killed more than 30,000 people in Gaza; Israel's **airstrikes** have killed more than 4,600 people in Gaza since the start of the war*). The word Israel is not involved in passive clauses as the subject. In addition, when Israel is portrayed through activation, a justification for its actions is often provided (i.e. *Hagari said **Israel's expanded ground operations in Gaza are aimed at securing the return of hostages**; They argue that **they can't accomplish that without striking** Hamas installations protected by civilian infrastructure*). The first instance includes the nominalization *expanded ground operations*, while the second a strategy of attribution of blame (Bandura, 2011).

Also, while Israel and Israeli actors are institutionalized, with a particular attention to military and political figures, the main Palestinian actors are Hamas members, which are always functionalized, especially when their killing is reported (i.e. *amid an increase in clashes between **Israeli forces and Palestinian militants** [...]*). While institutionalization provides Israel and Israeli actors with a certain degree of credibility, strategies of functionalization (van Leeuwen, 1996; van Leeuwen, 2006) may be seen as rhetorical

practices of dehumanization. In this regard, Israeli agency is often mitigated by means of nominalizations (i.e. *The Israeli military said an **attack on a car** in Nablus killed militants planning future attacks; **Blast** at Gaza hospital kills more than 500*) or euphemisms (i.e. *taking a heavy toll on noncombatants; the potential human cost*). Once again, the middle voice *died* is primarily used with reference to Israeli soldiers and hostages as well as Palestinian civilians, especially those killed by the lack of food or fuel due to the blockade. The use of the middle voice serves the purpose of downgrading Israel's responsibility for these casualties, especially since no direct link is made between them and the Israeli blockade.

As for the Palestinians, the phrase *Palestinian civilians* only appear 22 times (raw frequency) in the corpus, as Palestinians are mainly represented as *evacuating, being displaced* and *sheltering*. When they are killed, the word *civilian* is usually not involved, they are simply *people* or *Palestinians*. The main Palestinian actors are Hamas members, as mentioned before, and they are always functionalized as *militants* or *fighters*. The description of their violent actions contains various details (i.e. *Palestinian militants armed **with machine guns, rocket propelled grenades and pistols** were able to stream into Israeli towns and military bases*). Structures fitting van Dijk's ideological squares, which emphasize Hamas's bad actions and Israel's good deeds, are applied in various articles (i.e. "[Israel's commitment] to **minimize** civilians, even as Hamas continues its abhorrent strategy to **maximize** such civilian harm"). The main Palestinian political institution that is mentioned in the corpus is the Palestinian Authority, which is represented as *taking control, ruling* or *governing* Gaza. Notably, Palestinian officials only count 14 hits (raw frequency) in the corpus, while Israeli officials are mentioned 205 times.

3.6.3 Comparing *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*

The lexical analyses of the US newspapers reveal that both *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* make use of specific linguistic strategies that frame the Israel-Palestinian conflict in a way that often mitigates Israeli responsibility while emphasizing Hamas's role as the aggressor (van Dijk, 1988a; van Dijk, 1988b). For instance, both newspapers frequently associate Hamas with terror-related terms, specifically mentioning the events of October 7th in several news reports. Also, both these publications use

euphemisms and lexical choices in general, that result in downgrading Israel's responsibility in civilian casualties and, thus, minimizing the impact of the violence. In addition, both *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* overlook historical contextualization and historical events such as the Nakba are only briefly mentioned but lack detailed explanations. On the contrary, the term Holocaust is constantly mentioned as a standard of comparison for Hamas's attack on October 7.

As for the differences between *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, the former tends to mention occupation-related terminology more directly, without the use of surface markers of detachment, even if only with reference to the West Bank. The latter, instead, always mention occupation-related words in the context of Palestinians' statements or in relation to statements made by their allies. The different frequency of the occupation group words (see Table 6.1 and 7.1) may also signal the relevance attributed to this topic by the two news outlets. On the contrary, the frequencies of terror-related words are very similar (see Table 6.2 and 7.2).

With regard to the description of key political and military figures, *The Wall Street Journal* employs strategies to justify Israel's violence while emphasizing its mercy, such as the case of Israel saving one of Hamas's leaders' life. In addition, *The Wall Street Journal* institutionalize Israeli political and military figures, even more than *The New York Times*, which provides Israeli officials with honorific titles that may make them seem more credible, while using personalization and attributing official titles to Palestinian authorities as well.

In other words, while both newspapers show some bias, *The Wall Street Journal* reveals a more pronounced skew in its lexical choices. It frequently downgrades Israel's responsibility and emphasizes Hamas as the aggressor and the starter of the ongoing violence. This happens through various linguistic strategies, such as the avoidance of the word occupation, with rare exceptions inserted in quotes, and the reiterate use of the phrase *U.S.-designated terrorist organization*. Moreover, *The Wall Street Journal*, more than *The New York Times*, consistently emphasizes Israel's victimhood, while downplaying Palestinian side of the story.

Turning to the similarities regarding the transitivity analysis, both newspapers use agentless passive constructions to describe violence with reference to both sides of the conflict, more frequently Israel's. The use of agentless passive clauses tends to neutralize

agency while giving an impression of mutual violence rather than attributing specific actions to identifiable agents. They also make use of nominalizations (e.g. *raids, fighting, killings, clashes*) that, especially when accompanied by existential processes or verbs such as to erupt, to grow or to escalate, make descriptions of violence seem like spontaneous phenomena without a clear agency. In addition, Hamas members are referred to as militants or fighters through functionalization in both publications, which may contribute to dehumanize them and make them appear more as threats.

With regard to the differences between the two news outlets, instead, while both *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times* tend to use agentless passive structures frequently (i.e. *78 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza*), at least *The New York Times* sometimes retains a link to Israeli agency by means of circumstantial phrases (i.e. *78 Palestinians have been killed in Israeli military raids*). Additionally, *The Wall Street Journal* uses more euphemisms when describing Palestinian casualties (i.e. *noncombatants* or *taking a heavy toll*). *The New York Times*, on the contrary, tends to present these casualties without qualifiers. As for the representation of key political and military figures, while both show some bias towards Israeli actors, *The New York Times* makes an attempt to mention both Israeli and Palestinian officials by name, while in *The Wall Street Journal* Palestinian officials are mentioned significantly less (14 raw occurrences) compared to the Israeli officials (205, raw frequency).

Between the two, *The Wall Street Journal* might be considered more biased toward Israel due to its frequent use of euphemisms and the underrepresentation of Palestinian officials. It also consistently frames Israeli violence in a way that mitigates its accountability, while emphasizing mutuality. *The New York Times*, on the contrary, despite showing bias as well, occasionally provides more context and acknowledges both Palestinian and Israeli official actors.

3.7 Comparing the US, Arab and British press

Apart from the different amount of space devoted to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in general (see Table 2), *The Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* differ from their more liberal counterparts, *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*, also in their representation of the groups involved in the conflict. Specifically, *The New York Times*, and even more *The Guardian*, makes an attempt at contextualizing the current war in the light of

historical events, although occasionally little details are provided. They are also more acknowledging of topics such as the occupation of Palestinian land and references to Palestinian violence as terrorism are usually presented by strategy of detachment. In terms of transitivity, *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*, provide a less biased representation of the conflict by limiting the use of nominalizations and euphemisms. *Al Jazeera*, instead, tend to over-lexicalize the terminology referred to the occupation, thus referring to Israelis as the outgroup. It also makes a good effort in contextualizing historical events and linking them to the present-day situation. In addition, Hamas members are described as *resistance fighters* which is in opposition to what happens in the other news outlets. However, it also tends to favour the Palestinian side of the conflict by functionalizing Israeli victims, using the expression war on Gaza or Israel's war more often than Israel-Hamas, which in turn suggests mutual violence. It also highlights the context of Hamas's actions in relation to Israeli violence, in contrast to the other newspapers that tend to emphasize Hamas's attacks.

In the light of these results, all the newspapers show a certain bias, which, for the Western newspapers lean towards Israel, while *Al Jazeera* refers more favourably to the Palestinian side of the conflict. It means that different newspapers tend to use discourse ideologically to represent events of the conflict. This is probably linked to the historical and political context from which they operate: while Israel is institutionalized and presented as a proper state, Palestinians are thus far stateless. This has some important implications in the representation of violence and the use of sources: while the attack against the Palestinians is referred to as military operation, Palestinian violence against Israel is presented as an assault or even a terrorist assault. This occurs especially in *The Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. In addition, Palestinian violence is presented as the primary reason for the conflict and, as such, is reiterated in the texts of all Western newspapers. On the contrary, passivation is used to represent Israeli violence, sometimes even by employing agentless passive constructions. Palestinian violence is always negatively connotated and presented in detail, but there is no analysis of the reasons behind. On the other hand, Israel's actions, especially when it is activated, are often either accompanied by justifications or presented approximatively or counterbalanced by a direct link to Palestinian violence. Again, this applies to all the Western newspapers analysed in this study, especially to the more conservative ones.

The institutionalization of Israel has also other implications for the newspapers in terms of source selection. Institutional discourse is typically authoritative and delegitimizes alternative sources. Since newspapers crave objectivity and neutrality, for Western newspapers this often results in favouring and thus foregrounding Israel's recounts of the events over those of Palestinians. This does not happen, for instance, for *Al Jazeera*, for which Palestinians are the primary definers of the situation, especially Palestinian eyewitnesses. However, it should be acknowledged that the conditions under which journalists are working to cover the Palestinian-Israeli conflict are less than ideal. Journalists have no access to the front nor to Gaza Strip and the only way they can see what is happening is through the videos posted on social media by Palestinians, by contacting Palestinian witnesses by phone or through official statements. This means that sources and the way they are presented are key to frame a proper understanding of the conflict. In this light this finding might be even more significant.

Furthermore, the Western news outlets might not only overcome political pressures but also face readers expectations. Davis and Walton (1983), quoted in Zaher (2009), for instance, argue that in news reporting, especially on controversial subjects, such as political violence, are approached from an assumed moral consensus. The moral imperative to condemn violence or terrorism leads to practices of moral closure at the level of language. Moreover, condemning acts of violence legitimizes other forms of violence in response (i.e. state violence) which is somehow categorized in a different way from violent rioting or terrorism. In addition, these are well-established newspapers whose readerships tend to identify with them, which is something very specific of the US and the UK; and should be taken into account.

As for the difference between Western outlets and *Al Jazeera*, I have already mentioned the difference regarding the selection and the foregrounding of the newspapers' sources. While the Western newspapers tend to present Israeli violence less clearly, *Al Jazeera* tries to frame it as clearly and as coherently as possible. Overall, *Al Jazeera's* framing contrasts with Western narratives, since it emphasizes the disproportionate impact of Israeli actions. It also provides a more nuanced description of the events and the actors, as it adds Palestinian perspective to the picture.

Conclusion

This study wanted to explore the representation of the groups involved in the 2023-2024 Israeli-Palestinian conflict in five different newspapers, in the attempt of finding whether the outlets' political orientation and/or geographical distribution might have an impact on how the events had been framed. To answer the research questions, all the newspapers selected for the study present a bias toward one of the two sides involved in the conflict. While the Western newspapers, especially the more conservative ones, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Times*, seem to lean toward Israel, *Al Jazeera* favours the Palestinians. The results of this study reveal that political orientation might influence not only the space reserved to a certain issue but also how it is portrayed, specifically looking at lexical and transitivity choices.

This research also showed some limitations that may be easily overcome by future studies on the topic. First, since all the texts from the Western newspapers were extracted from the local edition of their website, it could be interesting to examine the corpus of *Al Jazeera Arabic* to compare the results to those found in this study for *Al Jazeera English*. Second, ethnographic intervention might also provide some fruitful insights, especially if accompanied by interviews with the journalists. Being myself a journalist, thus familiar with the dynamics at play in the newsroom, certainly helped in the development of the work, but I think that a better understanding of the practices of text production can enhance the quality of this study. In addition, a larger corpus may benefit the results of the research and yield even more reliable findings. Other limitations were due to time constraints, meaning that there was not the possibility to examine all the articles one by one, even if quantitative data were always accompanied by more in-depth readings. However, a more in-depth analysis of all the articles in the corpus might also lead to the compilation of a data base of linguistic patterns if done systematically, maybe providing useful materials for future research.

Additionally, one of the main critiques addressed to CADS studies is that they critique actual linguistic choices without providing practical and feasible solutions. In the light of the results obtained in this work, my suggestion would be to integrate a department with paid employees in the newspaper organic to periodically analyse large corpora of their newspaper's articles. Another alternative could be that of educating journalists to self-reflexive practices through skill enhancement courses with periodical meeting to evaluate

the effectiveness of the project. I do realize that current-day journalism is living one of its worst crisis in history, but, if done correctly, these suggestions could yield significant results in terms of both quality and credibility in the long term, making the effort worth the reward.

Finally, when it comes to suggestion for further research, probably a more ethnographical approach to the study of the text might enhance the overall quality of the study. Being in the newsroom, doing participant observation and having the opportunity to access the production of the text might provide fruitful insights to be applied later on during the analysis of the data. This would also take into account more practical issues that journalists have to face when they approach the writing of a new piece.

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Appendix

Table 1. General statistics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict study corpora

Corpus	Tokens	Number of words	Number of news reports	Number of days collected	Average article length by words
The Guardian	148,160	148,806	150	183	992
The Times	132,077	131,033	150	183	874
Al Jazeera English	116,693	116,752	150	183	674
The New York Times	189,720	149,064	150	183	815
The Wall Street Journal	199,998	227,650	150	183	1518

Table 2. Number of news articles related to the 2023-2024 Israeli-Palestinian conflict per month in the selected newspapers' websites.

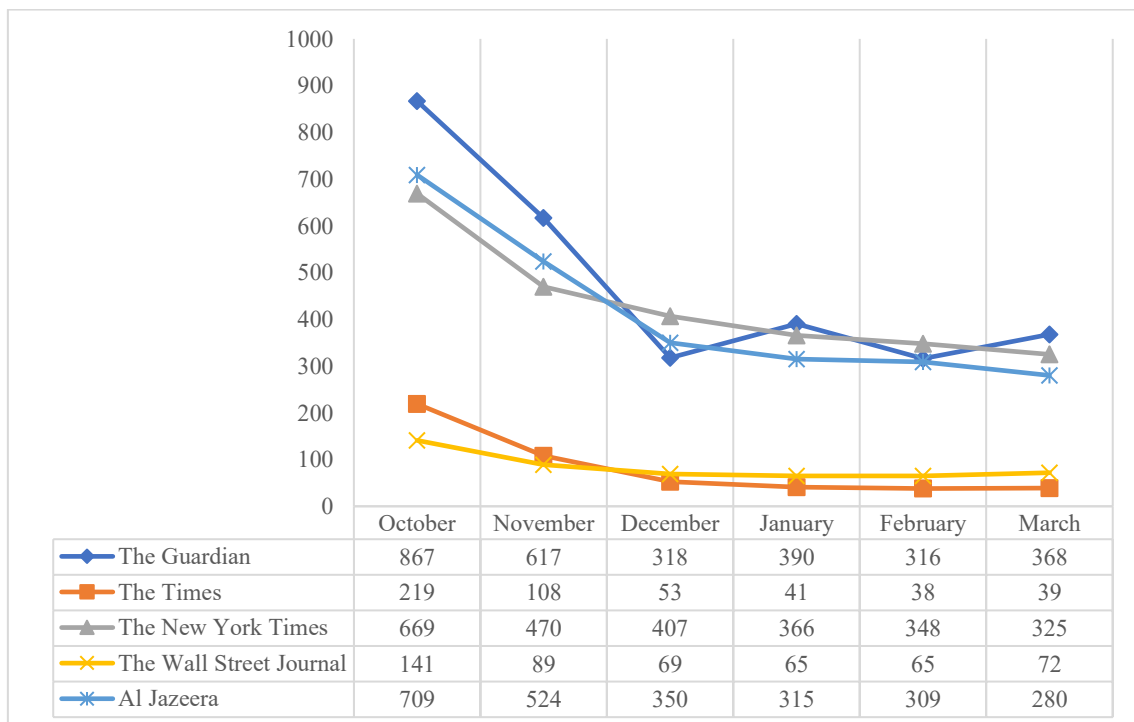


Table 3.1 The Guardian keyness analysis

Type	Keyness (Likelihood)	Keyness (Effect)
Gaza	7005.806	0.022
Israel	6567.553	0.023
Hamas	4894.922	0.016
Israeli	4280.957	0.014
Palestinian	1888.881	0.007
hostages	1426.187	0.005
Netanyahu	1366.843	0.004
humanitarian	1307.806	0.005
ceasefire	1192.709	0.004
killed	1185.916	0.006

Table 3.2 The Times keyness analysis

Type	Keyness (Likelihood)	Keyness (Effect)
Israel	5823.088	0.022
Gaza	5517.366	0.000
Hamas	5377.844	0.019
Israeli	5247.369	0.019
hostages	3653.567	0.013
Netanyahu	1484.391	0.006
Palestinian	1239.274	0.004
war	1164.375	0.005
IDF	1063.041	0.007
defence	887.038	0.003

Table 3.3 Al Jazeera keyness analysis

Type	Keyness (Likelihood)	Keyness (Effect)
Gaza	6265.307	0.023
Israel	5870.929	0.024
Israeli	5112.426	0.020
Hamas	2764.001	0.011
Palestinian	1632.462	0.007
Palestinians	1558.938	0.006
killed	1338.811	0.007
Jazeera	1312.306	0.005
attacks	1156.785	0.005
aid	1147.202	0.006

Table 3.4 The New York Times keyness analysis

Type	Keyness (Likelihood)	Keyness (Effect)
Israel	7897.268	0.020
Gaza	6808.422	0.019
Israeli	6677.954	0.017
Hamas	5988.464	0.013
military	4500.185	0.009
aid	2112.699	0.005
said	1523.350	0.024
hostages	1370.010	0.004
Palestinian	1327.105	0.004
Netanyahu	1297.968	0.003

3.5 The Wall Street Journal keyness analysis

Type	Keyness (Likelihood)	Keyness (Effect)
Israel	8961.461	0.026
Gaza	8794.208	0.023
Israeli	7348.715	0.020
Hamas	7049.974	0.019
military	2843.397	0.011
Palestinian	2299.793	0.007
said	2004.300	0.028
hostages	1991.137	0.006
Netanyahu	1667.654	0.004
officials	1550.097	0.008

Table 4. Daily average of published articles on the 2023-2024 Israeli-Palestinian conflict, categorized per month.

	The Guardian	The Times	The New York Times	The Wall Street Journal	Al Jazeera English
October	4,7	1,2	3,7	0,8	3,8
November	3,3	0,6	2,6	0,5	2,9
December	1,7	0,3	2,2	0,4	1,9
January	2,1	0,2	2	0,4	1,7
February	1,7	0,2	1,9	0,4	1,7
March	2	0,2	1,8	0,4	1,5
Total	2,6	0,5	2,4	0,5	2,3

Table 5.1 The Guardian frequencies of occupation words

Token	Raw freq.	Normalized freq.
occupied	48	72
occupation	32	48
occupying	11	16
occupy	2	3
occupies	1	1
Total	94	75

Table 5.2 The Guardian frequencies of terror words

Token	Raw freq.	Normalized freq.
terrorist	41	61
terrorists	26	39
terrorism	18	27
terror	12	18
Total	97	145

Table 6.1 The Times frequencies of occupation words

Token	Raw freq.	Normalized freq.
occupied	20	72
occupation	12	48
occupying	7	16
occupy	1	1
occupies	1	1
Total	94	75

Table 6.2 *The Times* frequencies of terror words

Token	Raw freq.	Normalized freq.
terrorist	82	122
terrorists	63	94
terror	35	52
terrorism	20	30
Total	200	145

Table 7.1 *The New York Times* frequencies of occupation words

Token	Raw freq.	Normalized freq.
occupied	47	70
occupation	28	42
occupying	3	4
occupy	-	-
occupies	2	3
Total	80	119

Table 7.2 *The New York Times* frequencies of terror words

Token	Raw freq.	Normalized freq.
terrorist	70	104
terrorists	45	67
terror	11	16
terrorism	21	31
Total	147	218

Table 8.1 *The Wall Street Journal* frequencies of *occupation* words

Token	Raw freq.	Normalized freq.
occupied	28	64
occupation	17	39
occupy	5	11
occupying	2	5
occupies	1	2
Total	53	121

Table 8.2 *The Wall Street Journal* frequencies of *terror* words

Token	Raw freq.	Normalized freq.
terrorist	79	180
terror	29	66
terrorists	24	55
terrorism	21	48
Total	153	349

Table 9. First ten *occup** collocates (3R) in the *Al Jazeera English corpus*

Collocates	Rank	Freq (Scaled)	FreqR
West	1	303	59
Bank	2	279	58
Jerusalem	3	117	19
East	4	198	20
Territory	5	246	8
Territories	6	27	3
Responsible	7	39	3
Golan	8	9	2
Heights	9	9	2
Forces	10	630	6

Riassunto dell'elaborato in lingua italiana

Questo elaborato si propone di indagare le modalità di rappresentazione del conflitto Israelo-Palestinese in cinque giornali con un'importante reputazione internazionale. Nello specifico, si tratta di due giornali pubblicati nel Regno Unito (*The Guardian* e *The Times*), due giornali statunitensi (*The New York Times* e il *The Wall Street Journal*) e un giornale con un ampio seguito in Medio Oriente (*Al Jazeera English*). Centocinquanta articoli sono stati estratti dal sito web o dagli archivi online di ogni pubblicazione, includendo gli articoli pubblicati in giorni alterni per non inquinare i dati. Infatti, spesso articoli già pubblicati vengono leggermente rimaneggiati per poi essere nuovamente pubblicati, specialmente nei giorni in cui il flusso di notizie è meno importante. L'argomento di tutti gli articoli è, chiaramente, il conflitto Israelo-Palestinese. Tra gli articoli sono inclusi anche pezzi speciali di approfondimento, analisi ed editoriali. Ad essere esclusi sono, invece, gli articoli di opinione o le lettere inviate all'editore da parte dei lettori. Una volta raccolti i dati in un formato che il software di concordanza è in grado di elaborare, questi sono stati raccolti in cinque diversi corpora per facilitare non solo l'analisi delle singole pubblicazioni, ma anche la loro comparazione. L'obiettivo del presente elaborato è infatti fornire un'analisi delle similitudini e delle differenze nella rappresentazione del conflitto Israelo-Palestinese tra i vari giornali e, più in particolare, questo studio si propone di intercettare eventuali discrepanze tra le pubblicazioni dovute al loro orientamento politico. Questa è infatti la ragione per la quale due diverse pubblicazioni, con orientamenti politici simmetrici sono state selezionate in rappresentanza della stampa inglese e di quella statunitense. I giornali sono stati scelti sulla base della loro reputazione e del tasso di credibilità attribuitogli dai lettori tramite sondaggi condotti da enti terzi. Altri due criteri sono stati la circolazione cartacea e il traffico generato sul sito web. Lo studio parte, comunque, dalla consapevolezza che gli scenari giornalistici della Gran Bretagna e del Regno Unito siano spesso difficilmente comparabili. È possibile intendere che il *The Guardian* e il *The New York Times* non corrispondono esattamente allo stesso prototipo di pubblicazione, pur essendo entrambi le pubblicazioni di pregio maggiormente allineate a sinistra dello spettro politico nei rispettivi Paesi. Bisogna comunque tenere in considerazione che un'esperienza giornalistica come quella del *The Guardian* è difficilmente immaginabile nello scenario

politico statunitense, quantomeno alle condizioni attuali. Tornando, tuttavia, alle condizioni necessarie per la selezione dei giornali da analizzare, nessun'altra pubblicazione araba ha soddisfatto i criteri di selezione, soprattutto in riferimento ai requisiti di reputazione giornalistica e circolazione. Lo scopo, dunque, è non solo analizzare le modalità di rappresentazione tra i vari giornali e all'interno delle singole stampe nazionali, ma anche quello di comprendere se ci siano effettivamente delle differenze tra i giornali Occidentali, tradizionalmente accusati di favorire una narrazione filoisraeliana, e la pubblicazione araba, la quale invece si propone di sfidare proprio le narrazioni dominanti proposte dal giornalismo occidentale.

A questo scopo, è stato utilizzato un approccio integrato tra l'Analisi Critica del Discorso e la Linguistica dei Corpora. I dati sono stati inseriti all'interno di un software di concordanze che permette di calcolare la frequenza grezza totale di singoli lemmi, di rintracciare eventuali pattern linguistici, inserendoli nel loro contesto di riferimento, e di segnalarne la frequenza. Essendo i corpora composti dello stesso numero di testi ma un diverso ammontare di parole totali, le frequenze proposte dal software di concordanza sono state normalizzate attraverso una semplice procedura statistica: moltiplicando il numero della frequenza calcolata dal software per il numero di parole totale del corpus e dividendo poi per 100.000. Il numero per cui dividere dipende di solito dalle dimensioni del corpus. Contenendo tutti i corpora presi in considerazione meno di 1.000.000 di parole, 100.000 è stato ritenuto un numero sufficiente per ottenere dei risultati attendibili. Questi strumenti, tipici della Linguistica dei Corpora e della Linguistica Computazionale, sono stati integrati dalle considerazioni teoriche dell'Analisi Critica del Discorso. Questo approccio alla disciplina dell'Analisi del Discorso nasce intorno agli anni '80 del secolo scorso, in un periodo in cui la linguistica si occupava principalmente di congetture astratte. Proprio in questo ambiente accademico, preoccupato di questioni di filosofia astratta, comincia a farsi strada un certo interesse per il concreto e, più specificamente, per il contesto e la pragmatica.

L'Analisi Critica del Discorso affonda le sue radici in diverse discipline ed essa stessa nasce come un approccio inter- e multidisciplinare, facendo di questa caratteristica uno dei suoi cardini essenziali. Quella che in inglese prende il nome di CDA (*Critical Discourse Analysis*) si innesta nel tronco della filosofia neo-Marxista, considerando i prodotti culturali non più mera sovrastruttura ma campo di battaglia per l'affermazione

del potere di classe. Altri contributi sono poi quello degli ordini del discorso di Foucault, la teoria del genere e dell'ideologia di Bakhtin, l'attenzione per il discorso politico dell'Analisi del Discorso francese, specialmente di Pêcheux, e la Linguistica Critica. Tra questi però un'influenza essenziale è sicuramente Michael Halliday, con la sua Linguistica sistemico-funzionale. Halliday vede il linguaggio come un sistema che offre ai parlanti una serie di scelte finalizzate alla costruzione di certi significati in certi contesti. Ogni scelta linguistica, infatti, dipende dal contesto nel quale è stata inserita e può avere una funzione specifica. L'Analisi Critica del Discorso si propone di analizzare le scelte compiute dai parlanti e di svelare le potenziali implicazioni ideologiche che queste potrebbero celare. Per farlo, ciascuno dei principali esponenti della CDA ha elaborato un proprio quadro di riferimento teorico. Tuttavia, questa diversità metodologica è presto sopperita dall'apertura intrinseca della disciplina stessa che si adatta e accoglie concetti provenienti da altre discipline, specialmente la storia, la sociologica e la psicologia. Questo testo presenta tre dei principali approcci alla disciplina. In questa sede ci limiteremo ad accennare agli aspetti dei singoli approcci che hanno poi composto il quadro teorico di questo lavoro.

La proposta teorica di Norman Fairclough (1989) prevede la scomposizione di ogni evento discorsivo su tre livelli: il discorso come testo, il discorso come pratica discorsiva e il discorso come pratica sociale. Questi tre piani potrebbero anche essere definiti usando tre semplici parole: descrizione, interpretazione, spiegazione. Il primo step prevede una descrizione delle realizzazioni linguistiche, che poi rappresenta anche la parte preponderante di questo lavoro, trattandosi per l'appunto di un'analisi prima di tutto linguistica. Il secondo e il terzo step, invece, vengono sviluppati nei paragrafi di comparazione tra le pubblicazioni prese in esame, introducendo occasionalmente concetti presi in prestito da altre discipline, come la sociologia dei media, la scienza politica e la storia.

A questo proposito, un altro approccio che è stato considerato utile ai fini della composizione di questo elaborato è quello storico-discorsivo, che ha come sua massima esponente Ruth Wodak. Questo approccio, in particolare, combina l'analisi del discorso con una forte attenzione storica e contestuale. L'obiettivo è quello di studiare il cambiamento delle pratiche discorsive e delle modalità di rappresentazione sociale, soprattutto in contesti di pregiudizi e di discriminazione. Per farlo, Wodak invita ad una

prospettiva multidisciplinare e all'integrazione nell'analisi di ogni possibile informazione contestuale.

L'approccio socio-cognitivo di Teun A. van Dijk, invece, esplora la reiterazione di dinamiche di potere attraverso l'uso del discorso, concentrandosi in particolare sui processi cognitivi di comprensione del testo. Uno dei concetti introdotti da van Dijk è stato ampiamente utilizzato nel corso dell'analisi dei testi: i cosiddetti quadrati ideologici. Si tratta di strategie linguistiche che servono ad amplificare le azioni o le caratteristiche negative di coloro che sono considerati parte dell'*out-group*, mentre quelle dell'*in-group* vengono mitigate. E viceversa: le azioni positive dell'*out-group* vengono mitigate e quelle dell'*in-group* amplificate attraverso l'utilizzo di specifiche strategie retoriche e linguistiche. Inoltre, van Dijk presenta il discorso come una risorsa e sottolinea come l'accesso a tale risorsa non sia effettivamente garantito a tutti i gruppi sociali. Secondo l'autore, infatti, le élite avrebbero un accesso privilegiato a quello che poi diventa un campo per l'affermazione del proprio potere sociale e del proprio gruppo di riferimento.

Per quanto riguarda, invece, l'approccio socio-semantico (SocSem) di Theo van Leeuwen, questo si è rivelato di fondamentale importanza per la categorizzazione e l'analisi delle varie strategie linguistiche utilizzate nella rappresentazione dei gruppi sociali coinvolti nel conflitto. Van Leeuwen si concentra sulle modalità con cui i segni (linguistici, visivi, gestuali, etc.) vengono utilizzati per rappresentare e trasformare le pratiche sociali. Analizza le strategie linguistiche che i parlanti scelgono di utilizzare per rappresentare gruppi sociali e situazioni in un certo modo. Tra queste, l'autore dà una definizione precisa delle modalità con cui un individuo può essere rappresentato come un uomo per il quale è facile provare empatia, attraverso strategie di personalizzazione, o in alternativa come un mero esecutore di istruzioni, che è quello che accade quando vengono utilizzate strategie di funzionalizzazione nei confronti degli individui. Queste scelte, secondo l'autore, sono influenzate da ideologie ad esse sottostanti e possono a loro volta influenzare coloro che le ricevono, privilegiando o escludendo determinate caratteristiche identitarie degli attori sociali.

L'applicazione di tali prospettive teoriche all'analisi di testi giornalistici, tuttavia, presuppone una preliminare conoscenza delle peculiarità linguistiche del genere giornalistico in genere, ma dei reportage di guerra nello specifico. Per questo motivo, l'elaborato presenta al lettore le principali caratteristiche dei testi giornalistici: la

mancanza di un ordine cronologico nel racconto degli eventi, la necessità di informare risultando allo stesso tempo accattivanti e la tendenza a presentare gli eventi ritenuti più importanti nelle parti iniziali del testo, specialmente nel titolo e nel cosiddetto *lead*. Vengono poi presentati i cosiddetti *news values*, ossia dei criteri utilizzati dai giornalisti per ponderare la notiziabilità degli eventi che vengono loro presentati.

Infine, la revisione della letteratura esistente sul tema in analisi ha evidenziato un bias nei confronti degli attori sociali israeliani, specialmente per i media occidentali. Studi precedenti, pur se ormai datati e con un'analisi più circoscritta, hanno mostrato che le modalità di rappresentazione del conflitto Israelo-Palestinese spesso mancano di contestualizzazione storica, cosa che produce una narrazione spesso anche imparziale.

Nel secondo capitolo, ampio spazio è dato alla descrizione della metodologia utilizzata. In particolare, si sottolineano i vantaggi derivanti dalla combinazione di Analisi Critica del Discorso e Linguistica dei Corpora. Mentre la Linguistica dei Corpora permette l'elaborazione di ingenti quantità di dati, promettendo quindi risultati più affidabili e corpora più rappresentativi dei generi testuali in analisi, l'Analisi Critica del Discorso integra un approccio più qualitativo, orientato ad una lettura attenta dei testi. In questo modo, anche grazie all'utilizzo di software esterni, gli analisti del discorso vengono incoraggiati a testare le proprie ipotesi, trovandosi davanti alla possibilità concreta che queste non vengano confermate dall'analisi quantitativa. Questo processo di auto-riflessione non può che produrre risultati più attendibili, specialmente se l'integrazione tra i due modelli metodologici riguarda ogni singolo testo del corpus.

Inoltre, nel secondo capitolo viene ripercorsa anche la storia alle origini del conflitto Israelo-Palestinese, per dare modo al lettore di inserire i risultati dell'analisi linguistica nel contesto nel quale e dal quale sono state generate. La descrizione degli eventi storici fondamentali nell'ultimo secolo di conflitto parte con l'affermazione del movimento Sionista, anche in Europa. Viene poi presentato anche un resoconto dell'esperienza britannica in Palestina attraverso il Mandato affidato al Regno Unito dalle Nazioni Unite. A questo proposito, si fa poi riferimento al piano delle Nazioni Unite per la spartizione del territorio palestinese tra israeliani e palestinesi, per poi arrivare alla Guerra dei Sei Giorni nel 1967 e una serie di altri conflitti, come la Guerra dell'Ottobre del 1973 e l'invasione israeliana del Libano nel 1982. Segue un resoconto degli eventi della Prima Intifada e di una serie di tentativi diplomatici fallimentari nel contesto della Guerra del

Golfo, la quale certamente catalizza le attenzioni, specialmente dell'Occidente, allontanandole dalla questione palestinese. Il resoconto storico continua con la descrizione dei processi di pace di Oslo e Camp David, anch'essi pressoché fallimentari nella risoluzione del conflitto. La frustrazione per le speranze di pace ormai sfumate, si riverbera nel racconto della seconda Intifada, per poi arrivare fino ai giorni nostri. Nel momento in cui questa tesi viene redatta, le violenze tra le due parti non sono ancora cessate.

Il terzo capitolo introduce i risultati dell'analisi linguistica ed effettua una comparazione delle varie stampe regionali e/o nazionali, al fine di determinare se l'orientamento politico delle testate possa effettivamente rappresentare una variabile in relazione alle modalità con cui il conflitto viene presentato ai lettori. Per quanto riguarda le testate inglesi, il *The Times* e il *The Guardian* usano entrambi la terminologia legata a temi che si potrebbero definire controversi, come l'occupazione dei territori palestinesi e la definizione di terrorismo applicata alla questione palestinese. Tuttavia, il *The Times* tende a evitare un riferimento diretto ad Israele, utilizzando strategie linguistiche che hanno l'effetto di mettere una distanza tra l'autore e il contenuto del testo. Si tratta, per esempio, dell'utilizzo del discorso diretto o delle virgolette per introdurre termini legati ai temi dell'occupazione e del terrorismo. Il *The Guardian*, invece, utilizza questi termini in maniera meno ambigua. La parola *occupation*, per esempio, compare 94 volte (frequenza grezza) nel corpus del *The Guardian* rispetto alle 41 del *The Times*. L'opposto accade, invece, con i termini semanticamente legati al concetto di terrorismo. Questo potrebbe essere indice del fatto che il *The Times* guardi con certo favore alle posizioni israeliane. Infatti, entrambi i giornali rappresentano Hamas come un gruppo terroristico, ma il *The Guardian* mostra maggiore cautela. Inoltre, la prospettiva palestinese circa le origini del conflitto è riconosciuta soltanto dal *The Guardian*, il quale quantomeno tenta di contestualizzare il conflitto attuale alla luce degli eventi precedenti al 7 Ottobre. Il *The Times*, invece, menziona la *Nakba* una volta sola e senza fornire ulteriori dettagli su cosa questo evento abbia significato e significhi per la comunità palestinese. Inoltre, entrambi utilizzano strutture passive in riferimento alle vittime palestinesi, cosa che ha l'effetto di minimizzare la responsabilità di Israele. Tuttavia, il *The Guardian* tende a mettere più in discussione, rispetto al *The Times*, la narrazione degli eventi fornita da Israele o gli Stati Uniti.

Con riferimento al corpus di *Al Jazeera*, invece, il lessico legato ai temi dell'occupazione e del terrorismo sono utilizzati nel tentativo di contrastare quella che *Al Jazeera* definisce la narrazione dominante dei media occidentali. Le parole legate al tema del terrorismo ricorrono 55 volte nel corpus, spesso riferendosi ad Hamas in via circostanziale. La parola *occupation* appare frequentemente, sia in riferimento alla Cisgiordania che a Gerusalemme Est, segnale di un atteggiamento critico nei confronti delle azioni israeliane. Termini come *conflict* o *clashes* vengono utilizzati per descrivere una violenza che opera da entrambe le parti. Nonostante ciò, i membri di Hamas vengono riconosciuti come *resistance fighters*, in contrasto con ciò che accade per le altre testate prese in considerazione. Per quanto riguarda poi l'analisi della transitività, *Al Jazeera* sottolinea la responsabilità israeliana attraverso l'utilizzo di verbi alla forma attiva, mentre la violenza palestinese è spesso passivizzata. Le azioni israeliane sono descritte nel dettaglio, mentre le azioni di Hamas sono rappresentate in modo meno netto. I membri di Hamas o delle autorità Palestinesi sono rappresentati tramite i cosiddetti *verbi di dire*: dicono, smentiscono, dichiarano. Lo stesso a parti inverse accade per Israele nelle testate occidentali, il che potrebbe indicare un certo interesse nel dare priorità alla definizione della situazione di una delle due parti, a discapito dell'altra. Inoltre, i termini utilizzati per descrivere i palestinesi tendono ad enfatizzare la loro sofferenza, mentre le morti israeliane sono spesso rappresentate tramite funzionalizzazioni o generalizzazioni.

Le testate statunitensi utilizzano strategie linguistiche che attenuano le responsabilità di Israele e sottolineano, invece, il fatto che Hamas sia l'aggressore e sia stato proprio l'attacco del 7 Ottobre ad aver dato inizio alle ostilità. Inoltre, entrambi usano termini legati al terrorismo e mancano di contesto storico, specialmente della prospettiva palestinese. Tuttavia, il *The New York Times* usa il lessico relativo all'occupazione in maniera meno ambigua rispetto al *The Wall Street Journal*, il quale inserisce parole come *occupation* o *occupied* nel riportare, per onore di cronaca, le dichiarazioni delle autorità palestinesi. Il *The Wall Street Journal* poi utilizza anche eufemismi per descrivere la sofferenza delle vittime palestinesi, il tutto enfatizzando la credibilità delle figure politiche e militari israeliane costantemente istituzionalizzate. Il riferimento alle autorità palestinesi, invece, è quasi assente. Per quanto riguarda l'analisi della transitività, entrambi fanno uso di costruzioni passive, che hanno l'effetto di mitigare le responsabilità degli attori che le pongono in essere. Tuttavia, *The New York Times* in alcune occasioni

tende ad attribuire, seppur debolmente, la violenza agli agenti israeliani attraverso l'uso di circostanziali.

In definitiva, il confronto tra la stampa statunitense, araba e britannica mostra come testate più liberali come il *The new York Times* e il *The Guardian* si sforzino quantomeno di offrire alcuni elementi di contestualizzazione, anche storica, ai propri lettori. Al contrario, *The Wall Street Journal* e il *The Times* sottolineano la responsabilità palestinese, in particolar modo di Hamas, minimizzando quella israeliana, senza offrire ulteriori analisi sulle motivazioni reali del conflitto. *Al Jazeera*, invece, fornisce una rappresentazione più favorevole ai palestinesi, affrontando ampiamente temi come l'occupazione dei territori palestinesi e contestualizzando la violenza di Hamas come reazione alla violenza israeliana.

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