

A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Representation of Israel and Palestine in American Media

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This thesis studies how Israel and Palestine are represented in American media reports about the ongoing war in the Gaza Strip. Media can fundamentally affect views of the audience on current topics, so researching and increasing awareness of media bias is crucial. The data for this study come from four CNN articles and seven New York Post articles that were published in September 2024. This study applies Critical Discourse Analysis to investigate selected linguistic features in the materials. The purpose of this thesis is to examine how the lexical choices, transitivity structures, and arguments and claims in the materials are used to create representation of both sides of the conflict, and how they might reveal bias. The findings of this thesis reveal differences in representations of Israel and Palestine in all categories, most notably in the lexicon. Further research could be conducted to examine how different linguistic elements, such as narrative, are utilised to create representation.

Key words: representation, critical discourse analysis, Israel, Palestine, media

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1 Introduction

In December 2023, South Africa accused Israel of genocide in the Gaza war, which was later discussed in the International Court of Justice. Organisations such as Amnesty International have also condemned Israel's oppression and domination against Palestine as apartheid. Despite these grave accusations, many newspapers still depict Israel's actions as justified (e.g. Tasseron, 2023). This thesis examines qualitatively the news coverage of the Israel-Gaza conflict in the Gaza Strip that began in October 2023, and the bias exhibited in the articles for either side of the conflict. The political and military conflict between Israel and Palestine is one of the longest and most violent in modern history. The central issues of the conflict are Israel's occupation of the land that historically has also belonged to the Palestinian people and the human rights violations that Israel has inflicted on Palestinians.

The war and its media attention have been subject to much academic research, e.g. (Tasseron 2023, Neureiter 2017). However, no studies of the latest developments of the conflict exist and most of the research focuses on events before the year 2014. This thesis builds on the previous research about the discourse of the Israel-Gaza conflict by utilising Critical Discourse Analysis methods to scrutinise the discourse on recent news reports and to compare how different sources cover the same events. It is important to study how the news and the media display bias because newspaper articles have immense social power and a significant impact on public perception of a particular subject, as was demonstrated by Hamborg, Donnay, and Gipp (2018, 409).

Due to the scope of the paper, the data have been limited to two news sources in the United States of America: CNN and the New York Post. American media serves as the target of observation because of its global audience and influence. The data will be discussed in more detail in section 3.

The purpose of this research is to scrutinise the representations of groups and actions related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by employing a linguistic analysis and to uncover the ideologies behind them. Specifically, this research seeks to answer the following questions: 1. What image do American Newspaper articles create about Israel and Palestine? 2. How do the chosen linguistic elements, i.e. lexicon, transitivity structures, and argumentation in the texts show this? I answer these questions by conducting a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA

is an analytic framework that examines the relationships between language, power, and ideology (Fairclough 1995). CDA will be discussed further in section 2.2.

This thesis now continues to section 2, which provides an overview of the theoretical framework of Critical Discourse Analysis, and introduces key concepts such as ideology, representation and media bias. Section 2 also briefly introduces the background of the conflict, which is useful for understanding the context of the topic and gives examples of prior studies related to news analysis and war journalism. Following this, section 3 introduces the methodology of this study and explains the processes of data selection. It also presents the categories for analysis and the analytic procedures utilised in the analysis section. Section 4 consists of the actual analysis of the materials and a discussion of the results. Finally, section 5 summarises the findings and offers some recommendations for further research.

2 Background

This section of the thesis introduces the theoretical framework that guides this study and specific approaches and concepts relevant to the research. Furthermore, it provides a brief overview of the historical and social context for the Israel-Palestine conflict and the media representation of both parties.

2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis provides the main theoretical framework for this thesis. CDA is a “problem-oriented interdisciplinary research movement, subsuming a variety of approaches, each with different theoretical models, research methods and agenda” (Fairclough et al. 2011, 357). Therefore, there is no one method of conducting CDA but rather multiple techniques. Still, the different approaches share the same goals and assumptions, such as the idea that discourse can construct and reflect social and political issues. Because of these qualities, Critical Discourse Analysis has often been applied to investigate political and social issues, e.g. (Wenden, 2005). A central goal for CDA is to clarify the relationships between language, power, and ideology (Fairclough, 1989). Ideology is a key concept for this study, and Van Dijk defines it generally as socially shared belief systems of groups, or ideologies as “foundational social beliefs of a rather general and abstract nature” (2006, 116).

As stated above, social issues can be reflected in discourse. Van Dijk states that language and language use cannot be separated from the interactional functions and the social context of verbal communication (1983, 22). Therefore, language forms reveal something about the social action behind the text and can be analysed to find, for example, biased assumptions. It is crucial that when conducting CDA, in addition to the textual analysis, the text is related to a broader social background and the processes of text production, consumption, and distribution are considered. These are the basic principles behind Fairclough’s three-dimensional method of discourse analysis, which have been considered in different sections of this thesis, although not examined deeply due to the scope of this paper. As the purpose of this thesis is to critically analyse media data and its semantic structures to reveal the bias behind them, CDA is a fitting approach for this study.

As the data for this research comes from news reports, it is important to note that “news production is not a direct representation (biased or not) of events, but rather some form of discourse processing” (Van Dijk 1983, 28). In other words, news construction is a

reconstruction of other discourses. Thus, it is important to be aware of factors that might affect this reconstruction, such as the social context of the news production, public opinions and the readership of the paper, and the sources where journalists get their information when they are not themselves at the war scene. For example, some of the articles analysed in this paper include sources such as *the Times of Israel*, *Jerusalem Post*, or the Gaza Health Ministry, which might affect the tone and content of the articles.

2.2 The Israel-Palestine Conflict and Media Representation

As discussed in Section 1, the territorial dispute between Israel and Palestine has led to one of the longest and most violent conflicts in modern history. To give a brief and incomplete summary, the roots of the conflict are in the rise of Zionism and Arab Nationalism, with the creation of the state of Israel leading to the first Arab-Israeli war and a mass displacement of Palestinians. Since then, violence has been recurrent in the area as subsequent wars, intifadas, and ongoing land disputes have perpetuated the conflict. Since Hamas has governed the Gaza Strip, multiple escalations of violence have occurred in the area, most recently on 7 October 2023, when Hamas-led militants attacked Israel in response to Israel's continued occupation. In response, Israel declared itself in a state of war. A ceasefire agreement was reached in January 2025 but by then, the war had resulted in the death of more than 45,000 Palestinians in 15 months, according to some estimates (e.g. Statista 2025). Israeli authorities estimate the number of Israeli deaths to be 1600, most of whom died in the October 7 attack. The conflict resumed in mid-March, so the number of casualties can be assumed to increase. The war is the deadliest for Palestinians in the history of the Israel-Palestine conflict and has raised international concern over the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

Since the conflict is deeply rooted in history and still influences politics today, it is no surprise that it has gained plenty of media attention and become a constant subject of news reporting. Representation is often an important concept in media discourse and is a key concept for this study. Representation in this context refers to the language used to “assign meaning to groups and their social practices, to events, and to social and ecological conditions and objects” (Wenden 2005, 90). Even though news reporting is expected to be objective, truthful, and accurate, people from both sides of the conflict have often accused newspapers of bias against them. Media bias here refers to internal bias exhibited by media coverage, which can be manifested e.g. in the selection of sources, published information, and word choices (Hamborg et al. 2018, 391). As mentioned in section 1, presence of bias in news

reports may significantly impact the readers' opinions on the topic and spread stereotypes of groups of people.

News reports of the war have been the subject of many academic studies, many of which have observed the reporting to be biased one way or another. Among them, Tasserou has analysed British and South African media coverage of the 2014 Israel-Gaza war from the perspective of legitimacy (2023). In this context, legitimacy is afforded to an actor when the action can be considered justifiable. In his research, Tasserou suggests that Israel's actions have legitimacy in the eyes of the media, i.e. they are seen as acceptable whereas Hamas' actions are classified as terrorism and therefore are not seen as acceptable (2023, 588). Furthermore, Centre for Media Monitoring (CMM) has constructed a report about anti-Palestine media bias relating to the reporting of events in Gaza in 2023-2024 in British reports. Their analysis reveals that bias often manifests in e.g. (a lack of) context, framing, language, and unverified claims (2024, 20-21). Additionally, Neureiter acknowledges that the findings of media coverage studies have been mixed but suggests that anti-Israeli bias is more common in liberal media outlets than in conservative ones (2017, 70). These findings are used as a comparison to the results of this thesis.

To understand the ideologies behind the news discourse on the conflict, it is important to be aware of the different relationships between the USA and Israel versus the USA and Palestine. Tasserou notes that Israel has an advantage over Palestine when it comes to perception since Western actors, such as the United States, offer it legitimacy (2023, 584). For decades, the relationship between the United States and Israel has been mutually beneficial. The US government has long been a supporter of Israel and provides Israel with military aid, with Israel being the biggest recipient of US foreign aid, and political support, having used the United Nations Security Council veto power frequently against resolutions condemning Israel. On the contrary, many Westerners see Muslims and Arabs as the 'Other' – different from us but collectively all the same, which leads to stereotyping and negative representations in Western popular culture. For example, Li and Zhong (2022) found in their research that Islam and Muslims are commonly represented as outsiders and even *turmoil makers* in the Western media. As this current study focuses on Western media, it is important to acknowledge the context of these different attitudes because they already put the two groups into unequal positions.

3 Materials

The data of this study consist of articles from two American media sources, CNN and the New York Post (NYP). These sources were selected because they are among the most-read news sources in the United States (Statista 2025) and therefore have an influence over a large audience. Additionally, they do not require a membership to access the articles. The articles were accessed through the News on the Web Corpus for ease of access, as searching and narrowing down the results according to the purposes of this study was difficult on the news sites. I used the neutral search term “Gaza” to narrow down the results to only articles reporting on the events in the Gaza Strip and the time frame chosen was September 1-September 30, 2024, to include only recent articles. Since the Israel-Gaza conflict has been subject to much media attention, especially since the events of October 7, 2023, recent articles are better suited to get a realistic account of the discourse around the conflict currently. A short time frame of one month was chosen to ensure that analysis of all relevant articles would be possible. This initial search gave me 66 articles from the New York Post and 20 from CNN. I manually explored the results and selected the articles for the analysis based on the following criteria: the articles must focus on the events in the Gaza Strip instead of only mentioning it in passing, and opinion pieces, columns, and political articles are rejected. Some of the articles are longer and cover other subjects as well, so of those only the relevant parts are analysed.

Based on these criteria, four articles were selected from CNN and seven from the New York Post. However, the CNN articles are notably longer so the overall word count from both sources is nearly equal. As the research in this thesis is mainly qualitative, the unequal number of articles does not pose a significant risk for the credibility of the analysis. Five of the articles are about Israel’s attack on Gaza’s school compound, four about Israeli hostages found dead, and two about Israel’s Prime Minister Netanyahu’s plans to evacuate northern Gaza. As there are multiple articles about one subject, it allows for better comparison between the articles.

As mentioned in section 2.1, earlier research has suggested that there is a difference in the existence of anti-Israel bias between liberal and conservative newspapers. For that reason, I chose my articles from a liberal source (CNN), and a more conservative source (NYP), to allow for a comparison of whether the political stance of the source affects the representation.

However, the political stance of the newspapers is not the only explaining factor, and for example the information sources and demographic of the papers might also affect their output.

It should be noted that due to the scope of the paper, I am only able to analyse a small number of articles. For the same reason, I only analyse three elements of the articles: lexicon, transitivity, and arguments and claims, since conducting a full analysis of various levels of the text would result in a very shallow analysis in a paper of this scope. Due to these limitations, the results are only approximate. This will, however, allow me to make a more in-depth analysis of the elements I focus on.

4 Methods

This thesis studies the relationship between the lexical and grammatical elements in the materials, and the ideologies they might reveal. The main form of analysis for this thesis is CDA. Van Dijk (1983, 24) argues that focusing on news discourse “requires a full analysis of various levels, units, dimensions, modes, and social contexts of the discourse”. Because such a full analysis of even one article would be extremely time-consuming and might lead to a shallow analysis, I only select the elements most relevant for my materials to analyse. This allows me to analyse a larger number of articles more in-depth and the results can still highlight some areas for future research and give insight into overall themes.

To help me determine which micro-level discourse structures to analyse, as there are countless to select from, I studied guidelines by Fairclough (1989, 1992), and Wodak and Meyer (2001). These suggest the analysis of vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, and textual structures. Not all of these are relevant to my study, as the structure of news text slightly differs from spoken text and other written genres. Based on the guidelines, I chose three elements for the actual analysis: lexicon, transitivity, and arguments and claims. These were chosen because they all appear frequently in my materials and have the potential to reveal hidden ideologies. As my data are limited, it is important to study elements that are present in all of them to get as comprehensive results as possible. The lexical category is based on Fairclough (1992, 185-192), with the focus on alternative wordings and word meaning. The category of transitivity has been adapted from Fairclough (1989, 123-125), with the focus on use of agency and active or passive sentences. The analysis of arguments is adapted from Wodak and Meyer (2001, 72-73), and it mainly includes examining which arguments are used by different actors and groups to justify their actions.

The analysis of the lexicon is key in illustrating implicit ideologies in discourse. Van Dijk (1998, 189-190) argues that lexical analysis is the most obvious component in ideological discourse analysis and that ideologies are a major source of lexical variation. For the analysis of the lexicon, I focus on two categories: persons and groups, and actions and events. For persons and groups, I search for specific words used to describe the people, tonal choices used for describing the different groups, and any differences in how the groups are presented. A mention of a person or a group is included in the analysis if they have a significant role in the text. My main aim is to reveal whether some groups are referred to more positively than others, which can reveal ideologies. Analysis of actions and events mostly includes

identifying mentions of violent acts and examining how they are described, and what kind of vocabulary is used to depict them. The focus here is on whether actions by different groups are described more positively or negatively.

The second level of analysis, transitivity analysis focuses on how the articles represent violence by both sides of the conflict, and how they express blame through transitivity structures. Agency as well as passive and active structures are observed. Especially in the transitivity analysis, it is important to keep in mind that the grammatical structures may be arbitrary, or they might be functional. I do not include in my analysis the grammatical structures that are in the text purely for grammatical reasons or to make the text more easily understandable, which is important for a news text. Sentences are analysed as arguments and claims if their purpose is to justify, argue, or claim. Some of the categories are somewhat overlapping, as the arguments often refer to persons or groups for example.

5 Analysis and Discussion

Findings from the different categories are analysed here in their subcategories. The Categories covered here are lexicon, transitivity, and arguments and claims. The findings are discussed more generally at the end of each subsection. For the convenience of the reader, references indicate the news source in addition to the author of the example.

5.1 Lexicon

Analysis of the lexical elements is divided into two subsections, persons and groups and actions and events, because they are the most common categories in the articles.

5.1.1 Persons and Groups

Two NYP articles and three CNN articles cover the topic of Israel's attack on a former school compound, and in those, Palestinians are depicted as the victims. Four NYP articles but none of the CNN ones focus on executed Israeli hostages, and they portray Israel as the victim. It should be noted that the number of CNN articles is smaller than the NYP articles, but as all the articles published within the timeframe are included in the analysis, CNN's lack of reports about events where Israeli are the victims might be an intentional choice.

The words Palestine or Palestinian are mentioned in total 23 times in all the articles, whereas the word Hamas appears 69 times – three times as often – which suggests that the articles lack context about the broader Israeli-Palestinian issue and discuss only specifically the Israel-Hamas war. This discrepancy is especially noticeable in the NYP articles. This can be problematic, as this lack of context may lead to situations where Israel is represented as the innocent side that has the right to kill thousands of civilians to defend itself. This is illustrated in example (1). All emphasis in the examples are mine.

(1): The Israeli offensive in Gaza **since the Hamas-led October 7 attack on Israel** has flattened neighborhoods, wiped out families and created a humanitarian disaster across the enclave. (Nasser 2024 [CNN])

Although the example (1) talks about the consequences of Israel's attack in Gaza, it offers the Hamas's attack on Israel as the only context for the war and does not mention anything about Israel's past oppression in the area, which might imply to the reader that Israel is the victim in

the war and defends itself against Hamas. Additionally, the lack of mentions about Palestine puts the focus on the perpetrators and shows that the victims are not the focus of the articles.

The articles more often talk about Israelis collectively rather than as individuals. A common strategy is substituting a spokesperson for the state of Israel, as in example (2).

(2): Israel said the operation targeted Hamas fighters there. (Nasser 2024 [CNN])

This substitution suggests that the whole state of Israel is united and shares the same interests, as though there was no opposition from anywhere.

Israeli groups are often referred to neutrally and using few descriptors (*The Israel Defense Forces, the military, Israeli officials*). No remarkable difference exists between NYP and CNN articles in the lexicon used to describe Israel but in one NYP article, Israel is once referred to by religion (*the Jewish state*). When talking about individual Israelis, they are talked about neutrally or in reference to their title (example 3) but sometimes they are also described as the victim (example 4).

(3): Earlier this week, **Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant** told members of the IDF's 9th Brigade that the "center of gravity is shifting to the north." (Land 2024 [NYP])

(4): Kirby was referencing the deaths of Israeli-American Hersh Goldberg-Polin, 23, and five other captives who were fatally shot in the head by Hamas in August. (Reyes 2024 [NYP])

Most uses of the words Palestine or Palestinian are also in a neutral context (example 5) or as a victim (example 6), but they are also used negatively (example 7).

(5): **Palestinian officials** say Israeli airstrikes have killed 16 people in the Gaza Strip. (AP 2024 [NYP])

(6): The strike hit Al-Mawasi, a coastal region in Khan Younis where tens of thousands of **displaced Palestinians** have fled Israel's bombardment from other parts of Gaza. (Nasser 2024 [CNN])

(7): **The Palestinian terrorists** also cruelly suggested in a separate posting Monday that the innocent captives were deliberately executed because they were about to be rescued by Israeli forces. (Land 2024 [NYP])

Additionally, terms *gunmen*, *terror group*, and *armed militants* are used to negatively depict Palestinians and more specifically the Hamas militants. Use of the negative words is limited to quotes and summaries of statements by Israeli authorities, so they are not necessarily the journalist's own words. However, as discussed in section 2.2, the selection of sources and published information is still a choice that might reveal media bias. This categorization of groups affects the way the reader relates to them and perceives their actions, and by referring to Palestinians as terrorists, the articles represent them in a negative way and make their actions seem less justified compared to Israel, which has more legitimacy as a state and military.

Palestinian victims are referred to in ways that evoke sympathy from the audience, as in examples (8) and (6) above.

(8): Hospital records show that the dead included a **mother, her child and her five siblings**. (AP 2024 [NYP])

Many of the articles seek to gain sympathy for the Palestinian victims by stating the fact that most of them are women and children. This was mentioned in one NYP article and all four CNN articles multiple times. Similarly, the use of the word *displaced* in example (6) above invokes thoughts of Palestinian victims as innocent civilians. Similar tactics are used to evoke sympathy for Israeli victims by use of adjectives, as in example (9).

(9): One of the **gaunt** and **exhausted-looking** hostages, **Eden Yerushalmi, 24**, said in the **eerie** propaganda video that she feared she'd never escape alive. (Land 2024 [NYP])

In example (9), the author of the article draws attention to the physical state of the hostages, using the words *gaunt* and *exhausted-looking* to imply they have suffered. When talking about Israeli victims, NYP articles write about the victims with names and ages (example 9), whereas the articles that report about Palestinian victims only give numbers and, in some cases, roles such as mother and sister. By naming the victims and mentioning their ages, they are humanized and feel more real to the audience instead of being just a statistic.

5.1.2 Actions and Events

Hidden bias here can be identified mostly via positive or negative tones used, as in examples 10 and 11.

(10): Goldberg-Polin became a symbol of Hamas' brutality (...) when Hamas stormed the Nova music festival on Oct. 7 and **slaughtered** 364 civilians. (Reyes 2024 [NYP])

(11): the terror group **cruelly** teased the footage on Monday (Reyes 2024 [NYP]).

As the example (10) illustrates, lexical choices of verbs indicate the tone of the action: *slaughter* describes the event quite differently than a more neutral word, like *kill*, would. The analysis of the articles reveals that more graphic words, such as *slaughter*, *execution*, and *murder*, are used to describe Hamas's attacks. In contrast, only the word *kill* is used in connection to Israel's attacks. There is a clear difference in the grade of brutality of the words, but only the NYP articles depict Hamas attacks as more violent. The CNN articles use similarly neutral words to describe the actions of both sides. These word choices reveal something about the attitudes towards both Israel and Hamas and their actions since there is no grammatical need to use the word "slaughter" instead of the word "kill" for example. Similarly, NYP describes the events of October 7 with words *terrorist attack* or *massacre* (example 12), whereas Israel's attacks are described with words *strike* or *operation* (example 13).

(12): The dual American-Israeli citizen was missing part of his left arm, which was **blown off by a Hamas grenade** when the Palestinian terror group descended on the Nova music festival in southern Negev during the Oct. 7 **massacre** in Israel. (Land 2024 [NYP])

(13): Ubaida [...] seemed to be referring to the June **operation** by Israel in which five Israeli hostages were **rescued** from Gaza's Nuseirat refugee camp. (Oliveira 2024 [NYP])

The actions themselves are quite similar but one is described as a terrorist attack and the other as a militaristic operation, which reveals the Western view of viewing Arabs as terrorists more likely than other groups. In example (13), what is left out is as important as what is said. The use of the words *operation* and *rescue* describe the events in a one-sided way and especially the word *rescue* has a positive impact on the tone of the action in that Israel managed to save the kidnapped hostages. Nonetheless, that description and the whole article leave out the additional information that the lives of five Israelis were exchanged for, according to some sources (e.g. CNN 2024), over 200 Palestinians, who died because of that operation. Although Israeli violence in this case resulted in a much higher number of deaths and injuries for

Palestinians, the framing of the sentence mitigates Israel's responsibility and instead frames the operation as a positive thing.

The results of the lexical analysis are in line with earlier research (e.g. Tasserou, 2023, and Centre for Media Monitoring, 2024), that have found a bias against Palestine in the vocabulary choices of journalists when reporting on the issue. This finding is more apparent in NYP articles than in CNN articles. The results agree with CMM's findings on British media in that the war is mostly framed as an "Israel-Hamas war" and mentions of Palestine or Palestinians are noticeably less frequent.

5.2 Transitivity

Here I examine how the materials use transitivity structures to represent violence by Israelis and Palestinians. I examine which actions each side performs, and how the articles represent agency and responsibility for violence. The transitivity analysis shows that use of transitivity structures is similar in both NYP and CNN materials. They both represent Israel's violence in most cases as direct and transparent (example 14). However, in most of the NYP reports, the object of the sentence often makes Israeli violence seem like almost defence (example 15).

(14): **an Israeli bombardment killed** one child and six other people in the Qizan Al-Najjar area (Sawalhi et al. 2024 [CNN])

(15): IDF's 162nd division killed over 100 gunmen (Land 2024 [NYP]).

Israel is represented as the attacker, but the actions are defended by stating that they were attacking against "terrorists" or "gunmen", as example (15) showcases. Since the word "gunman" has a negative association, as was stated in section 4.1, it could be argued that killing them can be seen as more justified compared to if the victims were civilians.

On some occasions, Israel's agency is removed or diminished (examples 16 and 17). All of these are cases where Israel is responsible for the death of Palestinian civilians. In example (16), the agency is implied as it is obvious from the context of the article that no one else could have been responsible for the strike, but Israel is not explicitly mentioned in the text. Example (17) shows that the agency is removed by using a non-transitive passive structure.

(16): Another **strike** on a home in Gaza City killed six people. (AP 2024 [NYP])

(17): A CNN stringer filming the aftermath said that Civil Defense workers said that at least 20 people **were killed**. (Kourdi 2024 [CNN])

None of the CNN articles included in the analysis depict Palestinian violence in any way so it cannot be analysed here. NYP more frequently uses intransitive and passive structures to represent Palestinian violence toward Israel, as in example (18). These structures, again, do not straightforwardly blame either side for the violence but it can be concluded from the context of the article. A transitive structure is used only once, as in example (19).

(18): the six hostages found dead **were deliberately executed**. (Oliveira 2024 [NYP])

(19): **Hamas stormed** the Nova music festival... and **slaughtered** 364 civilians (Reyes 2024 [NYP]).

In general, Palestinians are rarely portrayed as the actors in the articles, mostly they act as the objects in intransitive structures. Overall, both NYP and CNN present Israel's actions with active and transitive structures, with Israel as the agent, but NYP's use of objects makes the action sound like defence.

5.3 Arguments and Claims

This section analyses the arguments that different actors use to justify their actions or condemn someone else's actions. One distinction needs to be made when examining the arguments and claims: few articles include direct arguments that show the opinion of the author, but rather most of them include arguments presented by certain authorities, as in examples (20) and (21).

(20): Hamas was using the site of the former Shuhada al-Zeitoun School to plan and execute attacks against Israel, **the IDF alleged**. (Land 2024 [NYP])

(21): **Israel says** it only targets terrorists and accuses Hamas and other armed groups of endangering civilians by operating in residential areas. (AP 2024 [NYP])

Israel's attempts to gain legitimacy by claiming that Hamas is using civilians as human shields, as shown in examples (20) and (21), is a common strategy in the articles as it is mentioned several times in both NYP and CNN articles. However, the articles also note that Israel has offered no evidence for the claim or that Hamas denies the claims, which might make Israel seem like a less credible source of information. Furthermore, the words *claim* or

allege are often used when referencing the arguments, both of which can carry a connotation of disagreement. It might therefore indicate that the author disagrees with Israel's claims. However, given that the claims are mentioned in almost all the articles, the journalists are still offering it as a possible justification for the actions of the Israeli military. Another way that Israel is justifying its actions is by claiming that they are taking precautions to avoid civilian casualties (example 22). The articles do not comment on this claim, but it seemingly contradicts the reported number of victims, as far as Gaza Health Ministry's estimates of more than 40,000 victims are correct.

(22): The IDF said earlier that “**numerous steps were taken to mitigate the risk of harming civilians**”. (Sawalhi et al. 2024 [CNN])

The articles include arguments condemning Hamas, e.g. Israel's suggestions that Hamas is to blame for the death of Palestinian civilians (example 21) or for the lack of a satisfying solution to the war (example 23).

(23): “It doesn't appear that Mr. Sinwar is prepared at all to keep negotiating in good faith, especially after he murdered six hostages in a tunnel execution-style,” [White House National Security spokesman] Kirby told ABC's “This Week.” (Reyes 2024 [NYP])

However, CNN articles also condemn Israel's actions by referring to the fact that many of the attacks happen in humanitarian zones where civilians end up as the victims (example 24), or including statements from humanitarian organisations, which were mostly missing in the NYP articles. This critique expresses that Israel's actions are to be not acceptable and calls them out as violations against international humanitarian law (example 25).

(24): Dujarric said that the strike reaffirmed the Secretary General's warnings that “**there is no safe place in Gaza.**” (Nasser 2024 [CNN])

(25): “What's happening in Gaza is totally unacceptable,” UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in a post on X. “**These dramatic violations of international humanitarian law need to stop now.**” (Sawalhi et al. 2024 [CNN])

In general, the materials from CNN include a more critical view of Israel's claims and sentences that question the legitimacy of Israel's actions. They also more often condemn the actions by appealing to the facts that the attacks violate international humanitarian law and

leave civilians with no safe place. However, the articles also include arguments that can be thought to justify Israel's attacks. The argumentative analysis in this research reveals that Israel commonly defends its actions by stating that they only target terrorists and avoid harming civilians. However, it needs to be stated that the results are only suggestive and a bigger sample size or articles from other newspapers may yield different results.

6 Conclusion

This thesis investigated the nature of Palestinian and Israeli representation in American digital media from the sources *The New York Post* and *CNN*, as well as the power relations between the two sides of the conflict. Through a linguistic analysis, relationships between textual elements and hidden ideologies were examined. The analysis of the lexicon, transitivity structures, and arguments and claims revealed that bias is apparent in all the elements examined here.

The analysis showed that both CNN and NYP articles include bias to both sides. Overall, the difference between CNN and NYP in report of the war can already be seen in the topics they choose to cover, e.g. the NYP covers more broadly events of both Israeli and Palestinian violence, whereas CNN focuses only on attacks by Israel. However, the effect of the number of articles and the limited time frame of the materials included in the research cannot be excluded. On average, however, the NYP articles depict Hamas's actions as more violent and brutal than Israel's, which is especially evident in the lexical choices of the authors, whereas the difference in the CNN articles is not so noticeable. On the contrary, analysis of the arguments revealed that CNN examines Israel's actions and claims more critically, although they still included claims whose truthfulness cannot be guaranteed. Despite that, all the articles included elements that side with Israel as well, especially the tonal choices in the lexicon. It is not possible to say for certain what the reason for the differences between sources is, but it should be acknowledged that NYP and CNN had different sources for the articles, such as *the Times of Israel*, *Jerusalem Post*, or Gaza Health Ministry, which might affect the journalism.

It should be acknowledged that the scope of this study was rather limited, and further research with a larger selection of materials would be useful to support my findings. For instance, combining CDA and corpus analysis would allow for an analysis of a larger scale. It could also be beneficial to study semantical structures other than the ones I have focused on here. For example, narrative elements of the text could provide material for future studies. As the occupation in the Gaza Strip is still ongoing, it is important to keep bringing up the inequalities of the reports on the subject.

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