

‘Victims vs Terrorists?’

The Discursive Construction of Palestinians in Two Online Israeli Newspapers during the 2014 Gaza War

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ABSTRACT

This article is a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of the representation of Palestinians in two online Israeli newspapers published in English during the 2014 Gaza War. The study attempts to conduct a language-based analysis of the political and ideological workings that underpin the representation of social actors. It employs tools from the Discourse Historical Approach (Reisigl & Wodak 2001) to explain the discursive characterization of fighters/ Hamas and civilians. Since the huge number of Palestinian civilian fatalities was a major aspect of controversy in the last war, this article tries to reveal the linguistic choices and discursive strategies used in representing each group of social actors. More importantly, the article detects the linguistic and discursive differences between two newspapers and explains how they may reflect different political orientations.

KEYWORDS

Gaza War; Palestinians in Gaza; Critical Discourse Analysis; Online Israeli Newspaper

Introduction

The 2014 Gaza War

In June 2014, three Israeli settlers were kidnapped and killed in the West Bank. None of the Palestinian factions claimed responsibility for the kidnapping and until now many details about the event are still unknown (Beaumont & Crowcroft 2014). Nonetheless, the Israeli Prime Minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, ‘blamed Hamas for the murders, warning the militant group will pay a heavy price for the deaths’ (ibid.). Later, a Palestinian youth was kidnapped and killed in Jerusalem by Israeli extremists (Beaumont 2014). These events, followed by a large-scale Israeli campaign against Hamas in the West Bank, exacerbated the already fragile calm between Israel and the Palestinian factions in Gaza.

On 8 July 2014, the Israeli government endorsed ‘Operation Protective Edge’¹ against the movement in the Gaza Strip. The war lasted for 50 days² and resulted in more than 2,200 Palestinian deaths, thousands of injuries, and around 20,000 totally or partially destroyed houses (The Independent 2014). According to UN reports, 70 per cent of the fatalities were civilians (Booth 2014). On the other hand, 64 Israeli soldiers and six civilians were killed (The Independent 2014). The huge number of Palestinian fatalities surfaced in Israeli political and media discourses with various degrees of prominence and justification. On 22 August 2014, for instance, Haaretz published a commentary entitled ‘How many Palestinian civilians is a single militant worth?’ by Amira Hass, referring to the controversy over the exact number of civilians killed in Gaza (Hass 2014). Hass suggests that the complicated realities on the ground make the distinction between civilians and fighters a difficult task. This makes the issue controversial and, more importantly, open to political exploitation. It is then important to investigate how this issue was covered in Israeli newspapers that reach an international audience due to the role that newspapers and the media in general play in formulating public opinion. This study, therefore, intends to find out how the different political orientations of two Israeli newspapers, mainly the leftist *Haaretz* and the rightist *Jerusalem Post*, motivate the representations of Palestinians during the war.

¹ Operation Protective Edge is the English translation of the Israeli military operation in Gaza in 2014. Although the literal translation of the Hebrew name (*Miv'tza Tzuk Eitan*) is ‘Resolute Cliff’, the English name ‘Protective Edge’ is meant to convey ‘defensive connotations’ (Arnaout 2014).

² The operation began with extensive Israeli air strikes during which rocket fire from Gaza towards Israel continued in spite of the Egyptian proposal for a ceasefire submitted on 14 July (Saleh 2014). On 20 July, the operation evolved into a ground offensive (BBC 2014). Israeli ground forces entered residential areas and got involved in fierce battles with the Palestinian resistance. One of these areas was Al-Shujiyyeah neighbourhood in which around 200 Palestinians, mostly civilians, were killed on the first day of the offensive by the Israeli bombardment. Israel withdrew most of its ground forces on 13 August, but the operation continued until 26 August when both sides finally agreed on the Egyptian proposal.

The role of the media in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has already been recognized as a field of struggle (Wolfsfeld 2003) based on awareness of the role of the media in shaping the perceptions of local and international audiences (Slater 2007). During blatant conflicts, Israeli media 'behave in a mobilized manner' (Rinnawi 2007) and criminalize Palestinian resistance and label it as terrorism to get international support (Dor 2004). However, media studies show some differences between the leftist and rightist press in Israel. Jerome Slater (2007), for instance, found that the leftist newspaper *Haaretz* is critical of some Israeli practices in the occupied territories regarding the construction of illegal settlements and the inhuman treatment of Palestinians. On the other hand, the *Jerusalem Post* and other state-owned and rightist newspapers intensify the Palestinian *threat*, frame it as terrorism, and mitigate to a great extent the Israeli occupational and military actions (ibid.). However, few studies in this respect are based on language analysis. This study, therefore, conducts a systematic analysis of certain linguistic and discursive choices in *Haaretz* and *Jerusalem Post* (henceforth JP) in their representations of Palestinians during the 2014 Gaza War. Although the study deals with the online versions of these newspapers, it will not account for the journalistic practices of online journalism due to space limitations. Moreover, although online reporting influences some lexical choices, it is unlikely to result in major differences in the way social actors are referred to in a blatant conflict. Such choices are based rather on firm journalistic policies due to the contested socio-political context.

The study analyses 84 news reports from *Haaretz* totalling 53,419 words, and 117 news reports from JP totalling 60,800 words. The reports are selected from three periods: 8–12 July, 20–24 July and 22–26 August. The first and third periods cover the first and last days of the war, and the second period covers its peak, the ground offensive and the fierce battles in Al-Shejyayh where hundreds of Palestinians as well as a number of Israeli soldiers were killed or wounded.

Methodology

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a field of study which is interested in analysing aspects of social life by examining language use. It "primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and equality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by texts and talk in the social and political context" (van Dijk 2003). CDA analyzes the "dialectical relationships between discourse and other elements of social practices" (Fairclough 2001, 1). Several approaches have been developed to account for different kinds of discourses from a critical point of view, all of which share the grounding assumption that analysing texts requires situating them in their contexts (Fowler 1991).

CDA defines discourse as a social practice that signifies a particular domain from a specific perspective (Fairclough 1995b). Defining discourse as a social practice 'implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s),

institution(s) and social structure(s), which frame it: The discursive event is shaped by them, but it also shapes them' (Fairclough and Wodak 1997, 258).

One of the approaches to CDA is the Discourse Historical Approach (DHA), which is based on three general dimensions of analysis (Reisigl & Wodak 2009). First, the contents or topics of a specific discourse are identified, second the discursive strategies³ are investigated, and third the linguistic means, as types, and the linguistic realizations, as tokens, are examined. The DHA elaborates five discursive strategies: referential strategies,⁴ the way persons, objects, phenomena/ events, processes and actions are linguistically named and referred to; predication strategies, the characteristics, qualities and features attributed to social actors, objects, phenomena/ events and processes; argumentation strategies, the arguments employed in the discourse in question; perspectivization strategies, the perspective from which nominations, attributions and arguments are expressed; and intensification and mitigation strategies, whether utterances are articulated overtly and are intensified or mitigated (ibid.). Referential strategies, the focus of this article, are linguistic (and rhetorical) tools with which persons and groups are identified (Reisigl & Wodak 2001). They encompass the linguistic tools via which individuals and groups are named and referred to (Richardson 2007). Analyzing these strategies is based on three assumptions: referring to social actors in a certain way is a matter of choice (Reisigl & Wodak 2001), the way social actors are referred to carries value judgements (Richardson 2007) and referential strategies "establish coherence relations with the way that *other* social actors are referred to and represented" (ibid., 50). Referential strategies function as a 'basis for the argumentation schemes of the text' (Reisigl & Wodak 2009, 114); they are taken-for-granted starting points for argumentation. In other words, categorizing social actors via nominations is introduced as given and shared background information which conceals to a large extent the political and ideological interests served by this categorization. This study, therefore, attempts to determine how the most frequent nominations in the news reports analyzed function in terms of constructing the images of two groups of social actors: Hamas and Palestinian fighters on the one hand, and Palestinian civilians on the other. Since positive 'Self' and negative 'Other' representations are scarcely surprising in this context, the analysis will generalize the linguistic and discursive strategies used in this representation, and then put more emphasis on the differences between Haaretz and JP and try to work out the political relevance of these differences.

³ Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak (2009, 94) define a strategy as 'a more or less intentional plan of practices (including discursive practices) adopted to achieve a particular social, political, psychological or linguistic goal'.

⁴ Kate Clark (as cited in Richardson 2007, 50) clarifies the discursive role of referential strategies by examining the *Sun* newspaper's reporting of sexual violence. She argues that the newspaper refers to the man as *manic, monster, fiend, beast* if it holds him to be the perpetrator. If he is considered the victim, he is called *family man, hubby* and other similar expressions. On the other hand, if the woman is to be blamed, she is described as *Lolita, unmarried mum, a divorcee*, and if she is held to be the victim, she is referred to as *bride, schoolgirl, mother of three, daughter* etc.

The analysis is divided into two main sections: section one investigates the nominations used to refer to Hamas/ Palestinian fighters, and section two investigates the references to Palestinian civilians. Each section starts with statistical findings for the seven most frequent nominations in each newspaper. Comments are made on statistical findings when they reflect an interest of the study. The study then lists all the actual occurrences of the nominations as they appear in the news reports. An occurrence is a phrase in which a nomination is embedded and which forms one structural constituent. Such occurrences are meant to provide the co-text of the nominations to reveal all the possible aspects of their discursive functions. Each occurrence is followed by two numbers separated by a dot (.). The first indicates how many times an occurrence is used by journalists, and the second how many times it is directly quoted from different sources. Since indirect quotations involve a degree of paraphrasing and the distance between the journalist and what s/he is quoting is not clear (Fairclough 1995a), all nominations that appear in indirect quotations are considered to be the choices of journalists. In an indirect quotation found in JP, for instance, the newspaper attributes the nomination *Hamas and other groups* to a Hamas leader. However, a review of Palestinians' political speeches shows that 'groups' is not used to refer to Palestinian factions and movements, which means that this choice is made by the journalist. Therefore, each news report has been read thoroughly and the nominations checked and categorized manually, since no software is available that can make this distinction efficiently.

Finally, an in-depth analysis of the nominations is conducted to reveal the role of these nominations in constructing the images of social actors, and to investigate if there are discursive differences between the newspapers when using the same nominations. Due to space limitations, random examples are provided of the most salient discursive features.

Analysis

Hamas/ Palestinian fighters

Nomination	Haaretz	JP	Total
Hamas	290	295	585
terrorist	15	119	134
organization(s)	40	43	83
members	12	49	61
commanders	20	35	55
operatives	19	28	47
military wing	26	11	37

Table 1: The most seven frequent nominations that refer to Hamas and Palestinian fighters

Table 1 shows the most frequent nominations that refer to Hamas and Palestinian fighters. Some of these nominations refer to Palestinian factions while others refer to subsidiary groups of social actors.

Hamas

Haaretz:

- *Hamas* (247.32), *Hamas and Islamic Jihad* (4.0), *Hamas and other Palestinian factions* (2/0), *Hamas and other terrorist groups* (1.1), *Hamas and other organizations* (1.0), *Hamas and other terror organizations* (0.1), *the Islamic militant group Hamas* (1.0)

JP:

- *Hamas* (175.101), *Hamas in Gaza* (4.2), *Hamas and Islamic Jihad* (4.2), *Hamas and other terrorist organizations* (3.2), *Hamas and other terror groups in the Strip* (2.0)

The frequency difference between *Hamas* and other nominations emanates from the topical prominence of Hamas in reporting the war. The occurrences show that the representation of *Hamas* is essentialized and that three main characteristics of the movement are brought to the fore: *Hamas is an organization/ group*, *Hamas is terrorist* and *Hamas is Islamist*. The presupposition that Hamas is a terrorist group or organization functions as a basis for constructing an image of other Palestinian factions too. Although in most of the occurrences these factions are not identified, their structural parallelism with *Hamas* assumes a pragmatic resemblance as well:

Israeli troops exchanged fire with militants from Hamas and other factions.

However, military pressure might still affect Hamas and the organization might prefer to concentrate its rockets in barrages toward big cities rather than scattering them over most of the country during most of the day.

Hamas is also used as a generalizing synecdoche to refer to a limited number of social actors taking specific actions, leading to ‘hasty generalizations’ (Reisigl & Wodak 2001), which have the potential to associate all people referred to as *Hamas* with violence.

There have been several cases in which Hamas fired mortars and rockets at border kibbuzim during such visits.

Nonetheless, there are some relevant discursive differences between the newspapers regarding constructing a negative image of Hamas. First, direct quotations that include

the nomination *Hamas* are almost three times more common in JP. The vast majority of the quoted nominations appear in Israeli politicians' speeches. Although predicational strategies are not explicitly dealt with in this study, the following examples from two different news reports indicate the close resemblance between what politicians introduce as *opinions* and what newspaper reports as *facts*.

' Hamas is committing a double war crime by intentionally trying to hit Israeli citizens, and using the local Gaza population as human shields,' Netanyahu said.

Hamas is an expert at embedding itself in the midst of the Palestinian civilian population and using it as human shields, to seek immunity from the army.

Second, the reference to Hamas as *terrorist* appears once in Haaretz and five times in JP as choices of journalists. Referring to groups or individuals as *terrorists* will be elaborated later, but it suffices at this stage to claim that there is no tendency in Haaretz to essentialize Palestinians as *terrorists*.

Finally, JP employs prepositional phrases that relate *Hamas* to undifferentiated geographical areas. These prepositional phrases are circumstantial, they provide information about the places of social actors and are considered 'part of the ideational meaning of the clause' (Bloor & Bloor 1995, 52). Consider the following example:

Abu Marzouk said that Hamas and other Palestinian groups in the Gaza Strip reject the proposal 'because it encourages Israeli aggression.'

Based on the functional definition of prepositional phrases suggested above, *Hamas and the other groups in the Gaza Strip* are allocated *geo-political independence*. In other words, the decision made by the factions represents Palestinians in Gaza and not necessarily Palestinians who exist in other places. The reference to the whole Strip or to cities- instead of specific places- does not necessarily add to the readers' understanding of the context of events, as we can see in the following example:

The IDF struck 1,100 targets belonging to Hamas and other terror groups in the Gaza Strip since the start of an operation launched Monday to end Gazan rocket attacks.

The prepositional phrase *in the Gaza Strip* does not say much about the 1,100 strikes. Rather, it associates *Hamas and other terror groups* with the whole Strip, assuming that any struck target, wherever it might be, is a legitimate target.

Terrorists

Haaretz:

- *Terrorists* (11.3), *Hamas terrorists* (0.1)

JP:

- *Terrorists* (61.12), *Hamas terrorists* (13.1), *Gaza terrorists* (8.1), *terrorists in the Strip* (5.0), *Islamic Jihad terrorists* (4.0), *terrorists in Gaza* (4.0), *terrorists on the ground* (2.1), *a lot of terrorists* (0.2), *IDF's most wanted terrorists* (2.0), *Gazan terrorists* (1.0), *large numbers of terrorists* (1.0), *Dozens of terrorists* (1.0)

This nomination appears in the newspapers with considerable statistical differences. In JP, it is used interchangeably with the other nominations regardless of the context or political affiliations of social actors. Based on a similar study by Teun van Dijk (1995, 26), who found that describing Palestinians as terrorists is part of Israeli political and military discourse, we can argue that JP adopts the official political discourse in categorizing and evaluating social actors, which is established as given information. This is discursively articulated by the various linguistic choices which appear in the above occurrences. They define the political/ ideological affiliations of the social actors, *Hamas/ Islamic Jihad*, as well as their national or regional identities, *Palestinian/ Gazan*.

According to a report by the Palestinian news agency Ma'an, one of the homes targeted was that of senior Islamic Jihad terrorist Hafiz Mohammed Hamad.

Schalit's case turned into a strategic national security issue and five years later, Israel had to 'buy' his freedom by releasing 1,027 Palestinian terrorists.

The second example is even more interesting, the nomination refers not only to fighters in Gaza, but also to Palestinians in different places, e.g. the West Bank, who have different political orientations and who, most importantly, were imprisoned for different reasons, including involvement in political activities.

Terrorists is also contextualized through prepositional phrases that connect social actors to undifferentiated places, situating them in a homogeneous geographical entity:

St.-Sgt. Evyatar Turgeman, 20, from Beit She'an, was killed on Tuesday morning in a firefight with terrorists in Gaza.

In the example below, the association between actors and places also appears in the metaphor *terrorists on the ground*, but with rather different functions. The metaphor actualizes the social actors by drawing on their materiality simply traced by their existence on the ground. It presupposes a functional distinction between *terrorists: terrorists* who carry out military actions, and *terrorists* who carry out other kinds of actions:

Terrorists on the ground are increasing gun and missile attacks on IDF units on the ground.

More subtly, the occurrences of *terrorists* include *Gaza terrorists*, in which the modifier *Gaza* functions not only as a regional definer, but also as a place of belonging:

IDF surveillance video captures Gaza terrorists escaping in ambulance.

[T]errorists in Gaza says where the social actors are, although generally *Gaza terrorists* explains where they come from, without necessarily always being in that place. Finally, the threat from those social actors is intensified by nominations that refer to large undefined numbers of *terrorists*:

One of Hamas's goals is to be able to send large numbers of terrorists simultaneously through multiple tunnels, creating a largescale attack on southern Israel.

In contrast, Haaretz's employment of *terrorists* is conditioned and context-dependent, it refers to Palestinian fighters who infiltrate Israeli sites – outside Gaza – to conduct military operations. This identification of social actors appears mainly as relative clauses, as we can see in the following example:

Nine IDF soldiers were killed Monday, the 14th day of Operation Protective Edge, including four killed by terrorists who infiltrated Israel from Gaza through a tunnel that emerged near Kibbutz Nir-Am.

Unlike JP, Palestinian fighters involved in actions inside Gaza are not referred to as *terrorists*. Although other nominations may carry negative connotations, they orient the reader to what the social actors do, rather than whom basically they are, as the analysis below will show. Moreover, Haaretz employs evaluation-free nominations to refer to Palestinians, though not as frequently as other negative nominations. In the following excerpt, for instance, the writer uses *fighters* to refer to Palestinian social actors:

Palestinian fighters kept up their rocket fire on Israel on Sunday.

It is worth mentioning that the same nomination refers to Israeli soldiers, as the following example shows:

Soroka Medical Center in Be'er Sheva is treating most of the fighters injured in Gaza.

More surprisingly, the nomination *terrorists* is used at least once in the analysed reports to refer to Israeli social actors, which is another important indication that there is a remarkable tendency in Haaretz to criminalize social actors based on what they do and not whom they are:

This followed a post on his Facebook timeline about his visit to the mourners' tent in Shoafat put up by the family of Mohammed Abu Khdeir, 16, who was kidnapped and burnt alive last week, allegedly by Jewish terrorists.

This does not of course suggest that Haaretz keeps the same distance from both sides, but these discursive strategies are counter examples to the essentialized dichotomous positive ‘Self’ and negative ‘Other’ representation employed by Israeli media during major confrontations with Palestinians.

Organization

Haaretz:

- *The organization* (28.1), *Hamas and terrorist organizations* (0.2), *the militant organization* (1.0), *the Hamas terrorist organization* (0.1), *the Islamist organization* (0.1), *the Palestinian organization* (1.0), *the terrorist organizations* (0.2), *Hamas and other organizations* (1.0), *armed organizations* (1.0)

JP:

- *The organization* (22/1), *the terror organization* (1/1), *the terrorist organization* (1/0), *the Hamas terror organization* (0/1), *the Islamist organization* (1/0), *the terrorist organizations* (3/5), *Hamas and other terrorist organizations* (2/2), *terror organizations* (2/1)

One prominent lexical feature when referring to *Hamas* is over-lexicalization, which is an ‘excess of quasi-synonymous terms for entities and ideas that are a particular preoccupation or problem in the culture’s discourse’ (Fowler 1991, 85). This strategy is realized in the newspapers by using the nomination *organization* as a second reference to *Hamas*. It is distinguished by being embedded in a wider range of occurrences in which the *organization* is associated with *Islam*, *terrorism* and *militancy*. Yet, there are differences between the newspapers in the way *organization* is modified. In JP, almost all occurrences associate the nomination with terrorism which, again, exemplifies a discursive context-independent tendency to associate the ‘Other’ with terrorism:

Fifty targets belonging to terror organizations were destroyed overnight between Thursday and Friday.

In contrast, most of the occurrences in Haaretz do not have criminalizing nominations, and those which do are all directly quoted from other sources:

However, military pressure might still affect Hamas and the organization might prefer to concentrate its rockets in barrages toward big cities rather than scattering them over most of the country during most of the day.

‘The HRC is sending a message to Hamas and terror organizations everywhere that using civilians as human shields is an effective strategy,’ Netanyahu’s office added.

Members

Haaretz:

- *Hamas members (3.1), members of the Hamas political wing (1.0), members of a Hamas special force (1.0), a known member of Hamas military wing (1.0), members of his organization (1.0), members of its military wing (1.0), a senior member of the group (1.0), members of a Hamas force (1.0), its own members (1.0)*

JP:

- *Hamas members (19.1), senior members (5.2), Hamas and Islamic Jihad members (3.0), its members (3), a senior member of Hamas's rocket formations in Beit Hanoun (2.0), senior Hamas members (2.0), senior Islamic Jihad members (2.0), a senior member of the organization in Khan Yunis (2.0), members of Hamas military wing (2.0), Hamas senior members in northern Gaza (1.0), Islamic Jihad members in central Gaza (1.0), additional members (1.0), founding members of Hamas (1.0), members of a rocket team (1.0), members of Hamas military wing (1.0)*

These nominations define social actors in terms of their affiliations to *denounced* groups or organizations. The occurrences show that the membership is identified when it has a military character:

The IDF believes the infiltrators were members of a Hamas force that was specially trained for this mission.

Yet many occurrences do not identify the relationship between social actors and *organizations*, and thus nominations can refer to a wide range of social actors as *members*. In the following example, targeting the houses of *Hamas* and *Islamic Jihad members* is a legitimate military objective, although the nature of such membership is not clarified:

Seven homes of Hamas members and apparently one home of an Islamic Jihad member were bombed by the Israel Air Force.

A remarkable difference between the newspapers, though, is the absence of any circumstantial prepositional phrases in Haaretz. In contrast, the following example that shows how JP is more consistent in emphasizing the relationship between social actors and places, although prepositional phrases do not refer to specific areas:

The IAF struck three Islamic Jihad members in central Gaza on Thursday.

Commander(s)

Haaretz:

- *top Hamas commanders (3.0), senior commanders (3.0), Hamas commanders (0.2), military commanders (2/0), commanders (1/0), Hamas brigade commanders (0.1), the commander of the squad (1.0), Hamas' Khan Yunis company commander (1.0), Hamas military commanders (1.1), Hamas military commanders in Rafah (1.1), top commanders (1.0), every local commander (1.0)*

JP:

- *Hamas commanders (14/0), senior Hamas commanders (4/2), commanders (0/3), commanders of Hamas' naval commando unit (2/0), Islamic Jihad commanders (2/0), Hamas brigade commanders (1/0), Hamas's senior commanders (1/0), the organization's senior commanders (1/0), deputy commander of the Hamas forces in Shijaia (1/0), Islamic Jihad commander in central Gaza (1/0), top commander (1/0), high level commanders (1/0), Hamas company commander (0/1)*

Commanders is a functionalizing nomination (van Leeuwen as cited in Machin & Mayr 2012, 81) which represents people in terms of what they do. It emphasizes the high military positions of social actors. JP uses military terms that intensify this understanding, such as *Hamas' naval commando unit* or *Hamas forces*, which ultimately represent the fighters as army-like military formations. Taking into account that most of the occurrences refer to killed fighters, the nomination might contribute to the symbolic achievement Israel is seeking. See for instance the following excerpt quoting an Israeli minister:

‘The Hamas military commanders killed on Wednesday night were responsible for serious attacks on Israeli citizens and soldiers, including the abduction of Gilad Shalit,’ Defence Minister Moshe Ya’alon said Thursday.

Three occurrences in Haaretz and two in JP contextualize social actors in places through prepositional phrases:

The strike came days after the IDF killed three senior Hamas commanders in the Rafah area last week.

Operatives

Haaretz:

- *Hamas operatives* (6.1), *operatives* (6.0), *senior Hamas operatives* (2.0), *Hamas operatives on the ground* (1.0), *Islamic Jihad operatives* (1.0), *militant organization operatives* (1.0), *armed operatives* (1.0)

JP:

- *Hamas operatives* (9.0), *terrorist operatives* (2.1), *operatives* (2.0), *terror operatives* (2.0), *Palestinian operative* (2.0), *Islamic Jihad operatives* (2.0), *operatives that belong to Hamas and the rest of the organizations* (1.0), *senior Hamas operatives* (1.0), *Hamas terror operatives* (1.0), *Hamas terrorist operative* (1.0), *Hamas and Jihad operatives* (1.0), *operatives from the terrorist organizations* (1.0), *operatives from Jaish al-Islam terrorist group* (1.0), *operatives of Hamas as well as the popular resistance Committees* (1.0)

Similar to *commanders*, *operatives* is a functionalizing nomination which reduces social actors to the role they have or that is assigned to them by the writer. Most of the occurrences define the political affiliations of social actors, e.g. *Hamas/ Islamic Jihad factions*, or affiliate them to subsidiary groups, e.g. *other organizations*. One occurrence in Haaretz refers metaphorically to *actual involvement in militancy: Hamas operatives on the ground*.

They said that while the messages coming from Hamas stated, among other things, a desire for calm and a cease-fire, the behaviour of Hamas operatives on the ground was the opposite.

The metaphor suggests a distinction between social actors who have political or leadership positions in Hamas, collectively referred to as *Hamas* (generalizing synecdoche), and fighters who conduct military operations. The reference to fighters is explicit and their association with militancy is made clear, but the reference to those who send the messages is implied and backgrounded. Unlike Haaretz, JP is distinguished by frequent occurrences which have criminalizing modifiers, e.g. *terror*, *terrorist*, as seen in the following example:

The IDF confirmed that an IAF strike targeted Hamas terrorist operative Abdullah Difallah.

The report does not give further information about the social actor or why he was targeted, and justifying targeting him is achieved mainly by a referring strategy.

The military wing

Haaretz:

- *Military wing* (7.0), *Hamas' military wing* (5.1), *al-Qassam Brigades* (5.0), *the military wing of Hamas* (2.0), *Hamas military wing*, *Iz al-Din al-Qassam* (1.0), *Hamas and its military wing* (1.0), *the group's military wing* (1.0), *armed wing*

(1.0), *Hamas armed wing Iz al-Din al-Qassam* (1.0), *Iz al-Din al-Qassam fugitives* (1.0)

JP:

- *Hamas's armed wing* (3.0), *Hamas military wing* (2.0), *the military wing of Hamas* (1.0), *Hamas's Qassam Brigades* (1.0), *the armed wing of Hamas* (1.0), *the Palestinian Islamist militant group's armed wing* (1.0), *the armed wing of Hamas movement* (0.1), *Hamas's armed wing, Izzadin Kassam* (1.0)

This nomination does not show important differences between the newspapers as it appears in both, with similar discursive functions. Like *commanders*, this nomination emphasizes the professional character of the fighters:

Earlier on Friday, Hamas's armed wing has warned airlines that it intends to target Israel's Ben-Gurion Airport with its rockets from Gaza and has told them not to fly there.

Before we move on to the second section, it is worth mentioning that the previous excerpt exemplifies a general tendency in the newspapers in that references to the military character of social actors are emphasized while others, e.g. political practices, are backgrounded or concealed. Although not surprising in this context, the analysis contributes to identifying the linguistic and discursive tools needed to construct such claims based on language analysis.

Palestinian civilians

Table 2 shows the most frequent nominations that refer to Palestinian civilians. While there is some resemblance between the two newspapers in their use of collectivizing emotion-free nominations, there is a clear difference in their use of familial and sympathy-provoking nominations.

Nomination	Haaretz	JP	Total
Palestinians	44	57	101
people	48	34	82
civilians	35	35	70
children	44	24	68
residents	35	26	61
women	29	10	39
family/ies	34	3	37

Table 2: The most frequent nominations that refer to Palestinian civilians

Palestinians

Haaretz:

- *Palestinians* (22.2), (number) *Palestinians* (14.0), *Palestinians in Gaza* (3.1), *dead Palestinians* (1.0), *wounded Palestinians* (1.0).

JP:

- *Palestinians* (33.3), (number) *Palestinians* (16.0), *injured Palestinians* (3.0), (number) *Palestinians in Gaza* (2.0), *Palestinians of the Gaza Strip* (1.0), *Palestinians in the Gaza Strip* (1.0), *terrified Palestinians* (1.0), *wounded Palestinians* (1.0), *a dozen Palestinians* (1.0)

Palestinians is a generic nomination that refers to social actors in terms of their national affiliation without specifying any individual differences. It does not make any distinction between civilians or fighters, and unless there is further clarification, the social actors cannot be identified. However, for analytical reasons, the study assumes that the nomination refers to civilians unless otherwise stated. For example, the writer of the following excerpt from Haaretz uses *Palestinians* to refer indiscriminately to Palestinian fatalities without further clarification:

At least 130 Palestinians have been killed so far in the ground operation, raising the recent escalation's death toll in Gaza to 508, with 3,130 wounded.

Even if the reader assumes that '130 Palestinians' includes civilians, it is not possible to figure out how many there are, let alone their personal details. Therefore, the co-text or context of the nomination is vital to identify its referents. See how, in the following examples, the nomination is used to refer to fighters, politicians and undefined social actors, respectively:

Soon thereafter, the Palestinians fired rockets at Rehovot and Ness Ziona, triggering Color Red sirens.

Israel and the Palestinians accused each other of war crimes at an emergency debate at the UN Human Rights Council on Wednesday.

While the Palestinians claim that between at least 60 civilians were killed in the fighting, the IDF insists that at least two-thirds of the casualties were Hamas fighters.

When other nominations are used with *Palestinians* to provide further information about the social actors, they foreground some understandings of the nomination and background others. In an example from Haaretz, *Palestinians* collectivizes fighters and

civilians. Palestinian fighters, though a minority, are referred to explicitly as *operatives*, while reference to the majority – i.e. civilians – is implied:

As of Monday night, Operation Protective Edge has taken the lives of 28 Israelis, 26 of them soldiers, and of nearly 500 Palestinians, more than one-third of them armed operatives.

Such generic nominations gloss over the horrendous disparity in civilian casualties on the two sides. Although the vast majority of Israeli fatalities are soldiers, using the nomination *Israeli* is structurally and pragmatically parallel to the nomination *Palestinians* of whom two-thirds are civilians.

Civilians

Haaretz:

- *Civilians* (14.2), *Palestinian civilians* (6.3), *mainly civilians* (2.0), *dozens of civilians* (2.0), *mostly civilians* (2.0), *many civilians* (1.0), *civilians in Gaza* (1.0), *Gaza civilians* (1.0), *enemy civilians* (1.0).

JP:

- *Civilians* (14.7), *Palestinian civilians* (5.0), *Gazan civilians* (4.0), *civilians in Gaza* (1.1), *(number) civilians* (1.0), *dead civilians in Gaza* (1.0), *innocent civilians* (0.1)

Contrary to the first nomination, *civilians* is a collectivizing nomination that distinguishes this group of social actors from fighters, though no reference is made to their political status or personal details. However, the occurrences show that social actors are not associated with victimhood. Modifiers such as *Palestinian* or *Gazan* and prepositional phrases such as *in Gaza* do not add much to the reader's understanding of those social actors' unique experiences. One striking occurrence in Haaretz associates civilians with the *enemy*:

Gantz spoke of the need to persevere in carrying out missions and of the moral duty to defend the citizens of Israel without inflicting unnecessary harm on enemy civilians.

A relationship of responsibility is established between social actors, the *enemy* is responsible for avoiding any danger to civilians.

People

Haaretz:

- (number) *people* (28.1), *people* (9.3), *elderly people* (2.0), *Palestinian people* (0.2), *wounded people* (1.0), (number) *people in Gaza* (1.0), *innocent people* (0.1)

JP:

- (number) *people* (17.0), *people* (2.4), *our people* (0.4), *Palestinian people* (0.3), *the people of Gaza* (0.2), *physically disabled people* (2.0)

This is another generic nomination which provides no information about individual differences, politically granted rights or even civilian/ military distinctions of social actors. It confines them to one social reality and backgrounds individual, political and human differences which are vital for defining *legitimate* and *illegitimate* targets in wars:

Palestinian sources said eight people were killed and 25 wounded in the strike on the house.

When further information is provided, nominations appear as a pattern that undermines information about civilians and leaves ‘other’ social actors undefined:

Medical officials in Gaza said some 400 people, mainly civilians, had been hospitalized.

Compared with the extensive use of nominations and modifiers to refer to fighters, the references to Palestinian fatalities show a lesser degree of clarification which, alongside the generic nominations discussed above, has an influence on perceiving civilians as victims.

Women and Children

These nominations have similar discursive characteristics and are mostly adjacent in the same structural pattern. Therefore, the analysis will deal with them together.

Children

Haaretz:

- (number) *children* (13.1), *women and children* (10.3), *children* (5.6), *including women and children* (2.0), *including children* (1.0), *dead children* (1.0), *dismembered children* (1.0), *innocent children* (0.1)

JP:

- *Including (number) children (8.1), women and children (1.7), children (3.1), including children (1.0), children from Gaza (1.0), innocent children (0.1)*

Women

Haaretz:

- *Women and children (10.3), (number) women (7.1), women (8.0)*

JP:

- *Women and children (1.7), number of women (1.0), including women (1.0)*

Children and women are typical examples of the ‘ideal victim’ who is ‘vulnerable, defenceless, innocent and worthy of sympathy and compassion’ and with whom readers are likely to sympathize (Christie as cited in Greer 2007). Table 2 shows the difference between the newspapers in their use of these nominations, which reflects the politically motivated ‘exercise of inclusion and exclusion’ (Cavalho 2010, 169). Besides, an in-depth investigation of nominations shows that there are discursive differences between the newspapers in the way these nominations are used. The analysis shows that Haaretz is more committed to reporting the suffering of women and children in the war:

According to the Gaza Health Ministry, the number of Palestinian fatalities during Protective Edge is 508, among them 69 women and 130 children.

Human rights groups in Gaza said many Palestinian civilians, including children, had been killed in the Israeli airstrikes.

Although the Israeli agency in the second example is backgrounded – passivized and nominalized – its responsibility for the action is still evident. The large numbers of victims, as the first example shows, would necessarily raise questions about Israeli military actions. These questions are less likely to address the legitimacy of the war, but they do raise concerns about the way the war is conducted. In contrast, JP distances itself remarkably from highlighting this *unpleasant* side of the war. Most of the occurrences are quoted directly from Palestinian politicians as part of their political discourse and are not *factual* reporting of the war:

Abu Zuhri said: ‘The Khan Yunis massacre against women and children is an ugly war crime. All Israelis have now become legitimate targets.’

More importantly, some of the nominations found in JP are used in a completely different context. They do not refer to women and children killed by Israeli forces, but to those who are *supposed* to be treated in a hospital set up by the Israeli army on the Gaza border:

Hospital to begin functioning at 8 p.m.; IDF says will serve mainly women and children and will include a delivery room.

Such employment of nominations shifts the direction of their function; Israeli responsibility for these fatalities is concealed, and the topical prominence is moved from women and children as victims to the army as saviour.

Residents

Haaretz:

- *Gaza residents* (11.0), *residents* (8.1), *residents of Gaza* (2.2), *local residents* (3.0), *residents of the targeted buildings* (2.0), *(number) residents* (2.0), *most Gaza residents* (1.0), *Shujaia residents* (1.0) *a neighbourhood resident* (1.0), *many residents* (1.0)

JP:

- *Residents* (4.0), *the residents of the Gaza Strip* (3.1), *residents of Gaza* (3.1), *residents of Shejaia* (2.1), *Gaza residents* (1.2), *residents of northern Gaza* (2.0), *local residents* (2.0), *residents of (neighbouring) buildings* (2.0), *residents of the area* (1.0), *Palestinian residents* (1.0)

The nomination *residents* is ‘based on local orientation’ (Reisigl & Wodak 2001, 48) and mostly modified by geographical indicators or spatially indicative modifiers. The occurrences of this nomination can be divided into two categories. The first category includes a generic reference to Palestinians in the whole Strip, as the following example shows:

In the background is the growing frustration of the Gaza residents over the enormous humanitarian disaster that this war has caused.

The second category refers to Palestinians in specific areas. It is distinguished by establishing an ambivalent relationship between social actors and places in which social actors’ movements are the main aspects of representation:

The IDF called on residents of the area to take the opportunity of the cease-fire to vacate Shejaia and make their way to Gaza City.

Residents of the Gaza Strip in areas that the IDF will soon strike will receive information, via phone or other media, informing them that terrorist elements are operating in their area and that they must leave for their own safety.

This identification contextualizes the military actions in specific areas, representing them as affecting a limited number of social actors. More importantly, military actions are represented as targeting *places* where residents exist, and not the *residents* themselves, implying a spatial distinction between dangerous and safe places, which is challenged by the inability of Palestinians in Gaza to find a safe place anywhere in the Strip. The only difference between the newspapers, at this level, is the decrease seen in JP's use of this nomination, which reflects a consistent tendency, as we clarify further below.

Family/ies

Haaretz:

- *Families* (7.0), *(the) family* (7.0), *no. families* (5.0), *Gaza families* (4.0), *Judeh family* (4.0), *Odeh Kaware family* (2.0), *Abu Jama'e family* (2.0), *Siyyam family* (2.0), *entire families* (1.0)

JP:

- *(the) family* (2.0), *(number) families* (1.0)

This nomination draws on familial terminology with which the reader is likely to identify and sympathize. The average family includes social actors of both sexes and different ages, which associates them with vulnerability and innocence, as referred to above. This nomination exemplifies an important difference between the newspapers; it appears only three times in JP, so the analysis will only look at Haaretz.

This nomination, though collectivizing, can magnify the unique experience of a limited number of social actors. In the following example, *family* identifies specific groups of social actors by *collective* proper names; *Abu Jama'e* and *Siyyam*:

The Gaza fatalities on Monday included 25 members of the Abu Jama'e family, who lived east of Khan Yunis, and 10 members of the Siyyam family in Rafah.

Such identification sheds light on the horrific events those families went through, which is likely to provoke the reader's sympathy. Haaretz's identification of *families* by proper names has a considerable impact on viewing them as innocent (Reisigl & Wodak 2001, 110). As for the plural form, *families*, it is less likely to demonstrate specific social actors. It is used to refer to large numbers of social actors and is usually modified by rough quantifying modifiers. Nonetheless, the nomination promotes meanings of innocence, vulnerability and suffering that reflect a human crisis and evoke feelings of sympathy. For instance, the following excerpt does not specify social actors by proper

names, but the (large) number 89 and the intensifying adjective *entire* expose the reader to one of the ugliest faces of the war in that whole families are killed:

Officials in Gaza reported on Sunday that that during the seven weeks of fighting in the Gaza Strip, 89 entire families were killed by Israeli bombardments.

This is almost completely absent from JP, where the newspaper relies mainly on collective and emotion-free nominations that refer indiscriminately to social actors without provoking any concerns about the war, or even the way it is conducted.

Conclusion

This study has conducted a language-based analysis of the representations of Palestinians in online Israeli newspapers during the 2014 Gaza war. By analysing the most frequent nominations that refer to two groups of Palestinians, the study shows how linguistic choices are ideologically and politically motivated in a consistent process of representation.

The study found that both newspapers represent Hamas/ fighters in a negative matter. The nominations used intensify the idea of militancy and undermine to a large extent the political or legitimate character of Palestinian factions and movements. Nonetheless, the study reveals key linguistic and discursive differences between JP and Haaretz.

JP is distinguished by its essentialized characterization of Palestinian fighters. It employs context-independent criminalizing nominations based on whom the social actors are. The nominations and their occurrences show a high degree of resemblance to those quoted by Israeli politicians, showing a similarity between what is reported as *facts* and what is quoted as *opinions*. Some actions (e.g. targeting fighters) are deemed legitimate based solely on the assumptions conveyed by nominations (e.g. members), thus emphasizing the important function of nominations as taken-for-granted argumentative starting points. JP also shows a higher degree of consistency in contextualizing the references to fighters (37 references to places in JP vs three references in Haaretz). They are mostly contextualized in the whole Strip, in cities or by general geographical modifiers (e.g. north of Gaza). The consistent association between *Hamas*, *fighters* and other undefined *organizations* on the one hand, and *Gaza/ the Strip* on the other, constructs an image of violence and threat for a collective geo-political entity, which might be considered as an attempt on JP's behalf to overgeneralize the *problem of Hamas* making it a *problem of Gaza*. Bearing in mind that all Palestinians in Gaza have been under an Israeli siege for more than eight years, such a representation may provide a pretext for collective punishment measures.

In contrast, the representations of fighters in Haaretz, though negative, are less essentialized. The most important difference in this respect is Haaretz's conditional use of the criminalizing nomination *terrorists*, which distinguishes between actions *inside* and *outside* Gaza. This by no means suggests that Haaretz legitimizes the Palestinian military resistance inside the occupied territories, but it does nonetheless hints at the principal attitude of the Israeli left, that the occupation of these territories is also responsible for provoking violence. Moreover, the use of the nomination *terrorists* to refer to Israelis exemplifies Haaretz's noticeable attempt to define *terrorism* based on actions themselves, regardless of who commits them. Yet it is used to refer to Israelis in very limited contexts and the difference in using it on both sides is still wide.

Differences between the newspapers also appear in the representations of civilians. Both newspapers use generic nominations which have the potential to obfuscate the huge differences between Palestinian and Israeli civilian fatalities. Yet Haaretz does not show big frequency differences between generic nominations and sympathy-provoking nominations which draw on familial terminology and convey meanings of innocence and victimhood. The broad use of *women*, *children* and *family/ies* creates a counter-image of Gaza which is different from the *threat* image established by the political institution. Worth noting here is the evident responsibility of the army for these fatalities. Although no questions are raised regarding the legitimacy of the war, Haaretz seems more willing to question certain military actions, i.e. some aspects of how the war is conducted.

In contrast, there is clear exclusion of these groups of social actors in JP, as indicated by the frequency differences we observed in Table 2. Moreover, most familial nominations are quoted from Palestinian politicians, which questions their factuality, or refer to social actors in different contexts – such as the children who are supposed to be treated by the army. JP also maintains a degree of consistency in using circumstantial prepositional phrases when referring to civilians (29 reference to places). Haaretz, on the other hand, shows a remarkable increase in contextualizing civilians (21 reference to places). It is important to note, though, that contextualizing references to civilians serves a different function from those of fighters. As suggested earlier, the association between fighters and the whole Strip overgeneralizes the Israeli 'challenge' and problematizes the whole Strip. In contrast, civilians exist everywhere, and associating them with the whole of the Strip does not create unpredictable associations. On the contrary, overgeneralized contextualization obfuscates, to a large extent, the details of events which might provoke the reader's sympathy.

In sum, the study has aimed at looking for the differences between two famous Israeli newspapers instead of contributing to the traditional inquiry that looks for a unified image of Palestinians in the Israeli media. It shows that JP is an important platform for the rightist Israeli government to justify the military actions and to present an essentialized image of the conflict. In contrast, Haaretz exemplifies the hesitant Israeli left which does loudly question the legitimacy of the war but which nonetheless

challenges some aspects of how the war is officially represented and how some military actions are implemented. These linguistic-based findings contribute to the growing tendency in approaching media discourse based on language analysis. It shows how a systematic analysis of particular discursive and linguistic choices can reveal that choice and inclusion/ exclusion serve different functions in the socio-political context. Moreover, the study draws the attention to the different discourses within the Israeli society which might not be necessarily consistent with the official political discourse. With the help of further research, such discourses might be built upon in finding key points of understanding in an attempt to break the circle of violence in the region.

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