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FILOZOFSKI FAKULTET

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CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF AL JAZEERA'S AND THE NEW YORK TIMES' ONLINE NEWS ARTICLES: 'ISRAEL DECLARES STATE OF WAR'

(ZAVRŠNI RAD)

Rijeka, 2024.

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ODSJEK ZA ANGLISTIKU

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(Završni rad)

Studij: Sveučilišni prijediplomski studij *Engleski jezik i književnost* i *Njemački jezik i književnost* (dvopredmetni)

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UNIVERSITY OF RIJEKA

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH STUDIES

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CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF AL JAZEERA'S AND THE NEW YORK TIMES' ONLINE NEWS ARTICLES: 'ISRAEL DECLARES STATE OF WAR'

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the B.A. in English Language and Literature and German Language and Literature at the University of Rijeka

Supervisor: Asst. Prof. Martina Podboj, PhD

September 2024

IZJAVA O AUTORSTVU ZAVRŠNOG RADA

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to explore Al Jazeera's and The New York Times' online news articles from October 2023 about Israel declaring war on Hamas. The aim of this analysis is to describe and analyse certain strategies that journalists of these two different media outlets employ in the representation of the events taking place on 7th of October 2023. The analysis of the online news articles was done following the tenets of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Machin and Mayr: 2012) and Discursive News Values Analysis (DNVA) (Bednarek and Caple: 2017). The study showed that the New York Times' article news value construction highlights negativity, impact, unexpectedness and superlativeness. When it comes to discursive strategies used, CDA showed that Al Jazeera implements word connotations mostly to refer to participants of the war and to emphasize the event using negatively connotated verbs. The New York Times implements word connotations with sarcastic remarks and mitigations and is using linguistic choice which help distance the author from the statement. Overlexicalization is method implemented by both media outlets; Al Jazeera implements it mostly for associations and organizations, whereas the New York Times implements it more for important people. Impersonalisation is used in both articles as a part of metonymy. Al Jazeera's article tends to use collectivisation (mostly to refer to casualties), whereas the New York Times does the opposite and individualises people more (mostly to refer to experts and their statements or actions in this war). The opposing strategies of functionalisation-nominalisation also reveal a difference between these two media outlets; Al Jazeera prefers functionalisation and the New York Times nominalisation. Finally, both articles implement both types of aggregation, but scarcely.

Key words: Israel-Hamas war, Critical Discourse Analysis, Discursive News Values Analysis, Al Jazeera, New York Times

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1. INTRODUCTION

The early 2020s mark the intense continuation of the decade-long and complicated Israel-Hamas conflict[1], which resonated strongly around the world. The conflict was covered by media outlets around the world. At the time, every media corporation has already published at least one article about the Israel-Hamas war. Al Jazeera's coverage of the events in October 2023 when Israel declared war on Hamas was the initial motivation for this analysis and further exploration on how other media outlets broadcast news about it would ensue. Namely, even though it is expected for media to provide an objective coverage of events, on first glance it seems that there is a striking difference in how different media outlets covered the events of October 2023 in the Middle East. It must be noted that the overall complexity and sensitivity of the decades long conflict between Israel and Palestine and the discourse surrounding it is beyond the scope of this thesis, which is why its focus is limited solely to the media representation of the events taking place on 7th of October 2023, also referred to the Israel-Hamas war. Consequently, the aim of the thesis is to conduct a critical discourse analysis on how news media covered the event. It is very difficult to argue for 'neutrality' and 'objectivity' in media discourse, which is why specifically Al Jazeera's and The New York Times' online article about Israel's declaration of war were chosen for this analysis. Furthermore, it is common knowledge The New York Times as a western media company is more lenient towards the

[1] According to Encyclopaedia Britannica (2024), Israel-Hamas war is the war between the state of Israel and Palestinian militants, especially Hamas (militant Palestinian nationalist and Islamist movement in the West Bank and Gaza strip that is dedicated to the establishment of an independent Islamic state in historical Palestine) and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. The war began on the 7th of October 2023 with Hamas launching an assault on Israel from the Gaza strip resulting in around 1200 Israeli casualties. More than 240 Israeli hostages were taken by Hamas. Consequently, Israel declared state of war the next day and began with the ground invasion of the Gaza strip with the ultimate goal of completely eradicating Hamas (Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica: 2024). It must be noted that the conflict between Israel and Palestinian militants can be traced back to 1948 when the State of Israel was founded, which sparked the first Arab-Israeli war (Council on Foreign Relations: 2024). Furthermore, the October 2023 Hamas attack has been followed by a strong military response by Israel, ultimately resulting in a case before the International Court of Justice in Hague in December 2023. The still ongoing case was brought by South Africa regarding Israel's conduct in the Gaza Strip and a resulting humanitarian crisis, mass killings, and genocide against the Palestinians (ICJ 2024a). In May 2024 the ICJ ruled that Israel's presence in the occupied Palestinian territory is illegal and that Israel must immediately halt its military offensive, (ICJ 2024b), which to the day of completion of this thesis did not happen.

Israeli side and Al Jazeera, as the Middle Eastern media company more lenient towards the Palestinian side.

2. THE DISCOURSE OF ONLINE NEWS

Media and news discourse have been an object of linguistic and discourse analytic studies for decades and recently there is a growing interest in the analysis of online news discourse. This increase of interest in online news discourse can be attributed to online news consumption and distribution becoming more prevalent than traditional news formats. Bednarek and Caple (2012: 30) argue that the digital revolution is the latest technological development that influenced and shaped a new way of presenting the news discourse in the form of online news. Yuan (2015: 1) explains that online news refers to a variety of formats to disseminate information using internet portals and digital presentation. He then lists types of these formats, which include: news delivered through online videos, sounds, images, picture galleries and web pages with hyperlinks. Furthermore, such news can appear on a news organization's website, in local newspapers, on community websites, on public forums, individualized blogs, weblogs and other social media platforms (ibid: 1). Yuan further explains (2015: 3) that online news appears in a website's home page in the form of a short and pithy headlines. Those headlines typically contain no more than 10 words which represent the main idea of the article. Another feature used by all online news organizations is the use of hyperlinks – by clicking on certain highlighted keywords or sentences in the text, the reader is led to another webpage which provides the reader with additional information (ibid: 4). Furthermore, Bednarek and Caple (2012: 30) state that online news articles are nowadays accessible freely by anyone who has access to online websites. However, some newspaper organizations have established a pay fee for anyone trying to read their online news articles, effectively putting their news behind a 'paywall', as is the case with The New York Times demonstrated below:

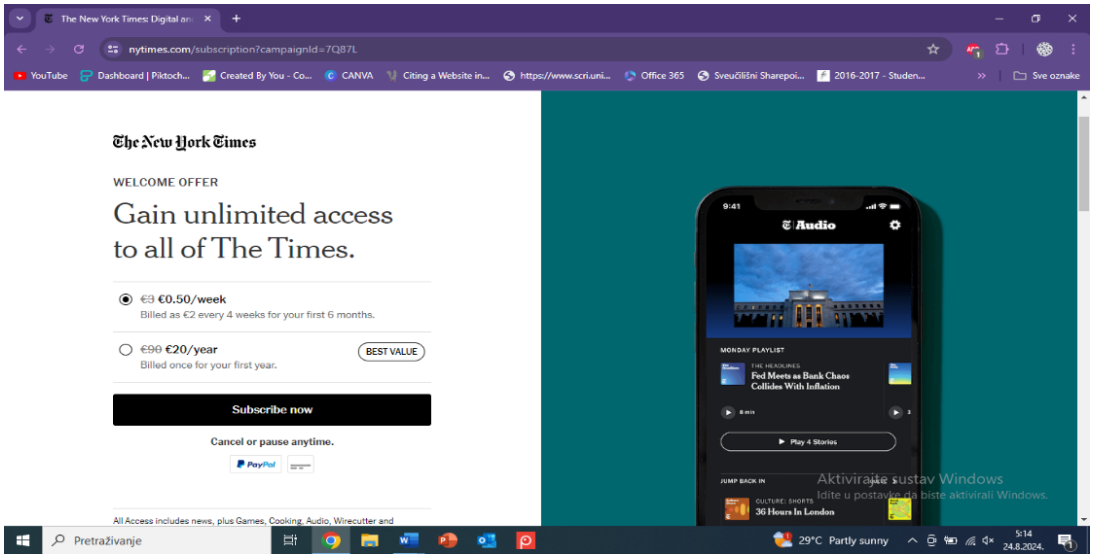

Image 1: The New York Times All Access subscription

Moreover, Bednarek and Caple (2012: 30-31) state that online news articles replicate the traditional formatting of the newspaper because many readers still enjoy the layout, features and organization of the traditional version of newspaper. Examples of traditional formatting can already be found at the beginning of an online news article. These include a headline which is bolded and of a slightly bigger font and a subheading of a smaller font size accompanied by an image as shown in examples below (Image 2 and 3). The digital revolution paved a way for collaboration and information sharing. As elaborated by Bednarek and Caple (2012: 31), most news organizations encourage their readers to contribute to their articles. Ways of contributing include commenting on the online news articles, providing the organizations with amateur photographs and video clips, liking and sharing the articles with other people. Consequently, online news media organizations offer a variety of news packages in form of podcasts, vodcasts, online news galleries and other multimedia such as interactives and graphics (ibid: 32).

2.2 Discursive News Values Analysis

Discursive News Values Analysis (DNVA) is an approach devised by Bednarek and Caple (2017), which aims to systematically analyse how news values are constructed discursively, i.e., through verbal and visual resources. News values are those which are deemed in the literature to define newsworthiness (ibid: 3). Bednarek and Caple recognize the following news values: eliteness, impact, negativity, proximity, superlativeness, timeliness and unexpectedness (2017: 55-66). *Eliteness* is when the event is perceived as of high status or fame. Furthermore, eliteness does not necessarily relate to an event, but can rather relate to: countries or nations, various kinds of institutions and organizations, various kinds of events and happenings and various

kinds of people (ibid: 58). Eliteness is not always tied to positive connotations but can also have negative ones (ibid: 59). *Impact* means that the event is made to have significant effects or consequences. Furthermore, Bednarek and Caple argue that other labels used for impact are importance, relevance, interest, social significance, (social) impact and consequence (ibid: 60). *Relevance* is used in the sense of significance or appeal to the audience and consequence is used in the sense of impact or effects (ibid: 60). Additionally, impact can be constructed as positive, negative or neutral, depending on the context (ibid: 60). *Negativity* is when the event is constructed as a disaster, conflict, controversy, criminal act, etc. Furthermore, there is a large and uncompleted list of types of negativities, which include environmental disasters, accidents, damage and detriments, crime and terrorism, injury, disease, death, chaos, confusion, political and other crises, opposition and division, war and conflict and other human suffering (ibid: 61). Moving on, *personalization* is when the event is geographically or culturally near in relation to publication location or target audience. Moreover, depending on the newspaper agency and the target audience, the article could be culturally near or far and geographically near or far (ibid: 63). *Superlativeness* is when the event is of high intensity or large scope/scale. Bednarek and Caple also argue that superlativeness is connected to proximity because people culturally and geographically closer to the event deem that event as superlative (ibid: 64). *Timeliness* is when the event is constructed as timely in relation to the publication date: as new, recent, ongoing, about to happen or otherwise relevant to the immediate situation/time (current or seasonal). Finally, *unexpectedness* is when the event is constructed as unexpected, unusual, strange or rare. Lastly, the analysis of news values has the potential to reveal common practices, conventions and clichés of news reporting and consequently to unmask the hidden ideology behind these discourses, which makes it a useful tool for critical discourse analysis (ibid: 4-5).

2.3 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis is an approach to doing discourse analysis aiming to discover and deconstruct ideologies and power relations in discourse. According to Machin and Mayr (2012: 2), Critical Discourse Analysis seeks to show how language and grammar can be used as ideological instruments. This is done, for example, by studying texts and the ways that they categorize people, events, places and actions. Different kinds of choices an author makes can alter the meaning of texts (ibid: 2). Thorough analysis of a text can reveals hidden ideologies

behind it. Machin and Mayr describe discursive strategies that will be beneficial for this analysis. These include word connotations, overlexicalization, impersonalisation, individualisation and collectivisation, nomination or functionalization and aggregation. As stated by Machin and Mayr (2012: 32), *word connotations* refers to the basic choice of words which an author makes in the text. These can be particular words which are predominant and occur frequently or words which stand out in one way or another. The main idea here is that the author makes a certain statement based on their word choice since such process is personally motivated. *Overlexicalization* occurs when there is a use of repetitious and quasi-synonymous words in news discourse. Furthermore, this gives a sense of persuasion and is normally evidence that something is either problematic or of ideological contention. Overlexicalization would be found in a place where there are a lot of specific words and their synonyms (ibid:37). Moving on, *impersonalisation* is when the participants are presented figuratively or as a part of a metonymy (ibid: 79). *Individualisation* and *collectivisation* are methods by which participants are described as individuals or as part of a collective. Individualised groups are usually brought closer to readers and people tend to sympathize with individualised people a lot, whereas collectivized people are simply a generic group (ibid: 80). Next up, *nomination* is when participants are presented in the way who they are, and *functionalization* is when participants are presented in the way what they do (ibid: 81). Furthermore, use of nomination can sound more personal, and use of functionalization can sound more official (ibid: 81). In cases of functionalization, the participants can be dehumanized, and it can also connote to legitimacy of how the readers view the participants. Functionalization can also be pejorative (ibid: 82). Lastly, the use of *aggregation* means that people are quantified and treated as 'statistics' (ibid: 83).

2.4 Previous analyses of the media coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict

As mentioned in the introduction, the Israel-Palestine conflict can be dated back to even earlier than 1948. Consequently, there are many news articles reporting on the conflict, accompanied by discourse analyses of this discourse. One such example is set by Barkho (2008), who analysed the BBC's discursive strategy and practices regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict back in 2008. According to Barkho (2008: 291) BBC editors are aware of the lexicon they apply and its inadequacies when describing the conflict. Similar to this thesis, Baidoun (2014) did an MA thesis on the critical discourse analysis of the Gaza conflict of 2013, analysing 31 press

articles from two Israeli and two Palestinian local online newspapers. Baidoun (2014: 74) concluded that the four media outlets embraced the dominant ideologies in their societies to appeal to the audience. Moreover, she explains that the news was ideologically biased on the bases of the socially shared attitudes and ideologies. Another similar analysis has been done by Kandil in 2009, who analysed CNN's, Al Jazeera's and BBC's articles about the Israel-Palestinian conflict using the tenets of Critical Discourse Analysis and Corpus Linguistics. That analysis concluded that Al Jazeera writes the most and CNN writes the least articles on the topic of Israel-Palestine conflict. On one hand, CNN uses the word 'terrorism' frequently, when referring to Palestinian groups and rarely to Israeli groups, whereas Al Jazeera and BBC are more cautious when using that word. On the other hand, Al Jazeera uses the word 'settlements' more that CNN and BBC when negatively referring to Israeli settlements (Kandil 2009: 154-156).

3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Articles which will be analysed in this thesis are news articles about Israel declaring war on Hamas published by online editions of Al Jazeera and The New York Times from 8th October 2023 and 7th October 2023 respectively. It is important to mention that these are online news articles and have dramatical headlines and subheadings which alongside a picture serve to pique readers' curiosity and 'bait' them to click on and read them (a strategy known as 'clickbait'). Upon clicking on the articles, the readers find themselves in front of a big, bolded headline followed by a subheading and a picture. Then there is the publication date and if it is known, the author of the article. Afterwards there are hotkeys for sharing the article on various social media which is an important function of the online news articles, since this is a major way of attracting a big audience.

The screenshots of the headlines of the two articles in question are showed below.

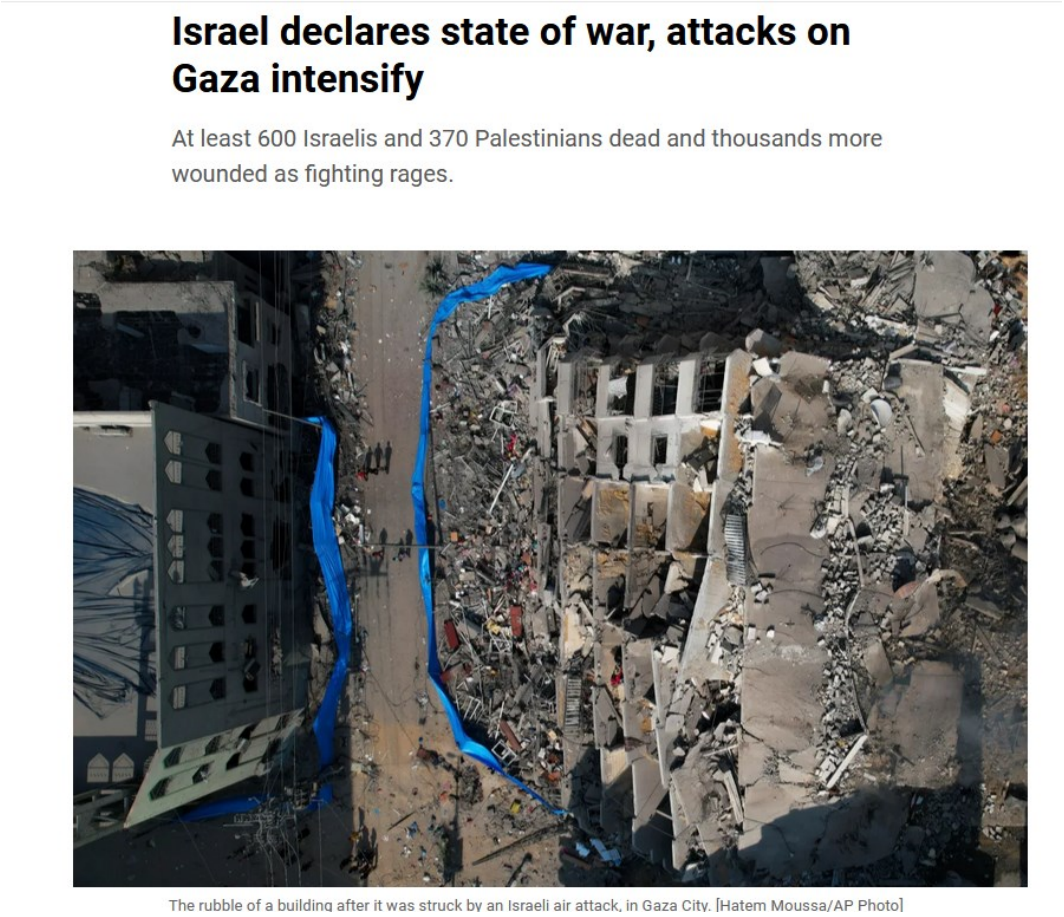

Image 2: Traditional formatting techniques used in the Al Jazeera's online news article

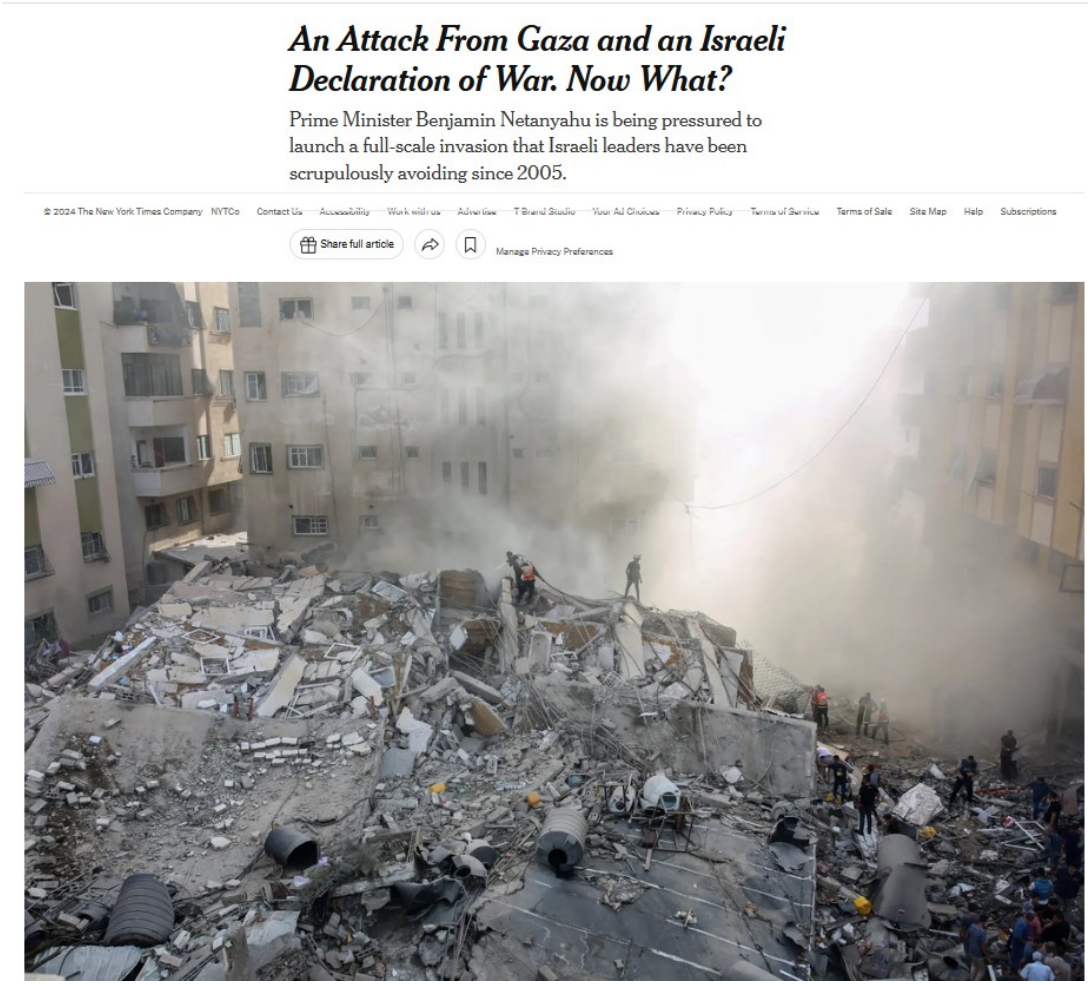

Image 3: Beginning of The New York Times' article

The remainder of the articles are then divided into chapters and the texts are occasionally interrupted by an image describing or referring to the event(s) in the adjoining chapters. The Al Jazeera's article is short, written on the 8th of October 2024 by an unknown author. It is important to mention that Al Jazeera is a Qatari broadcasting company and is therefore close to the reported event. The article of The New York Times is a bit longer and is written on the 7th of October 2023 by Steven Erlanger. The New York Times is an American news broadcasting company primarily intended for citizens of New York.

The analysis was conducted in two steps, which are presented in two separate subchapters. Firstly, the articles were analysed following Discursive News Values Analysis, as proposed by Bednarek and Caple (2017: 55-64). Then the articles were analysed according to methods of Critical Discourse Analysis proposed by Machin and Mayr (2012: 32-83). The DNVA segment of the analysis involved close reading of the articles to identify linguistic strategies employed to construct news values in the following order: 1. eliteness, 2. impact, 3. negativity, 4.

proximity, 5. superlativeness, 6. timeliness, and 7. unexpectedness. As will be shown, not all news values identified by Bednarek and Caple (2017) were included because they did not appear in the articles. Afterwards, the articles were analysed from the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis. They were closely read to identify linguistic strategies identified by Machin and Mayr (2013) as follows: 1. word connotations, 2. overlexicalization, 3. impersonalisation, 4. individualisation and collectivisation, 5. nomination or functionalisation and 6. aggregation. Other strategies identified by Machin and Mayr were not included in this analysis, since they were not identified in the articles.

4. ANALYSIS

Starting with headlines and subheadings of the two articles, Al Jazeera's article begins with a heading (01), subheading (02) and an accompanying image (as seen on Image 2).

(01) Israel declares state of war, attacks on Gaza intensify (Al Jazeera, 2023).

(02) At least 600 Israelis and 370 Palestinians dead and thousands more wounded as fighting rages (Al Jazeera, 2023).

The New York Times' article also has a headline (03), a subheading (03) and an accompanying image (as seen on Image 3). In both cases, the accompanying image depicts war debris and rubble.

(03) ***An Attack From Gaza and an Israeli Declaration of War. Now What?*** (The New York Times, 2023).

(04) Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is being pressured to launch a full-scale invasion that Israeli leaders have been scrupulously avoiding since 2005. (The New York Times, 2023).

Al Jazeera's article contains less text than The New York Times' (seven paragraphs; each containing only one sentence). However, there are a lot of images depicting various events in the early stage of war. Al Jazeera's article provides the reader with a brief explanation of how and why the war started and offers little information such as the number of casualties because the article was written on the second day after the war started.

The New York Times' article also has an image, a heading and a subheading which will also be exemplified here for the sake of simplicity:

The New York Times' article is longer; it contains 29 paragraphs, with each having between one and four long sentences. The article covers every major event of the war, same as with Al Jazeera, but contains more historical context regarding Israeli-Palestinian conflicts.

4.1 Discursive news values analysis

Since the Israel-Hamas war is a major conflict, it is expected that the articles covering the event will be filled with expressions constructing the news value of *eliteness*. This indeed is the case with Al Jazeera's article. 'Israel', 'Gaza', 'Gaza Strip', 'Palestinian enclave' are examples of

nations and regions, denoting the news value of eliteness. Interestingly, the name of Palestine as a nation has not been mentioned, but only its territories as regions. This might be because of the controversy of Palestine as not being fully recognized as a state. 'Palestinian fighters', 'al-Qassam Brigades', 'Hezbollah' and 'Hamas' are examples of various kind of organizations mentioned in the article. These linguistic choices are examples the news value of eliteness tied to negativity because they are all militaristic organizations. 'Israelis', 'Palestinians', 'worshipers at the Al-Aqsa Mosque' and 'Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu' are all examples of various kinds of people and ethnicities.

Similarly, New York Times' article also contains all subtypes of eliteness. 'Gaza', 'Israel', 'Middle East', 'Saudi Arabia', 'United States', 'Iran', 'Lebanon', 'northern Israel', 'the West Bank', 'Egypt', 'Palestinian State' are all examples of countries, nations and regions. Examples of various kinds of organizations and institutions referred in the article are: 'Palestinian forces in Gaza', 'Hamas', 'Israeli military', 'successive Israeli governments', 'Palestinian groups', 'Hezbollah', 'Fatah movement', 'B'Tselem', 'Al-Monitor' and 'Fox News'. In the New York Times' article, there are more examples of linguistic choices expressing the value of eliteness compared to Al Jazeera's article because the article is longer and contains more historical context of the conflict. Moreover, most of the organizations mentioned are of negative connotation because they are involved in the war. 'The Yom Kippur war of 1973', 'Israeli invasion of Gaza', 'planned demonstrations', '9/11' and 'a Palestinian uprising in the West Bank' are all examples of various kinds of events/happenings and are all negatively connotated. Furthermore, the New York Times' article demonstrates more examples of expression of eliteness when it comes to people than Al Jazeera. Firstly, there is mention of 'Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu' who is not negatively and as lacking agency, connotated in the subheading (04), since the author reports that "he was pressured to launch a full-scale invasion". However, later in the article he appears to be negatively connotated because of his words of bringing destruction to Hamas ("*As Mr. Netanyahu told Israelis in declaring war: "We will bring the fight to them with a might and scale that the enemy has not yet known," adding that the Palestinian groups would pay a heavy price*."). Other elite individuals mentioned are: 'President Biden', 'Natan Sachs', 'Mark Heller', 'Carl Bildt', 'Ariel Sharon', 'Amberin Zaman', 'Prince Mohammed bin Salman' and 'Aaron David Miller'. They are not depicted negatively nor positively because the author only reported their neutral opinion, as seen in the following examples:

(05) *"The conflict will unite Israel behind its government, at least for a while, with the opposition canceling its planned demonstrations against Mr. Netanyahu's proposed judicial changes and obeying calls for reservists to muster. It will give Mr. Netanyahu "full political cover to do what he wants," said Natan Sachs, director of the Center for Middle East Policy of the Brookings Institution."* (The New York Times, 2023)

(06) *"There is a lot of heavy pressure already for a large-scale incursion, to 'finish with Hamas,' but I don't think it will solve anything in the longer run," Mr. Heller said."* (The New York Times, 2023)

(07) *"But Carl Bildt, the former Swedish prime minister and foreign minister, said a major Israeli assault on Gaza was almost inevitable, particularly if Israeli soldiers were taken hostage. "If Hamas has taken Israeli soldiers as prisoners and taken them to Gaza, a full-scale Israeli operation into Gaza looks highly likely," he said on X. "Another war." The same presumably would hold true for Israeli citizens."* (The New York Times, 2023)

(08) *"Aaron David Miller, a former American diplomat dealing with the Mideast, said that Hamas had been frustrated with the amounts of money coming into Gaza from Arab countries and restrictions on workers getting permission to work in Israel. "In many ways this is a prestige strike, to remind the Israelis that we're here and can hurt you in ways you can't anticipate," he said."* (The New York Times, 2023)

When it comes to the news value of *impact,* Al Jazeera mentions only events which preceded the war, and every event had a wide negative impact on global scale. The sentences which best depict the construction of the news value of impact would be examples (09) and (10) below:

(09) *"On Sunday, the Lebanese armed group Hezbollah said it launched mortar attack into the occupied Shebaa Farms in solidarity with Hamas; Israel said it responded with artillery."* (Al Jazeera, 2023)

(10) *"The latest death toll stands at 370 Palestinians, according to health officials; and at least 600 Israelis, according to media reports".* (Al Jazeera, 2023)

The very headline (03) hints to a negative event that would have a significant impact on everyone. Besides the war, the New York Times also mentions: "the Yom Kippur war of 1973", "the series of clashes with Palestinian forces in Gaza over the last three years", "the 9/11" and "a Palestinian uprising in the West Bank" which all had an impact on the region and are also negative because they are tied to conflicts.

When it comes to the news value of *negativity*, it is clearly and obviously constructed through the articles, since they refer to a beginning of a war conflict, which in itself is bad news. As for

subtypes of the news value of negativity, Al Jazeera's article contains war and conflict (11), death and injury (12) and shock, human suffering, chaos and damage (13).

(11) *"Israel declares state of war, attacks on Gaza intensify"* (Al Jazeera, 2023)

(12) *"At least 600 Israelis and 370 Palestinians dead and thousands more wounded as fighting rages."* (Al Jazeera, 2023)

(13) *"This comes a day after a surprise attack by al-Qassam Brigades, the armed wing of Hamas, the Palestinian group that governs the Gaza strip."* (Al Jazeera, 2023)

The New York Times article is similar to Al Jazeera's in that it overall constructs the value of negativity, but with much more intensity. Naturally, the main type of negativity in this article is also war, revealed already in the headline (03). There are also instances of chaos and confusion (14). There is injury, death, damage, conflict, hostage situation and attack (15), shock (16) and political crisis.

(14) *"...Israel has again been taken by surprise by a sudden attack, a startling reminder that stability in the Middle East remains a bloody image."* (The New York Times, 2023)

(15) *"... this appears to be a full-scale conflict mounted by Hamas and its allies, with rocket barrages and incursions into Israel proper, and with Israelis killed and captured."* (The New York Times, 2023)

(16) *"The psychological impact on Israelis has been compared to the shock of Sept. 11 in America."* (The New York Times, 2023)

(17) *"The conflict will unite Israel behind its government, at least for a while, with the opposition cancelling its planned demonstrations against Mr. Netanyahu's proposed judicial changes and obeying calls for reservists to muster."* (The New York Times, 2023)

When it comes to news value of *proximity*, clearly the two news outlets represent a connection to two various cultural, social and political contexts; the Middle East and the West, respectively; even though both media are published in English and aiming at audiences across the world. Regarding that, Al Jazeera as a Qatari news organisation is both culturally and geographically near the event described in the article. However, it is noteworthy that this particular article had been written in English; therefore, its target audience is culturally and geographically far from the event. On the other hand, the New York Times as an American news organisation and its target audience are both culturally and geographically far from the event described in the article.

Al Jazeera implements the news value of *superlativeness* in the last two paragraphs of the article using the words "large-scale operation" (18), "violent attacks" (19) and "killing an alarming number of Palestinians" (19).

(18) *"Hamas said it launched its large-scale operation in response to continued brutality by Israel and its occupation administration against Palestinians."* (Al Jazeera, 2023)

(19) *"This includes standing by as Israeli settlers launch violent attacks on Palestinian villages and neighbourhoods; attacking worshippers at the Al-Aqsa Mosque and killing an alarming number of Palestinians this year."* (Al Jazeera, 2023)

The New York Times' article contains many examples of the news value of superlativeness. Firstly, there is a mention of "a full-scale invasion" in the subheading (04). Other linguistic choice denoting superlativeness are "a full-scale conflict" (20), "a major military response" (21), "might and scale that the enemy has not yet known" (22), "would pay a heavy price" (22), "major war" (23), "unforeseen consequences" (23), "sizable Palestinian casualties" (23), "thousands of troops" (24), "major Israeli assault on Gaza" (25) and "significant extra forces" (26).

(20) *"Unlike the series of clashes with Palestinian forces in Gaza over the last three years, this appears to be a full-scale conflict mounted by Hamas and its allies, with rocket barrages and incursions into Israel proper, and with Israelis killed and captured."* (The New York Times, 2023)

(21) *"There are few good options for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has declared war and is being pressured into a major military response."* (The New York Times, 2023)

(22) *"As Mr. Netanyahu told Israelis in declaring war: "We will bring the fight to them with a might and scale that the enemy has not yet known," adding that the Palestinian groups would pay a heavy price."* (The New York Times, 2023)

(23) *"But a major war could have unforeseen consequences. It would be likely to produce sizable Palestinian casualties — civilians as well as fighters — disrupting the diplomatic efforts of President Biden and Mr. Netanyahu to bring about a Saudi recognition of Israel in return for defense guarantees from the United States."* (The New York Times, 2023)

(24) "*Nevertheless, he added, Mr. Netanyahu has in the past rejected calls to send thousands of troops into Gaza to try to destroy armed Palestinian groups like Hamas, given the cost and the inevitable question of what happens the day after*." (The New York Times, 2023)

(25) *"But Carl Bildt, the former Swedish prime minister and foreign minister, said a major Israeli assault on Gaza was almost inevitable, particularly if Israeli soldiers were taken hostage."* (The New York Times, 2023)

(26) "*Even in 2002, when Ariel Sharon was prime minister and Israeli forces crushed a Palestinian uprising in the West Bank, the government chose to avoid sending significant extra forces into Gaza, where it then had Israeli settlements."* (The New York Times, 2023)

The Al Jazeera's article was published on the 8th of October 2023. This marks the second day since the start of the war. Therefore, following the news value of *timeliness*, the Israel-Hamas war which is the main topic of the article is still ongoing and newsworthy. The same explanation can be applied to the New York Times' article. However, the New York Times' article was published on the 7th of October 2023, which indicates that the event is more important to the New York Times than Al Jazeera.

Al Jazeera's article gives the notion of *unexpectedness* in the second sentence of the article (27):

(27) *"This comes a day after a surprise attack by al-Qassam Brigades, the armed wing of Hamas, the Palestinian group that governs the Gaza Strip."* (Al Jazeera, 2023)

Unlike Al Jazeera's article, the article published by the New York Times gives a strong sense of unexpectedness of this event. This can be seen in the examples (28) and (29):

(28) *"Nearly 50 years to the day after the Yom Kippur war of 1973, Israel has again been taken by surprise by a sudden attack, a startling reminder that stability in the Middle East remains a bloody mirage."* (The New York Times, 2023)

(29) *"The psychological impact on Israelis has been compared to the shock of Sept. 11 in America".* (The New York Times, 2023)

Following the tenets of DNVA proposed by Bednarek and Caple (2017), it can be concluded that the New York Times' article constructs more news values because the article is longer than Al Jazeera's. Moreover, there are more examples of eliteness in the New York Times' article due to it containing a deeper historical context of the Israel-Hamas war and mentioning more elite figures throughout the history of the conflict, as well as experts who commented on the escalation of the war in one way or another. On one hand, The New York Times' article tends

to contain more negativity, impact and unexpectedness. By far, the most frequently used technique that the New York Times implements is the news value of superlativeness. On the other hand, Al Jazeera's article is more geographically and culturally near.

4.2 Critical discourse analysis

The first strategy observed from the perspective of CDA was *word connotation.* The implementation of word connotations strategy can already be seen in Al Jazeera's headline. In example (01) the author chooses to describe the beginning of the war as Israel declaring state of war. With such word choice, the author fails to mention the opposing side and the reader gets the notion that Israel is only mobilising and is not yet entirely in a full-scale war. In the same example (01), the word 'intensify' has an extremely negative connotation. Its use serves to emphasize the attacks that the Israeli army will be conducting on the Gaza strip, and it also denotes that the war will likely be long and that this is only the beginning. As noted in the previous section regarding the news values of eliteness, the most frequently used words referring to participants of the reported event are those denoting various names of people, associations and countries taking part in the war ("Israel", "Palestinian fighters", "al-Qassam Brigades", "Hamas", "Hezbollah", "Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu"). Alongside these nouns, this article is filled with verbs that stand out: "declaring" (state of war), (thousands more) "wounded" (army) "continues" (to face off), "responded" (with artillery), "surprise attack", "launched" (mortar attacks), "will launch" (a ground invasion), "attacking" (worshippers), "killing" (an alarming number of Palestinians). These verbs have negative connotations since they are connected to the atrocities of the war. Out of all verbs, the verb "launch" stands out the most because it is the most frequently used verb of the article as it was used three times mostly to depict the start of massive operations (30 & 32) and strikes (30) which will result in massive casualties:

(30) *"the Lebanese armed group Hezbollah said it launched mortar attacks"* (Al Jazeera, 2023)

(31) *"Israel will launch a ground invasion"* (Al Jazeera, 2023)

(32) *"Hamas said it launched its large-scale operation"* (Al Jazeera, 2023)

To conclude Al Jazeera's word connotation strategies, in the last passage of the article, the author uses the word connotation "Israeli settlers" when referring to the Israeli people which indicates that the Israelis are strangers on Palestinian land and have no right to it.

The New York Times's article begins by emphasizing an attack coming from Gaza and then Israel declaring war as a result (03). There is also a rhetorical question at the end of the headline: "Now What?" (03). This indicates that the article will most likely hold information regarding the consequences of the beforementioned event and/or speculations about future events. Furthermore, the subheading (04) contains two interesting word connotations: "is being pressured to" (in the context of the Israel Prime Minister being pressured to launch an invasion) and "scrupulously" (which intensifies the Israeli leaders avoiding the war until now). Both connotations give the idea that this war was provoked by the other side (which is not yet mentioned). The fact that this information is in the subheading, reveals what the stance that the author of the New York Times takes might be. The second paragraph of the article, in which the readers find out that the opposing side is Hamas and its allies, contains an interesting part of a sentence (33):

(33) *..., "this appears to be a full-scale conflict mounted by Hamas and its allies", ...*

"This appear to be" is a hedge expression used by the author, implying that Hamas is responsible for this war, but trying to distance himself from this stance because it was an extremely controversial opinion at the moment the war started. Moving back to the first paragraph, the article itself begins by comparing this war to the 'Yom Kippur War' because in both wars the Israelites were taken by surprise. Moreover, the article is filled with references to historical events ("the 9/11", "Hezbollah fighting Israel in 2006", "Palestinian Uprising of 2002", "Conflicts of 2007/2008/2009"). Some historical events ("Yom Kippur War" and "the 9/11") are comparisons which are exaggerating the position in which the Israelites are victims of incursions from Gaza. The "9/11" comparison is the most interesting one because this article was mostly written for the American audience and since the 9/11 incident occurred in the United States of America, such comparison would leave a strong influence on the American reader, evoking strong anti-Muslim sentiments. Other historical events ("Hezbollah fighting Israel in 2006", "Palestinian Uprising of 2002", "Conflicts of 2007/2008/2009") serve as a reminder to previous conflicts that Israel faced against Palestinians. The article is written in a way that it contextualizes the longevity of the conflict, which is useful to both readers who were aware of

these events and the readers who have never heard of these events. Moreover, this article is filled with various words whose connotations intensify the reported events, such as: “scrupulously” (avoiding), “a sudden” (attack), “a startling” (reminder of the stability), (successive Israeli governments have) “tried hard” (to avoid), (Palestinian groups would pay a) “heavy price”, “unforeseen” (consequences), “important” (backer of Hamas), (retaining) “effective” (control). These word choices increase the impact of words standing beside them, and similarly to most frequent words in the Al Jazeera’s article, are mostly of a negative connotation because they intensify the atrocities of war.

The next strategy observed in this segment is *overlexicalization.* The article contains a few examples of overlexicalization. “Al-Qassam Brigades, the armed wing of Hamas, the Palestinian group that governs the Gaza Strip”. This example is just a clarification of what al-Qassam brigades are because most people are unaware of this name. This is to be expected since the article is covering the beginning of the war, and belligerents need to be clarified. Regarding the same reason, there is also mention of “the Lebanese armed group Hezbollah” and “Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu”. Other than that, Al Jazeera’s article does not rely on the strategy of overlexicalization much.

The New York Times uses overlexicalization in order to explain name of various people and groups taking part in this war (34) – (40):

(34) “*successive Israeli governments*” (The New York Times, 2023)

(35) “*Hezbollah, the Iran-backed militant group that controls southern Lebanon*” (The New York Times, 2023)

(36) “*Natan Sachs, director of the Center for Middle East Policy of the Brookings Institution*” (The New York Times, 2023)

(37) “*Mark Heller, a senior researcher at Israel’s Institute for National Security Studies*” (The New York Times, 2023)

(38) “*Carl Bildt, the former Swedish prime minister and foreign minister*” (The New York Times, 2023)

(39) “*Fatah movement of the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas*” (The New York Times, 2023)

(40) “*the more radical Islamist Hamas movement*”. (The New York Times, 2023)

When it comes to the strategy of *impersonalisation,* Al Jazeera uses it in example (01). Israel as a nation is represented as wholly being in war which makes sense. However, Israel attacking is not entirely true because only the Israeli military are conducting military operations and not the rest of the Israeli population. This type of impersonalisation relies on metonymy. In the article itself, there are only two cases of impersonalisation. The first one mentioning Israel when referring to Israeli's spokespersons ("Israel said it responded with artillery"). Secondly, mentioning Hamas when referring to Hamas' spokespersons ("Hamas said it launched its large-scale operation…"). Both examples are like the one in the headline. The author decided to simplify the information by not mentioning many names, relying on metonymy.

Similarly to Al Jazeera, the New York Times also implements impersonalisation already in the headline. In example (03) "an attack from Gaza" and "Israeli declaration of war" are examples of impersonalisations. The first impersonalisation gives very little information. It is not specified who the attacker was/were, only that an attack came from the region of Gaza. This is done deliberately to bait readers to click on the article and read it. The second impersonalisation mentions the state of Israel when referring to its high officials, which is a regular occurrence in media discourse, again based on metonymy.

Next, the strategy of *collectivization* was observed. In example (02) Al Jazeera uses collectivisation to report casualties from both sides of the war. This is because civilians were casualties, and the author felt no need to single someone out. Furthermore, in the article, only the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is individualised in the context of threatening to turn Gaza into a "desert island" (41):

(41) "*The escalation comes as expectations grow that Israel will launch a ground invasion of Gaza after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu threatened to turn the besieged Palestinian enclave into a "deserted island*". (Al Jazeera, 2023)

The Prime Minister is individualised here because these were his words, and by quoting him directly the author constructs a sense of accountability for Netanyahu's statements and the consequences they have in the development of the war. Absent significant events involving notable individuals, everything was largely *collectivised*.

As already seen in the New York Times headline presented in example (04), the Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is individualised because the author reported what the PM said. The same is in the rest of the article, where the Prime Minister is individualised seven times, in regard to his words and/or his actions (42) – (47):

(42) *"There are few good options for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has declared war and is being pressured into a major military response."* (The New York Times, 2023)

(43) *"As Mr. Netanyahu told Israelis in declaring war: "We will bring the fight to them with a might and scale that the enemy has not yet known," adding that the Palestinian groups would pay a heavy price.* (The New York Times, 2023)

(44) *"It would be likely to produce sizable Palestinian casualties — civilians as well as fighters — disrupting the diplomatic efforts of President Biden and Mr. Netanyahu to bring about a Saudi recognition of Israel in return for defense guarantees from the United States."* (The New York Times, 2023)

(45) *"The conflict will unite Israel behind its government, at least for a while, with the opposition canceling its planned demonstrations against Mr. Netanyahu's proposed judicial changes and obeying calls for reservists to muster. It will give Mr. Netanyahu "full political cover to do what he wants," said Natan Sachs, director of the Center for Middle East Policy of the Brookings Institution."* (The New York Times, 2023)

(46) *"Nevertheless, he added, Mr. Netanyahu has in the past rejected calls to send thousands of troops into Gaza to try to destroy armed Palestinian groups like Hamas, given the cost and the inevitable question of what happens the day after."* (The New York Times, 2023)

(47) *"Israel and Mr. Netanyahu have been wary of sending ground forces into Gaza."* (The New York Times, 2023)

Differently from Al Jazeera's article, this article has more individualised participants other than the PM Benjamin Netanyahu. American president Joe Biden is mentioned once alongside the PM Benjamin Netanyahu:

(48*) "…disrupting the diplomatic efforts of President Biden and Mr. Netanyahu to bring about a Saudi recognition of Israel in return for defence guarantees from the United States."* (The New York Times, 2023)

Three other participants were individualised. Firstly, Nathan Sachs, director of the Center for Middle East Policy of the Brookings Institute. He is mentioned twice in giving his opinion about the Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu and his actions:

(49) "*It will give Mr. Netanyahu 'full political cover to do what he wants*" (The New York Times, 2023)

Secondly, Mark Heller, a senior researcher at Israel's Institute for National Security Studies is individualised. He gave his opinion on what is going to happen next:

(50) *"There is a lot of heavy pressure already for a large-scale incursion, to 'finish with Hamas', but I don't think it will solve anything in the longer run," Mr. Heller said."* (The New York Times, 2023)

The last individualised participant is Carl Bildt, the former Swedish prime minister and foreign minister. The article reports on his post on social media platform X, that the Israeli invasion was inevitable:

(51) *"If Hamas has taken Israeli soldiers as prisoners and taken them to Gaza, a full-scale Israeli operation into Gaza looks highly likely."* (The New York Times, 2023)

All these individualised participants are either high officials from various countries and/or experts in the fields of Israeli's relations with surrounding countries, Israel's national security and Israel's history. By including their opinions in the article, the news reporting is attributed legitimacy and the perspective of Israel's side in the conflict is legitimized.

When it comes to the strategy of *functionalization,* in Al Jazeera's article, the participants are all functionalised and only the Israeli prime minister is nominalized. It can be noted that this strategy goes hand in hand with the strategy of *nominalisation.* For example, when mentioning Benjamin Netanyahu, the author functionalises him by writing that he is the Israeli prime minister and nominalises him by writing his full name, as seen in the example (52):

(52) *"…after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu threatened to turn…"* (Al Jazeera, 2023).

Same thing is done with other groups of people mentioned in the article like al-Qassam Brigades:

(53) *"al-Qassam Brigades, the armed wing of Hamas, the Palestinian group that governs the Gaza strip*" (Al Jazeera, 2023)

and Hezbollah:

(54) *"the Lebanese armed group Hezbollah said it launched…"* (Al Jazeera, 2023).

In the last chapter, however, an interesting type of functionalisation can be found. There is a mention of "Israeli settlers" which refers to all Israelites but in this particular context the author refers to the Israeli soldiers, because of the mention of attacks, as seen in the example (55):

(55) *"This includes standing by as Israeli settlers launch violent attacks on Palestinian villages and neighbourhoods; attacking worshippers at the Al-Aqsa Mosque and killing an alarming number of Palestinians this year."* (Al Jazeera, 2023)

This is a pejorative term depicting Israelites as unlawful occupiers of Palestinian land, and essentially positions the media outlet regarding its position in the conflict.

The subheading of the New York Times' article reveals two examples of functionalisation (04). Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is both functionalised and nominalised by his title and name. Moreover, the rest of the sentence contains another functionalization: "Israeli leaders". There are no names mentioned and the reader is unaware of the number and identity of officials, only that they have been avoiding the war since 2005. This functionalization is used in order to mitigate and depersonalize the importance of who these officials were, and which positions they held in the Israeli government and to simply depict the entire Israeli government as anti-war in the period between 2005 and 2023. Further in the article, the author decided to use nomination when referring to the Israeli prime minister ("Mr. Netanyahu"). This is done in order to avoid redundancy. More further in the article, the author quotes Netanyahu's words in which he mentions "Palestinian groups" ("adding that the Palestinian groups would pay a heavy price"). This functionalization is used on purpose, in a threatening way, to refer to all militant groups and generally to everyone standing in their way. Similarly to the Al Jazeera's article, the associations are functionalized: 'Hezbollah' ("Hezbollah, the Iran-backed militant group that controls southern Lebanon"), 'Fatah movement' ("Fatah movement of the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas"), 'Hamas' ("the more radical Islamist Hamas movement"). Furthermore, there are many people mentioned in this article, which are both examples of nomination and functionalization. "Natan Sachs, director of the Center for Middle East Policy of the Brookings Institution"; "Mark Heller, a senior researcher at Israel's Institute for National Security Studies"; "Carl Bildt, the former Swedish prime minister and foreign minister"; "Amberin Zaman, an analyst for Al-Monitor, a Washington-based news website that covers the Middle East"; "Aaron David Miller, a former American diplomat dealing with the Mideast". As a result of their significant reports and opinions, it was necessary to nominalise and functionalise these individuals. In addition, readers find such opinions more credible and trustworthy when a real person with a degree is behind it.

The final strategy observed in the articles is *aggregation*. Al Jazeera's subheading (02) reveals two types of aggregation. Example (56) reveals the exact number of casualties using the quantification strategy.

(56) *"At least 600 Israelis and 370 Palestinians dead"* (Al Jazeera, 2023)

Furthermore, the rest of the sentence (57) reveals the other type of aggregation.

(57) "*and thousands more wounded as fighting rages*" (Al Jazeera, 2023)

Al Jazeera puts an emphasis on the atrocities of the war by listing the number of casualties.

Compared to Al Jazeera's article, the only account of aggregation strategy is in the fourth chapter of the New York Times' article (58). Additionally, the phrase 'unknown number of hostages' is an exaggeration because the linguistic choice which was made here gives the notion of a large number, even though it can mean only one or two in reality.

(58) *"Given that 250 Israelis have died so far and an unknown number been taken hostage by Hamas, an Israeli invasion of Gaza — and even a temporary reoccupation of the territory, something that successive Israeli governments have tried hard to avoid — cannot be ruled out."* (The New York Times, 2023)

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this thesis is aimed to describe and analyse certain strategies that journalists of Al Jazeera and the New York Times employ to represent the events prior and taking place on 7th of October 2023; when Israel declared war on Hamas. The analysis was done following the methods of Critical Discourse Analysis and Discursive News Values Analysis. It can be concluded that both articles contain many examples of the news values of eliteness, with the New York Times' article containing more examples of eliteness when it comes to individuals. Consequently, both articles fail to provide many examples of personalization because they only report what the experts and/or higher officials had to say about the conflict. Both articles depict the war as a negative event which has a great impact on the surrounding people. Al Jazeera's article seems to depict a greater impact because of its cultural and geographical proximity. Both articles show the negativity of the war. However, the New York Times' article manages to show even more negativity due to the report of the historical events in Israel and the region preceding the Israel-Hamas war in 2023. The event is labelled as ongoing and recent, with the two articles being written two days apart (Al Jazeera's article written on October 8th and The New York Times' article written on October 7th). Ultimately, when it comes to discursive news values analysis proposed by Bednarek and Caple (2017), the New York Times' article discursively constructs more news values, which does not surprise, given that the article is longer than Al Jazeera's. Moreover, there are more examples of eliteness in the New York Times' article due to it containing a deeper historical context of the Israel-Hamas war and mentioning more elite figures throughout the history of the conflict, as well as experts who commented on the escalation of the war in one way or another. On one hand, The New York Times' article tends to construct more negativity, impact and unexpectedness. By far, the most frequently used technique that the New York Times implements is constructing the news value of superlativeness. On the other hand, Al Jazeera's article is more geographically and culturally near. As for the tenets of Critical Discourse Analysis, authors of both articles use very different word connotations: Al Jazeera's author implements words which refer to different organizations and groups and negatively connotated verbs used in regards to war, whereas the author of the New York Times also implements word connotations to describe and explain groups and organizations, but the strategy is mostly implemented to mitigate various events and to distance the author from a statement. Regarding overlexicalization, Al Jazeera uses it to describe opposing sides of the war, whereas the New York Times uses it to describe elite people

connected to the war and conflict. Both articles implement impersonalization-by using metonymy. The Al Jazeera's article singled out only the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu when citing his words, whereas the New York Times singled out more people who gave their opinion on the matter. When it comes to casualties, both Al Jazeera and the New York Times collectivised the people. Al Jazeera's article functionalizes the participants mentioned in the article, keeping the article formal, whereas the New York Times functionalizes everyone in the first part of the article in order to familiarize the readers with the belligerents, but implements nomination in the rest of the article. Finally, both articles aggregate the causalities of the war, however, both authors fail to provide the readers with the concrete evidence behind these numbers. Ultimately, this analysis demonstrates that DNVA and CDA can be used to analyse different news reports on the same event to uncover strategies used to discursively construct the event. In sum, strategies in both articles have been deconstructed and have proven to be quite different from each other, which confirms previous findings on the media coverage of the Israel-Palestine decades-long conflict.

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8. APPENDIX

Israel declares state of war, attacks on Gaza intensify

By: Al Jazeera staff

Last updated: 8 Oct 2023

At least 600 Israelis and 370 Palestinians dead and thousands more wounded as fighting rages.

Israel has declared a “state of war” as its army continues to face off against Palestinian fighters in several areas across southern Israel.

This comes a day after a surprise attack by al-Qassam Brigades, the armed wing of Hamas, the Palestinian group that governs the Gaza Strip.

On Sunday, the Lebanese armed group Hezbollah said it launched mortar attacks into the occupied Shebaa Farms in solidarity with Hamas; Israel said it responded with artillery.

The escalation comes as expectations grow that Israel will launch a ground invasion of Gaza after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu threatened to turn the besieged Palestinian enclave into a “deserted island”.

The latest death toll stands at 370 Palestinians, according to health officials; and at least 600 Israelis, according to media reports.

Hamas said it launched its large-scale operation in response to continued brutality by Israel and its occupation administration against Palestinians.

This includes standing by as Israeli settlers launch violent attacks on Palestinian villages and neighbourhoods; attacking worshippers at the Al-Aqsa Mosque and killing an alarming number of Palestinians this year.

An Attack From Gaza and an Israeli Declaration of War. Now What?

By: Steven Erlanger, New York Times staff

Last updated: Oct. 7, 2023

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is being pressured to launch a full-scale invasion that Israeli leaders have been scrupulously avoiding since 2005.

Nearly 50 years to the day after the Yom Kippur war of 1973, Israel has again been taken by surprise by a sudden attack, a startling reminder that stability in the Middle East remains a bloody mirage.

Unlike the series of clashes with Palestinian forces in Gaza over the last three years, this appears to be a full-scale conflict mounted by Hamas and its allies, with rocket barrages and incursions into Israel proper, and with Israelis killed and captured.

The psychological impact on Israelis has been compared to the shock of Sept. 11 in America. So after the Israeli military repels the initial Palestinian attack, the question of what to do next will loom large. There are few good options for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has declared war and is being pressured into a major military response.

Given that 250 Israelis have died so far and an unknown number been taken hostage by Hamas, an Israeli invasion of Gaza — and even a temporary reoccupation of the territory, something that successive Israeli governments have tried hard to avoid — cannot be ruled out.

As Mr. Netanyahu told Israelis in declaring war: “We will bring the fight to them with a might and scale that the enemy has not yet known,” adding that the Palestinian groups would pay a heavy price.

But a major war could have unforeseen consequences. It would be likely to produce sizable Palestinian casualties — civilians as well as fighters — disrupting the diplomatic efforts of President Biden and Mr. Netanyahu to bring about a Saudi recognition of Israel in return for defense guarantees from the United States.

There would also be pressure on Hezbollah, the Iran-backed militant group that controls southern Lebanon, to open up a second front in northern Israel, as it did in 2006 after an Israeli soldier was captured and taken prisoner in Gaza.

Iran, a sworn enemy of Israel, is an important backer of Hamas as well as Hezbollah and has supplied both groups with weapons and intelligence.

The conflict will unite Israel behind its government, at least for a while, with the opposition canceling its planned demonstrations against Mr. Netanyahu's proposed judicial changes and obeying calls for reservists to muster. It will give Mr. Netanyahu "full political cover to do what he wants," said Natan Sachs, director of the Center for Middle East Policy of the Brookings Institution.

Nevertheless, he added, Mr. Netanyahu has in the past rejected calls to send thousands of troops into Gaza to try to destroy armed Palestinian groups like Hamas, given the cost and the inevitable question of what happens the day after.

"But the psychological impact of this for Israel is similar to 9/11," he said. "So the calculus about cost could be quite different this time."

The question will always be what happens afterward, said Mark Heller, a senior researcher at Israel's Institute for National Security Studies. Nearly every year there have been limited Israeli military operations in the occupied territories, but they have not provided any solutions.

"There is a lot of heavy pressure already for a large-scale incursion, to 'finish with Hamas,' but I don't think it will solve anything in the longer run," Mr. Heller said.

But Carl Bildt, the former Swedish prime minister and foreign minister, said a major Israeli assault on Gaza was almost inevitable, particularly if Israeli soldiers were taken hostage. "If Hamas has taken Israeli soldiers as prisoners and taken them to Gaza, a full-scale Israeli operation into Gaza looks highly likely," he said on X. "Another war." The same presumably would hold true for Israeli citizens.

Israel and Mr. Netanyahu have been wary of sending ground forces into Gaza. Even in 2002, when Ariel Sharon was prime minister and Israeli forces crushed a Palestinian uprising in the West Bank, the government chose to avoid sending significant extra forces into Gaza, where it then had Israeli settlements.

Israeli unilaterally withdrew its soldiers and citizens from Gaza in 2005, while retaining effective control of large parts of the occupied West Bank. The failure of that withdrawal to secure any sort of lasting peace agreement has left Gaza a kind of orphan, largely cut off from other Palestinians in the West Bank and almost entirely isolated by both Israel and Egypt, which control Gaza's borders and its seacoast. Palestinians often call Gaza "an open-air prison."

After the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and the conflict of 2006, an internal struggle between the Fatah movement of the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, and the more radical Islamist Hamas movement ended with Hamas taking control of the territory in 2007, prompting Israel to try to isolate Gaza even further.

Even in an extended conflict of 2008 and 2009, Israeli forces entered Gaza and its population centers but chose not to move too deeply into the territory or to reoccupy it, with a cease-fire brokered by Egypt after three weeks of warfare.

Successive Israeli governments insist that after the 2005 withdrawal, it no longer has responsibility for Gaza. But given Israel's control over the borders and its overwhelming military advantage, many groups like B'Tselem, which monitors human rights in the occupied territories, argue that Israel retains significant legal responsibilities and obligations for Gaza under international humanitarian law.

While Hamas has not been clear about why it chose to attack now, it may be a response to growing Israeli ties to the Arab world, in particular to Saudi Arabia, which has been negotiating a putative defense treaty with the United States in return for normalizing relations with Israel, potentially to the neglect of the Palestinians.

That is the view of Amberin Zaman, an analyst for Al-Monitor, a Washington-based news website that covers the Middle East. "Israel's response to today's attacks will likely be of a scale that will set back U.S. efforts for Saudi- Israeli normalization, if not torpedo them altogether," she said in a message on X, formerly Twitter.

Saudi Arabia has not recognized Israel since it was founded in 1948 and until now had signaled that it would not even consider normalizing relations until Israel agreed to allow the creation of a Palestinian state.

But recently even the de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia, Prince Mohammed bin Salman, has gone public with affirmations that some sort of deal with Israel seemed plausible. In an interview with Fox News last month, he said that talk of normalization was "for the first time, real."

That will now be in question, depending on how long this conflict lasts and with what level of dead and wounded.

But Mr. Sachs of Brookings says that the goals of Hamas may be simpler: to take hostages in order to free Palestinian prisoners from both the West Bank and Gaza in Israeli jails.

Aaron David Miller, a former American diplomat dealing with the Mideast, said that Hamas had been frustrated with the amounts of money coming into Gaza from Arab countries and restrictions on workers getting permission to work in Israel. "In many ways this is a prestige strike, to remind the Israelis that we're here and can hurt you in ways you can't anticipate," he said.

Israel, shocked, will now have to deal with the results of what Mr. Miller, now with the Carnegie Endowment, called its "overconfidence and complacency and unwillingness to imagine that Hamas could launch a cross-border attack like this."

The ramifications of the war and its aftermath will be "far-reaching and take a long time to manifest," Mr. Sachs said. There will be commissions of inquiry into the military and intelligence agencies "and the political echelon won't escape blame, either."

But first, as Mr. Heller noted, comes the war. “And these things tend to get out of control,” he said.