

The use of the past in news articles

A discourse analysis of South African and Israeli newspapers reporting the *South Africa v. Israel* ICJ genocide case

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Master's Thesis
June 2024

Word Count: 16058

ABSTRACT

In December 2023 South Africa filed a case against Israel at the International Court of Justice for committing genocide in the Gaza strip. After the decade long conflict between Israel and Palestine had escalated again in the months before. This escalation and South Africa's meddling in this conflict on the world stage caused media from all over the world to report on the events. The role of journalism in conflict reporting has been widely explored in academic literature. These studies have shown that journalism plays a significant role in influencing public opinion and government policies. They also showed that various tactics and frameworks are used to either bring peace to conflicts (which is aimed with peace journalism) or to focus on winning, which often lexically increases conflicts (this is done with war journalism). Additionally, a considerable amount of research on collective memory has been done, often focusing on the role of collective victimhood on society. Yet, despite the inextricable link between history and journalism, little research has been done on the influence of the past on conflict journalism. This thesis tried to bridge this gap between memory studies and conflict journalism with answering the following research question: What role does the past play in Israeli and South African newspapers, reporting the South Africa v. Israel ICJ genocide case? To answer the research question a qualitative discourse analysis was performed on news articles from South Africa and Israel, using a comparative approach. This was done using ten articles from two papers from South Africa, and ten articles from two papers from Israel. The articles that were used were published in the first weeks of the case. An overlexicalization of the Holocaust in Israeli newspapers and an overlexicalization of South Africa's Apartheid history in South African papers showed that the newspapers use their own past as big explanatory thing for current events. The news articles covering the conflict were structured by a humanitarian discourse with which the newspapers tried to establish a position of moral authority for their country. The collective victimhood the countries experienced due to their traumatic past was used as a framework for this discourse. Findings of this thesis, thus, show that the past was primarily used to legitimize government policy and actions.

KEYWORDS: *ICJ genocide case, South Africa v. Israel, historical context, journalism*

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1. Introduction

For decades, the world has been divided by the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine. The attack by Hamas on 7 October 2023 and the response by Israel in the following months have only been a further intensification of the conflict. However, existing public opinions are changing through international politics (Conboye & Smith, 2023). While the United States, European Union, United Kingdom, Italy, and France had previously affirmed Israel's right to self-defense (Borges, 2023), Israel's reaction has now led to a growing disagreement between Prime Minister Netanyahu and Israel's allies, who disapprove of the amount of violence that is being used (Al Jazeera, 2023; Bateman & Evans, 2024). Amongst others, Russia, China, the African Union, and the United Arab Emirates have all favored a return to peace. South Africa, which sees parallels with its struggle against apartheid, has even filed an application of proceedings against Israel for committing genocide at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) (International Court of Justice, 2024).

On 29 December 2023, South Africa filed this case against Israel for violating the Genocide Convention in the Gaza Strip (Keitner, 2024). The term *genocide* was created by Raphaël Lemkin, a Jewish lawyer, to describe what the Nazis did to Jews before and during the Second World War (Lemkin, 1946). In 1946 the UN disclosed genocide as an internationally recognized crime and in 1948 several countries signed the genocide convention declaring that genocidal crimes need to be prevented and punished (Schabas, 2000), establishing its legal framework. Although the term genocide, thus, seems to refer to what happened during the Holocaust it is not limited to this event. Similar matters occur both before and after. Schabas (2000) for example refers to the crimes committed against Armenians in the Ottoman Empire (during World War I). Additionally, the ICJ has handled similar cases of genocide in the past decades, such as the one against former Yugoslavia (Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Croatia v. Serbia), n.d.). Given that the ICJ hearing will probably take years to reach a ruling and can only issue provisional measures without enforcement powers, South Africa aims to achieve a ceasefire in this case, allowing both parties to negotiate an agreement peacefully (Shotter, 2024).

Something that makes this specific case interesting, is the underlying historical context which refers back to the Holocaust and South African apartheid. Israel has stated to find the accusation outrageous and baseless (Shotter, 2024). They accused South Africa of being hypocritical for criticizing Israel's actions in "the name of the Holocaust". Israel justified their actions by claiming it was a necessary response to defend itself from the violence committed by Hamas. Whereas South Africa claimed Israel was killing Palestinians simply because they are Palestinians, and therefore committing genocide. South Africa drew a parallel between its own apartheid past and the current regime in Israel, which they argue consists of discriminatory laws that existed to systematically strip Palestinians of their land and homes in favor of Jewish Israelis (Amnesty International, 2023). For Palestine and its allies, who have felt like the system of ICJ was against them, this case was a test of the credibility of the international system (Shotter, 2024). This shows that the different parties used history to defend their actions. *South Africa v. Israel* is a legal conflict but could also be perceived as a test for international relations that asks to interpret the events within the context of past and contemporary conflicts, and additionally, wants to highlight justice and human rights.

1.2 Societal Relevance

Not only is *South Africa v. Israel* interesting as a court case but the ways in which news reports on this event are equally fascinating. Media outlets play a crucial role in framing issues and shaping public perception (McCombs & Valenzuela, 2020). When covering complex international legal cases like the *South Africa v. Israel* ICJ genocide case, journalists often draw upon past events to provide context and support their narratives (Bhowmik & Fisher, 2023; Schudson, 2014; Kitch, 2008, Zelizer, 2016). The way these events are selected, interpreted, and presented influences how the public understands the current situation. For instance, past conflicts can be used as context for the current allegations against Israel. For those pro-Israel, such references might be seen as biased and outrageously critical, while pro-Palestine supporters view them as necessary reminders of ongoing injustices. Similarly, references to conflicts or crimes against Jews and Israel can be used to defend Israel against the allegations. The choice of these events and the framing of the narratives can thus polarize public opinion and increase societal divides. This shows

that media informs public opinion, influences political dynamics, and shapes international discourse.

Newspapers produce discourse by creating a version of reality that influences public opinion and policy setting (Selvarajah & Fjorititio, 2023). An example of a conflict in which the media contributed to the events is the Rwandan genocide. The radio station *RTLM* that reported the conflict was perceived as an authority by both the perpetrators and the victims, and because of this got to play a directive role during the atrocities (Hefti & Ausserladscheider Jonas, 2020). Schabas (2003) highlights the role of the media in genocide by stating that genocide starts with investing in media campaigns (as cited in Hefti & Ausserladscheider Jonas, 2020, p. 12). A different example of the role of the media in conflicts is the mobilization and rhetoric of pro-Israel and pro-Palestine demonstrations. Although it is difficult to measure if the media has contributed to these demonstrations, it is clear that references and comparisons made in the media can also be found in slogans, speeches, and signs at demonstrations. Throughout May and June 2024, pro-Palestine protests took place on college campuses around the world, with protesters urging universities to end their relationships with Israel (Al Jazeera, 2024). During these protests, people referred to being on the right side of history as is done in media reporting about *South Africa v. Israel*. In March 2024 only 36 percent of Americans approved of Israel's actions as opposed to the 50 percent who did in November 2023 (Jones, 2024), showing that public opinions have changed over time.

Given that specific news frames can contribute to legitimizing policies (Fengler et al., 2018), countries and international organizations are likely to consider media when formulating their official responses to current events. This proves that the media's role in presenting these narratives can have serious consequences. The way *South Africa v. Israel* is framed in news stories, consequently, not only influences public perceptions but also shapes broader international reactions. By creating a version of reality, newspapers produce discourse that influences policy settings. In January 2024 the United States and the United Kingdom, for example, were opposed to supporting South Africa in the case, and other Western allies maintained quiet on the matter (Al Jazeera, 2024; AP, 2024). Nevertheless, more than 10 countries joined South Africa's case including Spain, Ireland, and Belgium in June 2024 (AJLabs, 2024). Something else that shows how official

organizations' opinions have changed is the arrest warrants the ICC has issued for Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Hamas leaders since the ICC believes they possibly committed war crimes (Bubola & Savage, 2024).

1.3 Academic Relevance

Analyzing how news stories shape international responses to conflicts, such as the South Africa v. Israel ICJ genocide case, can provide valuable insights into the power dynamics between media, public opinion, and policy. To gain insights into how meaning is constructed in society one needs to understand the frames in media coverage. For this reason, it is important to critically examine media texts. This research highlights the media's role as a powerful actor in international politics, capable of influencing not only national governments but also global organizations and public opinions. By examining the specific frames used in news coverage, academics can better understand how media contributes to the construction of social and political realities. This critical examination is essential for understanding how these media processes work.

In this thesis themes of conflict, journalism studies, and collective memory are interconnected. Collective memory is inherently connected to journalism since memory needs to be socially shared to become collective, a process often done through media (Neiger, 2020). Media serve as a place where political figures influence how the media's audience remembers and makes sense of the past (Neiger, 2020). Journalists themselves also function as political actors, since they contribute to the creation of the collective memory and how events are remembered. Collective memory is used as an explanatory narrative to report current events (Zandberg, 2010; Zelizer, 2016). This is done by bringing the past, the present, and the future together as a framework (Zelizer, 2008). The past and the future are selectively combined to explain the present or show how journalists make sense of current events (Zandberg, 2010; Zelizer, 2008). At the same time, journalists contribute to creating collective memory with what they report. What is remembered and forgotten is determined by highlighting specific things and abstaining from mentioning the rest (Ncube & Gwahirisa, 2024). Journalists can bring new perspectives to light by highlighting experiences that aren't shared (Tembo, 2024). As a result, newspapers have a powerful role in shaping societal narratives (Zandberg, 2010). Because of these things,

Kitsch (2008) considers journalism as something that shapes and reflects memory.

Journalists establish a role of cultural authority for themselves. They “function as an interpretative community, that authenticates itself through its use of narratives and collective memory” (Zelizer, 1992 as cited in Neiger, 2020, p.7). This is done by not just focusing on past events but on their roles and practices in covering them. Thus, journalists play an important role in how events are made sense of and commemorated, but do they have the right to tell these stories, and how is decided what the right story is? Garagozov (2016) shows that a society’s experiences of conflict and collective trauma shape collective memory, even among people who did not experience this traumatic conflict themselves. Additionally, Garagozov demonstrated that recollecting a collective memory can evoke strong negative emotions in conflicts, which can affect one’s attitude toward the other (idem.). In media reporting conflicts, collective memory, thus, can be used to provoke or reduce these clashes, which emphasizes the importance of examining the framework that is used in news stories.

Despite these findings, the use of collective memory in journalism reporting conflicts has not been much researched. Collective memory is believed to play a role in influencing public perceptions (Garagozov, 2016), and can affect people at social, cultural, and psychological levels (Shah, 2017, p.52). Additionally, it can worsen or reduce conflicts (Garagozov, 2016). However, how this is done and used in news articles remains underexposed. Because of this, it is important to study how collective memory is used in news articles and what role the past plays in giving meaning to conflicts, bridging the gap between collective memory studies and journalism in conflict reporting. This will be explored in this thesis using the following research question:

- *What role does the past play in Israeli and South African newspapers, reporting the South Africa v. Israel ICJ genocide case?*

With this, this thesis aims to examine how the past is used, and if this differs per paper or country. It tries to identify different historical events used as context and analyzes how they are used as a frame. To see if the papers report differently a comparative approach was used in which two journals from South Africa and two papers from Israel were used.

1.4 Thesis Outline

After this introduction, in which the background and broader context of this thesis's topic are explained, relevant literature is discussed in Chapter 2. This chapter defines important concepts, such as objectivity, bias, collective memory, and victimhood. It also reviews existing research on objectivity, bias in journalism, the use of the past in journalism, and the role of discourse in news stories. In Chapter 3 the used methods are described. The methods section consists of a description of the type of research, data collection process, sampling procedure, and data analysis methods used to formulate an answer to the research question. I, then, present the results in Chapter 4. Based on the overlexicalization of certain words and structural oppositions key themes, patterns, and differences in the reporting of the *South Africa v. Israel* ICJ genocide case in the different papers are discussed. Finally, in Chapter 5, the most important findings are summarized and contextualized in the discussion and conclusion. This chapter contains an interpretation of the results and provides an answer to the research question. Findings are compared to previous research and identify the result's implications. Additionally, the chapter mentions the limitations of this study and offers suggestions for further research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Objectivity and Journalism

Objectivity is generally a widely discussed concept, with debates questioning its true meaning and feasibility (Muñoz-Torres, 2012). Being objective means being neutral, without prejudices, preferences, or biases (Wirth, 1966). However, many scholars argue that complete objectivity, in its philosophical sense, is impossible. For example, Muñoz-Torres (2012) contends that the idea of objectivity is unattainable because it assumes that we, as subjects, can know things without interference from our backgrounds, ideals, and thought processes. Wirth (1966) also highlights the difficulty of assessing truth and being objective in the social world, as our understanding and reporting of the social world are an interpretation of behavior and events. For this reason, one is always influenced by the perspective used to assess the world around them. Yet, despite these discussions, objectivity is perceived as a cornerstone of Western journalism (Muñoz-Torres, 2012).

Objectivity in journalism slightly differs from objectivity in its philosophical sense, since it acknowledges that it is impossible to be completely unbiased. Because of this, it stands for fair and balanced reporting. This means that various or contrasting viewpoints need to be mentioned and presented as equally important (Muñoz-Torres, 2012). At the same time, various aspects of the same event are significant to different audiences (Baden & Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2017), leading to calls for varied emphasis on specific topics. Consequently, news articles are expected to report on the same event, similarly, covering all relevant elements and perspectives for its audience. The use of multiple viewpoints of reality in media, thus, can represent different interests (Shah, 2017). Making values such as objective reporting, accuracy, and truth are essential to journalism (Hafez, 2024). However, the role of a journalist is to make sense of the world, and report this to the public, which can't be done without putting the facts into a certain context (Muñoz-Torres, 2012). Therefore, journalists construct *a* version of reality through representation. They give meaning to reality by interpreting what they come across and putting this into a specific context (Hafez, 2024).

Before one can understand how news reporting fits into the broader media picture, including the factors influencing what is published and how this is a process of bias, one

needs to understand the unique way in which journalism communicates (Hampton & Conboy, 2013). Most news articles consist of factually correct information, although this information is embedded into a certain context. Journalists therefore report some version of the facts in their articles (Daly, 2011). The context in which the information is embedded shows the dominant thinking of the time and place the article is written in. Because of this news articles both reflect and shape the societies in which and on whom they report. The degree of embeddedness into a certain community or culture explains the type of content that is being created (Vos & Hanusch, 2024, p.39). Therefore, media environments shape the production and reception of journalism. It is for instance influenced by the commercial goals of the organization or its relation to a specific identity or a collective history. Because of this, the idea of producing good journalism is most often merely one of many goals of a news broadcaster (Hampton & Conboy, 2013). Since journalism is embedded into the economic, political, and cultural aspects of which it is written, it needs to be seen as a discourse that is published within “the web of knowledge and power”.

Haq (2024) argues that journalists have some autonomy and power to decide how they report on events (p.5). This would be a result of the difference between what journalists think their role is (journalism as a social practice) and the articles they write within the context and institutions they work in (journalism as an institution). The different ideals and practices used in both places would also explain the reproduction of (negative) representations in news articles and the use of contradicting news frames by different journalists. Objectivity, then, is both an ideal and a practice in the journalistic field. How journalists strive for objectivity as an ideal is different for different fields of journalism. This shows that objective, truthful, and accurate reporting in some cases means following certain rules and practices, while in other cases it revolves more around interpreting, and investigating events and reporting about these in a balanced way (Hafez, 2024, p.168). Critics of peace journalism, for instance, question whether reporting in a way that promotes bias, and because of this is prejudiced, does not go against the idea of objectivity (Bhowmik & Fisher, 2023). For these critics, objectivity entails the balanced reporting of events in which different sides are included in the story (Bhowmik & Fisher, 2023; Hafez, 2024). What seems to be central to this idea of objectivity is that journalists have to depersonalize themselves from personal biases and follow certain routines aligned with

this ideal so they can report unbiased and represent society accurately (Raeijmaekers & Maesele, 2015).

Hall (1974) criticizes objectivity in journalism and the idea that it is possible to report events neutrally (as cited in Haq, 2024). According to him depersonalization and rationalization of journalistic practices may prevent journalists from mentioning their own views on the matter, however, it still reproduces hegemonic power relations and dominant discourses. This false idea of objectivity hides the fact that news stories are written in a certain institutional context with a specific way of operating and thus the institutional embeddedness of the author (Vos & Hanush, 2024). The institutional embeddedness often results in the lack of embedding in something else, which causes a partial representation of the event (p.42). The routine practices of news production that follow this institutional embeddedness result in the reproduction of dominant definitions concerning certain topics. This is a structural process that is performed through the use of pre-existing frames (Hall, 1974, as cited in Haq, 2024, p.3). These frames and the distancing of journalists from stories result in the reproduction of stereotypes and inequalities, showing that there is no such thing as neutral reporting of news stories. What is difficult, however, is that these journalistic practices at the same time legitimize journalists as reliable sources of information in Western cultures (Haq, 2024, p.3).

While embeddedness in communities is in Western journalism seen as something that prevents journalists from distancing themselves from the story and thus from reporting objectively, it is in other cultures seen as something that results in better journalism (Vos & Hanusch, 2024, p.45). This is because embeddedness for journalists outside of the Western world is something that gives context and explanations in journalism. In these cultures, embeddedness in community is equal to identity and is something that is part of oneself and cannot be changed. Hence, journalists argue that embedded reporting and acknowledging the role one's identity has played in writing the article would result in better journalism. Their ties with social and cultural values make personal detachment and *objective* reporting difficult; therefore, admitting the role their background played is the best they can do (Vos & Hanusch, 2024, p.43). This difference between acknowledging one's cultural background and its impact on reporting events, as

opposed to the institutionalized embeddedness, is something to take into account when analyzing news articles from different countries.

2.2 Bias in Journalism

People react to conflicts based on the knowledge they have of the specific conflict (Zhukov & Baum, 2016). The information they gather about it is shaped by the context in which it is written and its reporting bias. Baum and Zhukov (2015) define reporting bias as “the media’s tendency to systematically underreport or overreport certain types of events” (p.384). What is perceived as “newsworthy” and how this is covered is influenced by different factors. Information needs to be filtered to what is deemed relevant, and what journalists believe to be relevant is mentioned in the articles. Therefore, their contextual model of the situation shapes what is being reported (Van Dijk, 2008). The selection of various and possibly conflicting viewpoints is always a biased process (Muñoz-Torres, 2012). Journalists look for things that, amongst others, are frequently happening, meaningful, unexpected, a continuation of something that is already reported about, negative, timely, relevant, and within (cultural) proximity (Selvaiah & Fjoiritio, 2023, p.763). Stories that are surprising and salient to the intended audience are also more likely to be reported on (Baum & Zhukov, 2015). The agenda-setting approach claims that journalists overemphasize certain aspects of events and ignore others (Fengler et al., 2018, p.403). Research has found that news articles covering events are usually event-oriented, violence-focused, and ethnocentric (Baden & Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2018, p.22). Because of this viewpoint, articles might not cover everything, even though news articles are expected to report all relevant elements and perspectives (Baden & Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2017). As a result of reporting bias and agenda-setting, different sources mention different types of events and highlight various parts of these happenings. This means that reporting events in a completely unbiased, and thus “neutral” way is impossible since journalists are forced to make choices about what they will tell the audience when writing an article (Zelizer, 2002, p.286).

Bias is a result of the selection process of content (Adegbola et al., 2020), however, how events are represented in media is a process of bias as well. A journalist’s reporting is influenced by their society’s values, traditions, ideologies, and political realities (De Beer,

2008, as cited in Fengler et al., 2018, p.403). Additionally, Neureiter (2017) shows that coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in German, British, and US, papers is biased because of public opinion, demographics, and interstate relations. According to Fengler and colleagues (2018), these media biases arise because of ideological, economic, and institutional practices. Baum and Zhukov (2015) similarly mention the commercial preferences of reporters and editors, and politics and state-imposed preferences. Another thing influencing how is being reported about events is the type of event that is reported on and where this event takes place. Foreign reporting, for instance, is event-centered and conflict-oriented (Fengler et al., 2018). The types of bias in reporting that are most commonly used in conflict covering are location-specific, time-specific, casualty-specific, or actor-specific (Zhukov & Baum, 2016).

Media framing can be a tool that is used to introduce bias in news reporting. Through the use of specific frames, journalists emphasize certain viewpoints or aspects of a story that align with their own or their organization's biases, in addition to the different ways of reporting bias mentioned above. These frames are different for each field in journalism and relate to the different ways in which these fields strive for objectivity, leading them to focus on different things. In cosmopolitan journalism showing a diversity of opinions and actions is preferred (Hafez, 2024, p.171). It has the goal to provide the public with as many voices as possible. Journalists have the task of interpreting what is happening in foreign reporting and addressing its biases. In humanitarian journalism, journalists need to be neutral and distant observers in their reporting (Hafez, 2024, p.173). Journalists are expected to report morally with attention to humanity as a way of protecting democracy and society. For peace journalism, which wants to de-escalate conflicts in the reporting of war and crises, it means that one side's viewpoint may be excluded (Hafez, 2024, p.170). Because it wants to resolve conflicts it uses a multiparty orientation and avoids demonizing language (Lee & Maslog, 2005). Peace journalists try to understand both sides as well as possible in order to offer a fitting solution. Because of this historical and cultural context are considered carefully (Lee & Maslog, 2005). War journalism, in contrast, has a focus on winning (Maslog et al., 2006). It focuses more on the here and now, is elite-oriented, and often uses a binary opposition of good versus bad (Lee & Maslog, 2005). Similarly, Milner (2012) explains that a focus on reporting the latest news offers less room for

contextualizing conflicts in war journalism.

Koltsova and Pahakhin (2019) show that as a conflict progresses, conflicting parties' agendas deviate, which leads to polarization in how the conflicts are portrayed. In articles about conflicts, news consumers are likely to see one side of a story (Zhukov & Baum, 2016), which probably aligns with their worldview. Seeing only one side of a story can have polarizing effects on individuals who are exposed to opposing stories. This in turn can affect how the conflict proceeds (Zhukov & Baum, 2016, p.8). When the distance between the country reporting on a conflict and the conflict itself is large, media content tends to be more in line with the reporting country's government's views (Koltsova & Pashakhin, 2019). This could explain why studies have shown that American and other Western reports are often in favor of Israeli perspectives (Bhowmik & Fisher, 2023; Elmasry, 2013). Studies on Arab news coverage, in contrast, found that the perspective of the Palestinians is given more attention in Arab media, and the views of Israelis are downplayed or are not shown (Elmasry, 2013). Through the use of certain news frames, the media can contribute to the legitimization of policies. (Fengler et al., 2018, p.402). Because it influences conflicts, the media plays an important role in conflict propaganda.

2.3. The use of the past in journalism

Embeddedness in social relations and communities stems from a shared history (Vos & Hanusch, 2024, p.45). Shared histories are the basis of identity and the idea of community (Zerebuval, 2003 as cited in Lee & Chan, 2016, p.998). It gives people common reference points for the interpreting of events that are happening in the present. For this reason, reporters provide the historical context of conflicts happening (Bhowmik & Fisher, 2023). Yet, how people in society experience events can differ per community, which results in different social groups relating to the past in divergent ways (Lee & Chan, 2016, p.999; Kitch, 2008, p.). Because of this journalists can be embedded in different histories and interpret and understand events in various ways (Vos & Hansush, 2024, p.45). Dominant media is often unaware of the histories of marginalized groups. Because of this, their journalism sustains existing oppressions (Lang, 2015, p.85 as cited in Vos & Hannush, 2024, p.45). An example of the use of community-based memory is that of journalists who have experienced the effects of colonialism in their countries. They have a specific

framework of interpretation for similar matters that journalists who did not have this experience lack (idem). The same can be said for journalists in countries and communities that have experienced genocide. This shows that journalists use a social framework based on shared histories to interpret events. Lee and Chan (2016) call this framework “collective memory” (p.998). The use of collective memory is a different way in which bias occurs and shapes the used news frames (Zelizer, 2016).

News articles, thus, work within specific cultural memory forms. Simultaneously they contribute to the creation of a collective memory with the mentioning of certain details (Schudson, 2014, p.85; Kitch, 2008, p.311). This shows that journalists not only use history to frame their stories and explain current events but also take part in constructing collective memory. When history is used in news articles as a framework, this is mostly done to explain things, which is one of the routinized practices of journalism (Schudson 2014, p.91). Past events are used to contextualize current events and create meaning for what is happening (Kitch, 2008, p.312; Zelizer, 2016, p.6064). Putting events in a certain time frame and comparing them to past events helps us to better understand what is happening. This connects events over time and place that are not necessarily linked to each other (Zelizer, 2016, p.6080), which shows that journalism and creating memory are connected (Zandberg, 2012). Providing context in news articles can be risky because people may criticize the framework that is used, but it does make a text more informative (Schudson, 2014, p.92). Criticism can be avoided if journalists are more open about the framework that they use to give meaning to the present in news articles (Zelizer, 2016, p.6080).

Journalists contribute to the creation of collective memory by contextualizing and explaining current events in various ways. However, these approaches vary widely depending on the motives and methods that are applied. Drawing attention to an event and highlighting its importance and newsworthiness is one of the reasons history is used in news articles (Schudson, 2014, p.89). In this case, looking back makes the story relevant (Zelizer, 2008). A different way is to use current events to point to bigger patterns in history or put them in a specific time frame to explain them (Schudson, 2014). The present is central to the story, and the past is merely used to interpret current events (Zelizer, 2008).

Additionally, references to the past can be a strategic move, used for agenda-setting (Lee & Chan, 2016, p.99). Here, the past is used to convince the public of what should be happening or legitimize one's actions. According to Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger (2019), collective memory shows up in two main ways in the news. These are through the use of historical analogies and the use of historical context.

The selective use of history provides readers with a specific interpretation of the historical context of the news content's framework in all of these cases. To remain objective historical contexts used in news articles are presented as a given. However, a contextual framework stems from a specific historical standpoint and thus isn't necessarily neutral or objective. The right of the public to be informed results in the need for someone who informs the public of what is happening and interprets these events (Hafez, 2024, p.167). So, part of the journalist's job is to fit events into a framework to make sense of what is happening and not just report mere events (Schudson, 2014, p.88). What is used to explain and contextualize current happenings depends on the routine practices of journalism, what journalists consider to be part of the public sphere, and journalists' personal ideologies (Lang, 1989, as cited in Zelizer, 2008, p.82). Journalists because of this only bring up what they think is relevant to current events (Lee & Chan, 2016, p.999). What is mentioned and what is not, is worth noting, since this can be a sign of what framework is used (Zelizer, 2016, p.6061).

The explanatory framework can make use of different types of collective memory to make sense of the past, the present, and the future. Despite this, studies on journalism and memory mostly focus on retrospective memory, which refers to what has happened in the past (Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2013, p.91). Another one is more about what needs to happen in the future, which is called prospective collective memory (Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2011, p.213). Incorporating both of these ways in studies on how collective memory is used in news can help to grasp how news articles about current events refer to and make sense of the past, present, and future. Journalists retrospectively use the past to validate what is happening in the present. Tenenboim-Weinblatt (2011) argues that it is important to look at the interaction between retrospective and prospective memories for the use of collective memory (p.217). Whilst Henrichsen (2023) argues that journalists should move

on from the dominant use of retrospective memory to a more prospective approach. Doing so would explain the present with the use of the past, but also create more room for what is possible in the future and what should be done (p.3743). It would help to move beyond the static past. The past is also often used as an analogy to current events, offering the audience a ready-made interpretation framework for what is happening (Zelizer, 2008).

Nevertheless, forms of communication that are not focused on commemorating events sustain history through social, political, linguistic, and psychological processes (Tenenboim-Weinblatt & Neiger, 2019, p.422). Because of this most news articles are rooted in historical practices or events. Zandberg and colleagues (2012) agree that journalism and the process of creating collective memories always have a “commemorative value” in addition to their news value (p.66). Combining the past with the present and the future would make the past an ongoing event that keeps extending into the present, creating collective memory. Zandberg (2012) uses the term *reversed memory* to refer to this concept, according to which traumatic pasts are remembered by reporting the victorious present, thereby fostering the idea that past events are ongoing (Zandberg et al., 2012, p.66). A comparable concept is that of *prosthetic memory*. According to Kitch (2008), media can make people feel connected with historical events or experiences of others, despite not having experienced it themselves. This corresponds with Garagozov (2016) who claims that one can remember something they did not experience themselves. Tenenboim-Weinblatt (2011) argues that a prospective element can be found in all collective memories. Usually, this is in a negative form of ‘never again’ or in the positive form of maintaining the spirit and tradition of certain personalities and events (p.216). For this study, the negative element is especially applicable, since it mostly is used to refer to the past as a way of highlighting that it should never happen again (such as is often done when referencing the Holocaust or cases of genocide).

Since collective memory is a social framework that is created in social processes, it is something that is not fixed. A static past is therefore not that common (Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2011, p. 217). For this reason, studies of collective memory should be about the process of how these memories are constructed and what the intentions are of their creation. The creation of a new collective memory is crucial for achieving justice (Herfroy-

Mischeler, 2016, p.824). With the creation of a new collective memory, the narrative is changed. The past is also often used as an analogy to current events, offering the audience a ready-made interpretation framework for what is happening (Ghilani, 2017).

2.4. The role of discourse and victimhood

Earlier I mentioned the influence of ideology and bias on what is reported. But these things not only influence what is reported but also influence the discourse that is used in the reporting. Discourse exists of textual elements that regulate behavior, positions, and identities (Thwaites et al., 1994, as cited in Selvariah & Fjoritio, 2023, p.762). It constructs meaning through language and the representations of the world (Broersma, 2010, p.16). Newspapers produce discourse by creating a version of reality which in turn can influence public opinion and policy setting. This is done through the content of a news article but also with its form and style (Broersma, 2010, p.20). These things are in turn a result of ideologies and underlying assumptions that shape what is written (Van Dijk, 2008, p.198). Cultural beliefs and values structure what can and can't be mentioned in discourse construction (Selvariah & Fjoritio, 2023, p.763). Additionally, a journalist's contextual model of the situation shapes what is being reported, since what they believe to be relevant is what is mentioned in articles (Van Dijk, 2008, p.195).

The discourse that is used to report certain events can also indicate a newspaper's ideology. Differences in style and content between newspapers from all over the world are marked more by ideological dimensions such as quality and popularity instead of content (Van Dijk, 2008, p.198). Certain lexical choices or semantic structures are based on the ideology in which a text is written. Underlying assumptions this way shape what is written (Van Dijk, 2008, p.198). Examples are the focus of the article, what is included and excluded in the article, or what is presented as foreground or background information.

Events happening in history shape the ideologies that are shared in the media (Van Dijk, 2008, p.197). Ideas of victimhood can become rooted in the collective memory of a group, shaping discourse and this way keeping the trauma alive (Hadar, 2019, p.15). Victimhood in essence is the feeling of unjust suffering (Hadar, 2019). Those experiencing these feelings consider themselves to be moral, civil, and not deserving of suffering (Hadar, 2019; Adonis, 2018). Bouris (2007 as cited in Adonis, 2018) attributes characteristics such

as the lack of responsibility, the absence of guilt, and a feeling of moral superiority to the victim identity. In the case of the ICJ genocide trial, each group uses its own tragedies over the ones of the other. The collective memory and sense of victimhood create a sense of identity, which ultimately leads to the othering of those who do not share this memory. The Holocaust, for example, has contributed to shaping the identity of Jews (Gilbert & Posel, 2021). In media the collective memory of this event is used to create a sense of collective victimhood among Jews (Hadar, 2019). Adonis (2018) showed that, similarly, the collective memory of South African's apartheid regime and its historical injustices shape the current generation's identity and create a sense of victimhood amongst them. Despite these findings, very little literature exists on how exactly this idea of collective victimhood and identity shapes discourse in articles reporting conflicts.

Historical narratives, thus, are not only used to give context to current events but also shape the way that is spoken about these happenings. This doesn't mean that there is only one way a specific event can be framed. In conflicts events are often framed in different ways by the various parties. Each side tries to present themselves as the victim as a way to accumulate sympathy and support from outsiders, which results in competitive victimhood where both parties try to claim to be the victim and this way gain an advantage in the conflict. The demonization of different groups as a result of collective victimhood distances the two groups (Hadar, 2019, p.11). This idea of competitive victimhood results in opposing parties using the same event in their advance. In discourse, the conflict becomes clear in references to who the victim and the oppressor are (Helmus & Marcellino, 2023, p.2).

Core practices of journalism are informing the public. This means that current events are supposed to be reported and made sense of. Often this is done in a personally distanced way and with the use of history as an explanation. Lexical choices or semantic structures shape how this is done and thus influence content, form, and style (Van Dijk, 2008). Discursive tactics that are used to do this are for example the presenting of news as factual information or using direct quotes or intentions to distance oneself. The presenting of news as facts, with the use of articles such as "everything you need to know about.....", is an important part of the meaning-making process in news articles (Zelizer, 2016, p.6060).

This gives the idea of neutral and objective reporting while highlighting specific aspects of the case that are mentioned and others deliberately are left out. What is absent is an indicator of what people want to derive focus from (Herfroy-Mischeler, 2016, p.824). This depends on journalists' biases and is manifested through the use of discourse. Something else that plays a key role in this process is the use of language and specific terms to reinforce certain goals or legitimize policies (Fengler et al., 2018, p.402). The use of military terms, for example, benefits a war campaign, whereas the use of legal and cultural terms, such as "genocide," enforces international law (Selvairah & Fjorititio, 2023, p.763). Journalists can create or highlight the idea of conflict with the words they use in articles and emphasize certain aspects of these events. If conflicts are not visible, they can be imagined by the audience if journalists create the idea of the event happening through the use of language (Zelizer, 2016, pp.6063-6064).

Through discourse, the idea of conflict or an enemy can be created in a way that reinforces ideologies and goals and influences public opinion. News agencies play a big role here since they construct the version of reality and with this set an agenda and influence public opinion, and because of this are able to create the idea of conflict and an enemy (Selvariah & Fjorititio, 2023, p.763). This thesis analyzes the news reporting of a trial, which inherently exists of opposing parties. The distancing of these different sides is thus not just a result of victimhood and a feeling of being suppressed by a suppressor but is manifested in the physical world because of this. Othering is, as a consequence, inherent to this case. However, through the use of language that pits parties against each other, this process of othering can be amplified. A way in which this is done is with the use of phrases such as "we" and "our" as opposed to "them" (Zelizer, 2016, p.6063). Another way that this can be done is with the use of stereotypes or dehumanizing metaphors (Steuter & Wills, 2009, p.7). Stereotyping works similarly to othering since it normalizes and solidifies differences, thereby dehumanizing those who are othered (Hall, 2013).

During conflicts othering intensifies since it helps to linguistically construct an enemy (Steuter & Wills, 2009, p.12). Musa and Ferugson (2013) claim that portraying groups as enemies reinforces prejudices and raises the chances of violence against them. Creating a sense of the oppressor versus the oppressed is done by taking one's agency

away and dehumanizing both parties. Using language that dehumanizes and demonizes a group are methods often used to construct enemy images (Bahador, 2012). What is important here is who gets a say in news articles and how different groups are framed (Fengler et al., 2018, p.415). Representing the opposite group as a dehumanized other helps with the creation of an enemy (Steuter & Wills, 2009, p.11). Discursive creation of conflict and enemies revolves around positive self-presentation versus negative presentation of the other.

3. Research design

3.1 Qualitative Research

A qualitative research method was used to formulate an answer to the research question. Qualitative research aims to understand and describe social phenomena (Flick, 2013, p.5). Through the analysis of forms of communication, such as newspapers and other documents, it seeks to understand the way one constructs the world around them. Additionally, it aims to understand behaviors, values, beliefs, and assumptions (Choy, 2014). It is an exploratory and interpretative approach, that focuses on understanding the data and a certain phenomenon (Mohajan, 2018). This way it explains meaning-making processes in communication (Flick, 2013). The method is suited for answering the research question since it wants to understand and describe what is happening. This allowed me to examine the complexity of the case and the importance of using the past as context in the news reporting of *South Africa v. Israel*. Since this method was used to explain and understand phenomena descriptively and narratively it gave room for new insights to arise (Mohajan, 2018). Analyzing the articles broadly and openly made it possible to inquire about the different roles historical context played in the news reporting of the ICJ genocide case.

In qualitative research, researchers try to interpret meanings. They use existing research and theories to develop research questions (Mohajan, 2018). But theories are also used as a context that helps to make sense of the data and give meaning to the findings (Collins & Stockton, 2018). For this reason, observations must be related to relevant contexts to grasp one's motives or consequences. Theory helps to interpret the data by framing the subject within a specific context, and this way providing focus and obstructing meaning. However, a theory is not the only thing that influences a researcher's interpretations and consequently a study's findings. The researcher self has an active role in the research process since qualitative research is a researcher's interpretation of the data. This causes the researcher to actively determine what comes out of the research, making it all the more important to be open about decisions made and to reflect critically on them (Mohajan, 2018). Thus, findings are not only a result of theory used to make sense of the phenomenon but are also influenced by one's past, culture, socio-economic status, gender, race, and ethnicity.

3.2 Data Collection

The type of qualitative research that was used for this thesis is qualitative content analysis (QCA). QCA is a form of qualitative research that uses media material (Maring, 2015; Schreier, 2013). Because of its flexibility in analyzing different types of communicative texts, it is a method that is used throughout various academic fields. It is a way of systematically examining the data and describing the meaning of a text (Schreier, 2013, p.170). QCA looks at not just the content of a communicative effort but also considers the context in which the content was published and created, as well as the purpose of its creation (Mayring, 2015). Incorporating the context into the analyses makes it possible to say something about the way the text gives meanings to certain things. Because of this QCA is suited to examine a text's underlying meaning within its social context and criticize what is left out or what is highlighted (Puppis, 2019). It was as important to look at the things that were excluded in the articles as what was included because this can show what underlying meanings and power relations (Zelizer, 2016, p.6061). Because of this, QCA is a method suited for analyzing the role of historical context in the news reporting of the *South Africa v. Israel* ICJ genocide case. To be able to say something about the role historical context played in news articles it was necessary to look at the way certain aspects of the past were highlighted, and others were left out. The context in which the articles were produced and published needed to be taken into account during the analysis since this can play a role in what is and what isn't mentioned. The method, thus, focused on describing the material but analyzed this with the context of the texts in mind. It was a process where decisions were based on both the data and theory (Mayring, 2015).

Since qualitative research is often the researcher's interpretation of the data, researchers are an important part of the process. Examining all material relevant to the research question and assigning them to certain categories within a coding frame prevented the data from being examined solely based on the researcher's assumptions and expectations (Schreier, 2013, p.171). Additionally, the systematic approach to the data here prevented the researcher from selective reading (Krippendorff, 2019).

3.3 Sampling

The perspective newspapers have on a conflict shapes the ways they choose to report an event, for this reason, I have decided to answer the research question using papers from different sides of the trial (South Africa and Israel). A focus on the main events resulted in each paper from each country reporting the same events. Initially, I planned to incorporate German newspapers into this analysis, but I could not find enough English-language articles from German newspapers. Therefore, I decided to focus on articles from Israeli and South African newspapers. An analysis of German articles could have been an interesting addition to this analysis because it would have given an idea of how a country with a similar history that is now an outsider would have reacted.

To gather a big enough sample size, articles from 2 papers per country were analyzed. Eventually, 60 articles were studied, 15 articles per paper. The newspapers that were used are *Mail & Guardian*, *Sunday Times*, *Ha'aretz*, and *Jerusalem Post*. These papers were used because they are a few of the most popular ones from each country, that aim to provide a balanced coverage of news and events. Yet, there is a small difference in perspectives that the newspapers use. The Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* and the South African *Mail & Guardian* are considered to be more liberal and left-leaning papers (Media Bias Fact Check, 2023a; Media Bias Fact Check, 2024a). The Israeli *Jerusalem Post* and the South African *Sunday Times* cover more of a broad range of perspectives and are considered to be more center-right (Media Bias Fact Check, 2023c; Media Bias Fact Check, 2024b). These differences in political leanings were taken into account when analyzing the articles since they can influence the way that events are written about.

The sample was drawn using purposive sampling, which means that a selection was made out of specific articles, that were useful for answering the research question. Purposive sampling is a way to ensure that the data set is useful and appropriate for answering the research question (Campbell et al., 2020). The analyzed articles were found using specific search words on the newspapers' website's search bar and were published between seven and twenty-eight January 2024. The time frame that was used was chosen because the first part of the trial took place in that period. The keywords that were used are "ICJ", "genocide", and "South Africa vs Israel", with the use of these keywords the

articles found have to correspond with the research question and cover the first week of the *South Africa v. Israel* ICJ case. After collecting the articles that were published within this timeframe and were found using the keywords, random sampling was used. With the use of *randomizer.org*, fifteen articles per paper were selected. The dataset includes different types of articles, ranging from news articles to opinion articles and analyses. Since this analysis is a textual analysis only written articles were used. Video reportages or embedded videos were ignored due to this.

3.4 Data analysis

The 60 articles were analyzed using discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is a way of analyzing texts that focuses on the way that language creates and reproduces systems of social meaning (Tonkiss, 1998). It perceives texts as something that constructs and organizes reality and as something that shapes social practices (Tonkiss, 1998, p. 246). Language is seen as a performative social practice (Braun & Clarke, 2020; Machin & Mayr, 2012). Tonkiss (1998) defines discourse as a systematic ordering of language, which as a result, is something that constructs the social world by giving meaning to it. Yet, discourses themselves don't hold meaning (Bondarouk & Ruël, 2004). The meaning arises as a result of the context in which it is created and circulates, as well as a consequence of the purpose with which it is used. Because of this discourse analysis consists of an analysis of the interaction between discourse, texts, and context. This resulted in the context in which texts are produced and published, and thus in which discourses are created to be part of the analysis. It is also important to incorporate the context of discourse into an analysis because discourse often is adapted to fit the context in which it is used (Tonkiss, 1998). Consequently, what is communicated and how this is done is influenced by the institutional context in which articles are published, as well as by the communicative intentions of the author and/ or publisher. Language is in this case perceived as not just a neutral information-sharing tool, but also a space where our understanding of the social environment is actively created (Tonkiss, 1998, p.246).

Discourse analysis is a suitable method for this thesis since it gave the possibility to critically examine the way collective memories are used to legitimize actions. It is a method that is not necessarily about what is true or not, but about how language constructs a

reality. This made it possible to analyze how and to what extent things such as Apartheid, the Holocaust, and collective victimhood are used to legitimize or disapprove current events. Discourse analysis allowed me to focus on how power circulates in the meaning-making process and which meanings were dominant and which were not. This is because the approach considers power to be something that circulates, has multiple sources, and is manifested through language (Khan & MacEachen, 2021). During the analysis questions such as “Who produces knowledge?”; “What knowledge is produced?”; and “Who gets to regulate these meanings and with which strategies?” were just as important as an analysis of the latent meaning of the text. Asking these questions helped to gain insight into how people perceive, understand, and articulate the world around them, and how these perceptions were influenced by culture (Khan & MacEachen, 2021).

Despite discourse analysis being a useful and popular method for content analysis, there is no clear methodology for how it needs to be performed (Braun & Clarke, 2020). It is a methodology that is used across various disciplines, and as a result, there are different ways to perform a discourse analysis (Tonkiss, 1998). However, all approaches come down to an examination of how language presents reality. Discourse analysis, after all, is a way of content analysis that consists of a close analysis of texts. To structure the analysis, I took a few concrete steps. Before starting with the analysis, I looked at the texts to get an idea of the main themes and ideas (Bondarouk & Ruël, 2004). This was done by coding the data, focusing on how the past was used in the articles and how meanings were created. Relevant parts of the dataset were assigned to the coding frame’s categories, which helped to reduce the material (Schreier, 2013). This was an inductive process since the data needed to show how language shaped the meaning-making process, and reproduced and legitimized existing beliefs (Tonkiss, 1998). Using a coding frame helped to understand how historical contexts influenced the coverage of *South Africa v. Israel* by revealing what different newspapers chose to highlight or omit (Proudfoot, 2023). Consequently, only focusing on those aspects relevant to answer the research question.

Coding, thus, is a way to summarize the data and also helps to ensure the focus lies on only these aspects relevant to the research question (Schreier, 2014; Puppis, 2019). Since QCA wants to analyze communicative efforts concerning its context, the text must be

interpreted within its context (Mayring, 2015). The use of these inductive codes makes sure that the texts themselves are analyzed. Additionally, it prevents the analysis from being a biased description of the data based on the researcher’s assumptions (Mayring, 2015). The coding process is an iterative process that is repeated until all data is assigned to mutually exclusive categories (Schreier, 2014). After a representative part of the data was analyzed, the categories were tested and if needed revised (Puppis, 2019). The used codes are written down in the code book, which consists of an overview of each theme and its subthemes (Puppis, 2019) (see Table 1).

Table 1.

Coding Scheme

Main theme	Theme	Sub-theme	
Overlexicalization	Genocide	Holocaust	
		Jurisprudence	
	Apartheid	South African Apartheid	
		Israeli Apartheid	
	Cynical case	Blood libel	
		Distorted case	
	Irony		
	Hypocrisy		
	Structural oppositions	Good vs. evil	Right side of history vs. wrong side of history
			Enlightened world vs. the dark one
Victim vs. enemy		Oppressed vs. oppressor	

The coding process was additionally structured focusing on questions identifying who or what were (in)visible in the articles and the moral subject positions that were created. This was done by focusing on the use of overlexicalizations and structural oppositions during the coding process. With overlexicalizations I mean the repetition of particular words. This is important because an abundance of certain words or phrases shows what the author is trying to convey with their texts (Tonkiss, 1998, p.257), and this way points to where the meaning-making process takes place (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p.37). Structural oppositions indicate the narrative and discourse used in media. Often texts and discourses are shaped around different oppositions (Tonkiss, 1998). This is important to consider because the implied differences emphasize the paper's stance (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p.39).

During coding the codes and categories were constantly compared to each other and if needed revised (Boeije, 2010). After this process, the themes and coding scheme were compared to the theoretical framework described in the literature review. This was done by reading, searching, and interpreting the data, as well as categorizing codes and making links between them (Boeije, 2010). After that, the noteworthiness and importance of the single components were assessed (Bondarouk & Ruël, 2024).

4. Results

4.1 Overlexicalizations

In the analyzed articles, the past was often used to explain current events. It was used as context to what is happening now so that readers understand the conflict and the *South Africa v. Israel* case better. This was done by lexically referring to the past to highlight the magnitude of the case, but also by comparing the case and related events to specific things that happened in the past such as other cases of genocide or South Africa's apartheid regime. However, the parts of the past that were used to give meaning to current events shape how the case is explained. Certain ideological positions and power relations were embedded in these narratives, legitimizing these viewpoints and silencing others. For this reason, it is important to note which events are highlighted or marginalized.

Past events that were used to give context to this case are other cases of genocide that the ICJ handled, which were used as jurisprudence for this case, the persecution of Jews during the Second World War (Holocaust), and South Africa's apartheid regime. What stood out is that Israeli newspapers mentioned the Holocaust in 19 out of 30 articles, while South African papers mentioned the Holocaust in merely 6 out of 30 articles (see Table 2).

Table 2.

Mentioning of Holocaust

	Frequency	Distribution
Israeli papers	<u>32</u>	<u>19/ 30</u>
<i>Ha'aretz</i>	20	10/ 15
<i>Jerusalem Post</i>	12	9/ 15
South African papers	<u>8</u>	<u>6/ 30</u>
<i>Mail & Guardian</i>	4	4/ 15
<i>Sunday Times</i>	4	2/ 15

At the same time, apartheid is used in 15 out of 30 South African papers, and only in 8 out of 30 Israeli papers (see Table 3). This shows that the papers use their own country's collective memory as big explaining power for what is happening.

Table 3.

Mentioning of SA's Apartheid regime

	Frequency	Distribution
Israeli papers	<u>20</u>	<u>8/ 30</u>
<i>Ha'aretz</i>	13	3/ 15
<i>Jerusalem Post</i>	7	5/ 15
South African papers	<u>33</u>	<u>15/ 30</u>
<i>Mail & Guardian</i>	24	9/ 15
<i>Sunday Times</i>	9	6/ 15

4.1.1 the use of the Holocaust as legitimizing for one's actions

In Israeli articles covering the *South Africa v. Israel* ICJ genocide case, the Holocaust was highlighted as a way to legitimize Israel's actions and emphasize its status as a victim. The collective memory of the Holocaust framed Israel as being under an existential threat and therefore justified current policies. The Holocaust is this way used to silence criticism and create sympathy for Israel. This emphasized the use of the Holocaust as the historical justification for Israel's actions, making Israel into "a perceived moral authority", wanting to prevent genocide. By mentioning the Holocaust, Israeli papers and officials tried to protect the state from condemnation, arguing that criticism of Israel's policies is often rooted in antisemitism. An illustrative example is the reference to the idea that the ICJ was established as a response to the Holocaust and to protect the world from another Holocaust in Israeli newspapers.

The use of the Holocaust as a reason to defend itself and as a justification for Israel's

actions aligns with Zionist ideology, which sees the Holocaust as a critical justification for the existence and security of the Israeli state. The Holocaust is used as a defense mechanism that legitimizes the state's actions and underscores the continuous threat against Jewish survival. By emphasizing the Holocaust as *the* genocide, Israeli narratives drew parallels between past and current events, such as comparing Hamas to the Nazis. With this narrative, they reinforced the idea of ongoing danger and victimize themselves. As a result, Hamas and others not allowing Israel to react this way became the enemy. The following quote from the *Jerusalem Post* illustrates this idea:

Justice Barak will be in The Hague as a Jew, and not just a Jew, but a Jew who survived the Holocaust, the real Holocaust, the one that really happened, and the one that would happen again, tonight if it were up to the religious fanatics you have chosen to hail, shield, and serve (Asa-El, 2024, para. 9).

Referring to the Holocaust as “the real Holocaust, the one that really happened, and one that would happen again” emphasized the idea of an ongoing threat against Jews. Additionally, mentioning that the one defending Israel in the trial is a Holocaust survivor underscored the collective trauma felt by Israelis and contributes to the creation of Israel as the victim.

The power relations embedded in this discourse positioned Israel as a moral authority wanting to protect its own people and this way prevent another genocide from happening. This stance makes it difficult for other nations to criticize its actions without being accused of insensitivity to Jewish suffering or being antisemitic. Additionally, this feeling of collective victimhood unites Jews, and this way reinforces a sense of solidarity and support for Israeli policies. This argument, however, is judged by critics, such as in the following quote from the *South African Mail & Guardian* in which is claimed that being critical of Israel doesn't equal being antisemitic.

Thankfully in South Africa, unlike in Germany and the United States, the ludicrous idea that critique of the Israeli state is necessarily anti-semitic is seldom taken seriously outside of far-right circles. (...) in South Africa it has always been clear that being Jewish does not equate to uncritical support for Israel or the wider Zionist

project (Hlela, 2024a, para. 13).

At the same time, the Holocaust and Hitler's crimes against Jews during the Second World War were used to support the case South Africa wanted to make and condemn Israel's actions. This was for example done by comparing Netanyahu to Hitler or Israeli government policies to the German policies during the Holocaust, implying that both cases are cases of genocide. Furthermore, this was done by comparing quotes made by Israeli officials to *Mein Kampf* as a similar forecast of genocide (Maltz, 2024). South African papers also referenced Zionism and the establishment of the state of Israel using a more negative tone of voice. The counsel for South Africa Ngukaitobi, for example, mentioned the 1948 massacre against Palestinians, highlighting that this showed a "sentiment of wanting to destroy the animals [that Palestinians are] (as cited in Ngukaitobi, 2024, para 21). These claims counter Israel's argument and turn Israel into the enemy that is committing genocide.

4.1.2 *the use of SA apartheid as legitimizing*

South African President Ramaphosa explained their approach to the ICJ using the following words: "As a people who once tasted the bitter fruits of dispossession, discrimination, racism, and state-sponsored violence, we are clear that we will stand on the right side of history" (de Jong, 2024, para. 7). In this quote, Ramaphosa connected what is happening in Gaza to South Africa's history with an apartheid regime. In the analyzed articles the legacy of South African apartheid is frequently highlighted to legitimize the case against Israel. This was done in both Israeli papers and South African papers. For example, as was done in the *Sunday Times* with the following: "For South Africans, these features will be all too familiar" (Rabkin, 2024, January 10, para. 22), which highlights this perceived similarity. South African papers, however, more often used the analogy as a way to condemn Israel's regime, while Israeli newspapers took a more neutral stance or try to refute this comparison.

South Africa's apartheid history has led them to sympathize with Palestine as becomes clear in the following quote in the *Sunday Times*: "Our own colonial apartheid history in South Africa has sensitized us to the plight of the Palestinians and their suffering under the yoke of Israeli oppression, military occupation, and genocide" (Nadel as cited in

TimesLIVE, 2024, para. 6). By comparing the Israeli regime to the apartheid regime in South Africa, these articles framed the debate within a human rights discourse that demands accountability and change. It emphasized the idea of a moral duty to disapprove of Israel's policies in Gaza and the West Bank, just as was done during the apartheid regime in South Africa. This goes against narratives of defense and exception that Israel often uses to justify its actions and implies that Israel's actions are part of a broader pattern of systematic discrimination.

South Africa positioned itself as a moral authority concerning issues of racial oppression and human rights as a result of its own past. A quote that illustrated South Africa's claim to be a moral authority is presented in the *Sunday Times*:

We are the reverence point to the world when it comes to issues of human rights. We are also a reference point in taking a stand on a matter of principle to support the struggles of other people subjected to the same challenges we had. The people of Palestine are being bombed, they are being killed and there is apartheid there in Israel and we were duty-bound to stand up and support the Palestinians (Ramaphosa as cited in Andisiwe Makinana, 2024, para. 3).

This moral and humanitarian position is shaped by South Africa's history of colonialism, apartheid, and racial injustice in the 20th century and how the country and its government dealt with these issues. The comparison of both regimes is thus not only about explaining that South Africa can relate to Palestinians but also about showing that South Africa is committed to fighting injustices and racism worldwide. South Africa's actions were portrayed as a continuation of their struggle for liberation and human rights, reflecting the vision of the African National Congress (ANC). The continuation of this struggle and the call for idealism and revolutionary morality as important values of the ANC became clear in the next quote from the *Mail & Guardian*:

It's on the margins of civil society, and not in ANC branches, that one finds more politics and discussion. And this is why the government's courageous act of taking Israel to the World Court is so noble and why many are hoping that it signals a new ANC – or rather the old ANC, where idealism and revolutionary morality mattered

more than pragmatism and bureaucratic processes (Williams, 2024, para. 12).

South Africa, thus, positions itself as a leader in the global struggle against oppression, supporting the Palestinian cause against Israeli actions, motivated by its own past and its governing party's core values. As a result, a settler discourse and a post-colonial discourse were prevalent in South African articles depicting Israel as the oppressor, Palestinians as the oppressed, and South Africa as a moral leader in human rights advocacy. A quote that highlighted this feeling and South Africa's history was the following:

South Africa's ethical position at The Hague can be viewed as a manifestation of historical karma. Our legal team presented a case in the world's highest court, situated in the Netherlands, a country that had previously colonized us. The essence of the case was on behalf of an oppressed population that had supported the black majority during the days of apartheid. Specifically, the case targeted Israel, a country that had collaborated with the Apartheid regime (Sooliman, 2024, para. 1.).

The use of a post-colonial discourse was made explicit in this quote through references to South Africa's colonial past. The statement that South Africa's ethical position in this case can be perceived as a "manifestation of historical karma" hinted towards the idea of restorative justice, where the harm caused to South Africans during Apartheid is acknowledged and addressed. This acknowledgment was done by the trial taking place in the country that colonized South Africa, in a case against Israel who now has a similar regime (according to the quote). This example showed that the collective memory of South African Apartheid and the victimhood they experience shapes the discourse that is used in South African newspapers. Conversely, the comparison between the ANC and its struggle against Apartheid in the 20th century and the Palestinian organizations now was refuted in Israeli papers. As is demonstrated by the following quote: "Many in South Africa since October 7 have been making the false comparison between Palestinian armed organizations like Hamas and the armed actions of the African National Congress (ANC) during its fight against the Apartheid regime in South Africa" (Mack, 2024, para. 7). In addition to making comparisons between ANC and Palestinian organizations, Nelson Mandela's legacy was mentioned by papers from both Israel and South African. Yet, the

Israeli papers did this to criticize South Africa (see Figure 1), whereas South African papers did this to applaud its governments decision (see Figure 2).

Figure 1.

Irony in Post-Apartheid South Africa according to Jerusalem Post

South Africa tarnishes legacy of combatting racism with ICJ case

Post-apartheid South Africa is weaponizing the Genocide Convention against the Jewish state as it defends itself against the racist, genocidal, terrorist Hamas regime.

By IRWIN COTLER, NOAH LEWJANUARY 11, 2024 10:52

Updated: JANUARY 11, 2024 10:54



A woman holds a placard during an interfaith prayer service in Bo-Kaap for the success of the South African Government's genocide case, which accuses Israel of genocide in the Gaza war, at the International Court of Justice in the Hague, in Cape Town, South Africa, January 10, 2024 (photo credit: REUTERS/ESA ALEXANDER)

Figure 2

Mandala and Morality in the Mail & Guardian

OPINION

/ 18 JANUARY 2024

Win or lose, South Africa has the moral high ground

By Gugu Ndima.



Nelson Mandela, in 1997, said: "We are not free unless Palestinians are free." This statement, and South Africa's commitment, is embodied in a historic picture of Mandela and Palestine Liberation Organisation head Yasser Arafat. (Photo by Palestinian Authorities via Getty Images)

4.1.3 Irony and Morality

Although South African apartheid is primarily used to underscore why South Africa felt connected to this case, Israeli newspapers additionally used it to create a sense of irony regarding South Africa’s decision to take the case to court. This became apparent through the overlexicalization of words such as “hypocrisy”, “irony”, and “cynical” (see Tables 4, 5, and 6). An example is the following quote from the *Jerusalem Post*, which claimed that Israel is a victim of racism and injustice. The quote suggest it is ironic that South Africa uses a concept originally designed to protect Jews to tarnish Israel while trying to fight racism and injustice, and in doing so it perpetuates the racism and injustice it seeks to combat with the case.

Mandela, while a strong advocate for Palestinian rights and statehood, also affirmed the right of Israel to peace and security. It is tragically ironic that 30 years later, in 2024, post-apartheid South Africa is weaponizing the Genocide Convention against the Jewish state as it defends itself against the racist, genocidal, terrorist Hamas regime. In engaging in this Orwellian inversion, South Africa tarnishes its legacy of combatting racism and injustice (Cotler, 2024, para. 10)

Table 4.

Mentioning of Hypocrisy

	Frequency	Distribution
Israeli papers	<u>9</u>	<u>5/ 30</u>
<i>Ha’aretz</i>	5*	3/15
<i>Jerusalem Post</i>	6	2/ 15
South African papers	<u>9</u>	<u>5/ 30</u>
<i>Mail & Guardian</i>	5	3/ 15
<i>Sunday Times</i>	4**	2/ 15

Notes

* referencing Israel's foreign ministry accusation

** Three of these are references to charges critics make

Table 5.*Mentioning of Cynical*

	Frequency	Distribution
Israeli papers		<u>2/ 30</u>
Ha'aretz	-	-
Jerusalem Post	5	2/ 15
South African papers	<u>0</u>	<u>0/ 30</u>
Mail & Guardian	-	-
Sunday Times	-	-

Table 6.*Mentioning of Irony*

	Frequency	Distribution
Israeli papers	<u>6</u>	<u>4/ 30</u>
Ha'aretz		-
Jerusalem Post	6	4/ 15
South African papers	<u>1</u>	<u>1/ 30</u>
Mail & Guardian	-	-
Sunday Times	1	1

The overlexicalization of hypocrisy, irony, and cynicism is, thus, used to criticize *South Africa v. Israel* (see Figure 3). The Israeli *Jerusalem Post* was especially critical of South Africa's accusation calling it a "cynical", "ironic" or "hypocritical" accusation in 5 out of 15 articles. Although these are different words, with a slightly different meaning they

were all used to emphasize the irony of South Africa as a moral actor wanting to prevent humanitarian crises while having issues of criminality, corruption, and problems with basic service supply. Another example that illustrated this idea is this: “South Africa has lost the moral high ground of being the most sophisticated leader in Africa.” (Goldman, 2024). With these references, the articles tried to undermine South Africa’s position as a moral authority and weaken their position. These claims come back to the question of who acts out of morality and is a moral authority which is the point both parties tried to make with their references to their past (whether this is the Holocaust or South Africa’s apartheid regime). The South African papers used these words as well, however, they mostly did this to refer to Western hypocrisy for not speaking out about what is happening, while “preaching human rights and democracy” (Allison, 2024; Sooliman, 2024; Hlela, 2024b; Mthombothi, 2024). Other times South African papers referenced hypocrisy they did this to counter Israeli claims (see Figure 4).

Figure 3

Hypocrisy as depicted in the Jerusalem Post

South Africa’s genocide charges against Israel: Cynical abuse of the ICJ - opinion

The terms used in South Africa's application to the ICJ are ironic, especially in light of its distorted interpretation of the Genocide Convention.

By ALAN BAKER JANUARY 10, 2024 04:27 Updated: JANUARY 10, 2024 17:26



THE INTERNATIONAL Court of Justice in The Hague: It is ironic that the world’s principal judicial organ is being petitioned by South Africa, at the evident behest and initiative of the Palestinian leadership, to adjudge Israel for the alleged crime of genocide, says the writer. (photo credit: YVES HERMAN/REUTERS)

Figure 4

Sunday Times' reaction on claims of hypocrisy

Despite charges of hypocrisy, SA has been courageous in breaking the silence over Gaza

Hopefully, with time, the verbal jousting may eventually drown out the guns of war

14 January, 2024 - 00:00

Barney Mthombi

Columnist



Overlexicalizations prevalent in the articles were, thus, mostly used to convince the audience of the paper's stance, which was most of the time in accordance with its country's government policy. In a few instances the papers criticized this policy. The following quote from the South African Mail & Guardian, for instance, criticized South Africa's involvement in a similar way to Israel, highlighting its hypocrisy in trying to take on a bigger role as a global actor.

In this light, the South African involvement with the ICJ regarding Gaza could be seen as a form of performative justice, where the focus on international affairs becomes a way to show a commitment to human rights without addressing the root causes of oppression at home. This outsourcing of guilt to international arenas could well be viewed as a superficial attempt to align with global norms while failing to address the internal transformation required for genuine justice. (Schutte, 2024, para. 4)

The Israeli Ha'aretz also criticized its own government as Scheindlin does in the next quote claiming that both Israelis and Palestinians committed crimes.

Precisely at the most wretched point in the history of this conflict, Israelis and Palestinians should confront the fact that they are not unique. No two horrors are exactly alike, and as a decades-long student of conflict, the creativity of human savagery never ceases to amaze me. But it's time to accept that we've simply joined the grim list of people embroiled in mass atrocities, with perpetrators and victims, on this side or the other, wildly mixed. (para. 5)

4.2 Structural Oppositions

The articles that have been analyzed are structured based on a court case. Inherent to this is the creation of two opposing parties: those who accuse someone of something and the other who defends themselves. Besides the fact that the use of opposites seems inevitable when it comes to reporting a court case, the binary oppositions created can also provide an idea of the underlying power structures and ideologies of a text. In the previous section, a few oppositions were briefly touched upon such as victim versus enemy and oppressed versus oppressor, in this part, I will elaborate more on these structural oppositions.

4.2.1. Taking the moral high ground: Good versus Evil

The use of a humanitarian discourse with a focus on presenting oneself as a moral authority resulted in opposing good against evil throughout all articles. This was done by literally referring to “a war of good against evil” (right-wing finance minister Bealel Smotrich as quoted in Jerusalem Post staff, 2024, para. 6), or to “standing on the right side of history” or “standing on the wrong side of history”, which implied the existence of a choice that can be made between doing good or evil. These references simplify the conflict and force the audience to align with the moral ground in a way to persuade the public of the paper’s stance. Yet, this was also done by implying oppositions that ultimately relate to good and evil, such as was done with opposing terrorism and genocide versus peace and safety. In both South African and Israeli papers, this was done to convince the public that the government was acting in their best interest. An illustrative quote is the following from *Jerusalem Post*: “Post-Apartheid South Africa is weaponizing the Genocide Convention

against the Jewish state as it defends itself against the racist, genocidal, terrorist Hamas regime.” (Cotler & Lew, 2024, para 1). This showed that Hamas is depicted as terrorists in Israeli papers and that South Africa was on “the wrong side of history” for choosing to support them. South Africa doesn’t just choose the wrong side they use something good as a weapon against Israel, making them an enemy as well.

However, South African papers used references to genocide and terrorism to illustrate the same but for Israel. As became clear in the following quote from the *Mail & Guardian*: “For many the destruction of Gaza is an obvious continuation of the often genocidal logic of Western colonialism” (Hlela, 2024, January 11, para. 4). This quote illustrated that colonialism inherently involves genocidal practices, framing Israeli actions in Gaza as part of a larger historical pattern of oppression. The quote this way also refers to the difference between the West and the global South, and its colonial past by using colonialist ideologies in which the West perceives itself as superior to the rest of the world. This historical divide between the West and the Global South is something that was also illustrated by the next quote:

The parallels between those who supported apartheid in South Africa and those supporting apartheid in Israel persist. Colonial powers appear to subscribe to a “back your buddy club”. They believe that as long as they pretend that they are the forces of good and repeat the same, the lie will become a truth, and everyone will consider them as a civilised moral authority to aspire to.

Germany, a colonial power with its own historical baggage, is the first country to support Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the case brought by South Africa. This alignment suggests a continuity in the dynamics of international alliances shaped by historical legacies and political interests. (Sooliman, 2024, para. 3 and 4).

Opposing good against evil ultimately challenges international relations and the divide between the West and the rest of the world, in addition to simplifying the conflict as a way to convince the public. This narrative was especially prevalent in South African newspapers, where the past was used as a reference point for how things can be different. Whereas

Israeli papers mentioned this less explicitly.

4.2.2. Dehumanizing both the victim and the enemy, and othering

Israel, Hamas/ Palestine, and South Africa are all depicted as both the victim and the enemy in the articles. What stood out is that Israeli papers often refer to Hamas as the enemy and to themselves as the victim (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

Israeli Victimhood in Ha'aretz



South African papers refer less to Hamas and depict Israel as the enemy and Palestinians as the victim. This became apparent in how often Hamas is mentioned throughout the sample, where the *Jerusalem Post* mentions Hamas more than both South African papers do together (see Table 7). Israeli newspapers portrayed Hamas as “human animals” or “barbarians” whose actions cause Palestinians to become “collateral damage” (Rosensaft as quoted in Maltz, 2024, para. 4), rather than them being killed by Israel because they are Palestinians as such (which is how genocide is defined in the South African papers). The Israeli Ha’aretz, for example, wrote the following in an attempt to highlight Hamas’ role: “South Africa argued as if there was no Hamas and everything was Israel’s doing” (Maanit, 2024, January 13, para. 18). The dehumanization of Hamas by referring to them as “human animals” and “barbarians” justified the violence that Israel uses against them. Furthermore, it reinforced negative stereotypes and biases, upholding existing prejudices and contributing to hatred.

Table 7*Mentioning of Hamas*

	Frequency	Distribution
Israeli papers	<u>194</u>	<u>38/40</u>
<i>Ha'aretz</i>	69	18/20
<i>Jerusalem Post</i>	125	20/20
South African papers	<u>123</u>	<u>26/ 40</u>
<i>Mail & Guardian</i>	46	11/ 20
<i>Sunday Times</i>	77	15/ 20

The difference between how often Hamas is mentioned in Israeli newspapers and South African ones, illustrates the different ways in which the victim and enemy are represented in the papers. Israeli newspapers assigned the victim role to themselves by portraying themselves as innocent and passive, which diminished their role in the conflict and depicted Hamas as the enemy. Meanwhile, Palestinians were represented as the victims in South African media. They described them as a passive entity that needed to be protected, stripping them of their agency and individuality. Dehumanizing Palestinians in this way highlights their need for external help. This is a result of South African media writing about the issue from a distanced South African perspective, which does not give a voice to Palestinians. A similar opposition to victim versus enemy was the one of the oppressed versus the oppressor.

These binary oppositions, which are amplified with the use of a dehumanizing discourse, sustain the othering process between the various parties reinforcing divisions between them and justifying the actions of one while demonizing the other. This results in polarization, making it more difficult to create “peace and conflict resolution” and perpetuates the conflict.

5. Conclusion/ Discussion

This thesis explored the role of the past in news reporting of the *South Africa v. Israel* ICJ genocide case. It showed that the past is often used to contextualize events. Overlexicalizations demonstrated that Israeli newspapers refer significantly more to the Holocaust than South African papers, while South African journals referred more to South African Apartheid than Israeli ones did. The Israeli Jerusalem Post tried to undermine South Africa's position as a moral authority with the overlexicalization of the words irony, cynicism, and hypocrisy. Morality is another prominent theme, alongside the overlexicalization of the Holocaust, South African Apartheid, irony, cynicism, and hypocrisy. The results indicate that journalists mostly use their country's past as the big explanatory thing, using it to critique others and thereby give meaning to what is happening.

References to the Holocaust and South African Apartheid make collective victimhood a central theme in the articles. This feeling gives meaning to current events by creating a moral framework. Each country's traumatic past is used to claim a position of moral authority, with Israeli papers referencing the Holocaust and South African papers referencing Apartheid. This framework provides a moral justification for each country's current policies and actions. Due to the ethnocentric approach of this framework, each country views its norms and values as superior to the other and as an explanation for its actions. The emphasis on national traumas cultivates a sense of superiority and pride. By portraying oneself as historical victims, countries thus legitimize current events, often sidelining the responsibility for their role in ongoing conflicts. This shows that the past, additionally, reinforces national narratives and moral superiority, thereby influencing global perceptions and policies.

Due to the overlexicalization of morality, a humanitarian discourse was dominant throughout the articles. With references to the country's traumatic past the papers decriminalize its current actions and policies. In doing so the papers create the idea that their country is a moral authority and does what is best. The dominance of a humanitarian discourse in the articles highlights the essential role journalists play in covering crises. Despite the articles reporting a humanitarian conflict, not all articles fit the humanitarian framework. The results of this thesis show that the focus of the humanitarian frame was on

how the paper's country of origin would fix the conflict, despite this being something different for both countries.

With the use of overlexicalizations, the articles report on meaningful events that are a continuation of something that is already reported on, relevant with a focus on violence, and ethnocentric, just as Selvaiah and Fjoiritio (2023) and Baden and Tenenboim-Weinblatt (2018) argue. The articles are ethnocentric because of the references to each country's past, which is used to explain why one's culture, norms, and values are the best. The results show that South Africa was superior (according to South African newspapers) because it knew how to and had the duty to act morally based on its past. Israel was depicted as superior (according to Israeli newspapers) because they had suffered so much in the past that they had proven to be moral and strong people. This also shows how the past is used as a framework in the conflict's media representation. The differences in discourse that were found among the different newspapers corresponded with the newspaper's political orientation, narrative style, and values. For example, the *Jerusalem Post*, which is considered to be a more center-right paper, uses negative framing of the other. Similarly, it uses more personal language compared to the personally distanced tone found in news articles from other papers.

The most prevalent structural oppositions in the articles were the opposition of good against evil and that of the victim against the enemy. South African papers, referred to their apartheid struggle as a way to condemn genocide resulting in illustrating Israel as barbarian and the aggressor and this way created the opposition of good versus evil and that of victim versus enemy. Israel referred to the Holocaust to compare Hamas' actions to what the Nazis did during the Second World War and this way depict oneself as the victim and Hamas as the enemy. The implicit references to the structural opposition between victim to enemy, and oppressed to oppressor, highlighted the conflict in the articles. This corresponds with Helmus and Marcellino's theory (2023) stating that conflicts can be created through words by opposing two parties.

Opposing good against evil can be explained as a consequence of the dominance of a humanitarian discourse in which journalists depict their country as a moral authority. With references to "doing good" or "acting morally" one ultimately places oneself above

everyone else who does not act the same way, depicting oneself as superior to the other. Hammond (2000), similarly, argues that a humanitarian discourse is an excuse to make a distinction between moral superiority and inferiority. This opposition forces the audience to align with the paper's stance since it depicts the country the paper is from as the one taking the moral high ground and everybody else as inferior. These processes of othering justify one's actions and simultaneously demonize the other, perpetuating the conflict. Additionally, the conflict is simplified through these binary oppositions.

The use of binary oppositions, such as good versus evil and victim versus enemy, is in line with tactics that are used for war journalism, such as the dehumanization and even demonization of the other and focusing on one's own suffering (which is predominantly done by Israeli newspapers). Yet, results also contrast existing theories on war journalism. Tenenboim-Weinblatt and colleagues (2016) stated that war journalism reports more on current events, while peace journalism often uses historical and social context to explain the possible motives and effects of the conflict. The reporting in the analyzed articles, thus, corresponds with many characteristics of war journalism but simultaneously refers to historical context, which is a feature of peace journalism. A possible explanation for this is that the newspaper articles report on a court case rather than the conflict itself which allows South Africa to use its past to explain why they became involved, and how they are going to fix the conflict. Despite Israel being involved since the beginning, they also use the past in a different way than is custom for peace reporting. They mainly refer to the past to portray themselves as victims, which is similar to competitive victimhood as Hadar (2019) described. This suggests that war journalism uses references to the past to legitimize one's action and this way obtain a superior position in the conflict.

The way Israeli victimhood is described is in line with characteristics Bouris (2007) attributed to the victim identity (as cited in Adonis, 2018). In the articles, the responsibility for the situation is not placed on Israel. By claiming that they are protecting their own people and standing up for those in need, they create the idea of being morally superior and deny being guilty of committing crimes. Israeli newspapers use a settler discourse that refers to an anti-Semitic world and nazifies the other. This is similar to observations Hadar (2019) made in research examining Israeli identities (p.16). With Israel's frame of

victimhood, history is sustained through linguistic processes just as Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger (2019) argue, especially the implicit prospective element of never again is prevalent in the articles. The use of a discourse that refers to those who do not agree as anti-Semitic and the Nazification of the enemy reinforces this. South African papers dehumanize Palestinians by representing them as victims, making them helpless and highlighting the need for help. In doing so they portray Palestinians as passive actors that are free of guilt, which places them above Israel. At the same time, however, South Africa claimed to be morally superior. This shows the presence of competitive victimhood in the articles, despite South Africa imposing this victimhood on Palestine, leading to unequal relations.

In line with existing literature, these findings show that there is no such thing as neutral reporting (Muñoz-Torres, 2012; Hafez, 2024; Daly, 2011; Vos & Hanusch, 2024; Hampton & Conboy, 2013). Articles about the *South Africa v. Israel* ICJ case are framed using references to the past and overlexicalizations of irony, cynicism, hypocrisy, and morality. The conflict is perpetuated through the use of structural oppositions. The creation of these structural oppositions both highlights and simplifies the conflict. The collective memory and sense of victimhood that is referred to in the articles create a sense of identity, which ultimately leads to the othering of those who do not share this memory. In the South African articles, a (post)colonial discourse is used, that aims for more equitable power relations and peace. At the same time, the humanitarian discourse that is used in both South African and Israeli newspapers perpetuates global divides and geopolitical tensions, since the choice that is implied by referring to good and evil tries to convince the public of the paper's stance, ultimately placing both parties in direct opposition to each other.

5.3 Implications

As discussed earlier, the articles make use of characteristics that are associated with war journalism, humanitarian journalism, and even peace journalism. In the articles, different discourses coexist. The use of structural oppositions creates the idea of two opposing sides, which is inherent to a trial and is accompanied with the use of features typical for war journalism. At the same time, South African papers try to aim for peace,

despite not using tactics typical for peace journalism, which are an avoidance of demonizing language and the use of a non-partisan approach that Lee & Maslog refer to (2005). The results of this study, thus, contradict the claim made in the literature review stating that articles about the conflict used a frame of peace journalism since they aimed for peace. Simultaneously, *South Africa v. Israel* is about a humanitarian conflict. Articles reporting on this case consequently report facts of humanitarian crises on the Palestinian and Israeli sides, which is done as objectively as possible, corresponding to humanitarian journalism.

This study aimed to bridge the gap between memory studies and journalism reporting conflicts. It has shown that collective memory is often used to legitimize a country's government policies in journalism. In this case, collective victimhood that was a result of both countries' traumatic pasts played an important role in framing current events. The collective memories of the Holocaust and South African Apartheid were used as the most important historical frames for giving meaning to the *South Africa v. Israel* ICJ genocide case in Israeli and South African newspapers. Journalists in this case worked as gatekeepers, shaping public perception and discourse through their editorial choices. The selective emphasis on the Holocaust by Israeli papers, and on its Apartheid history in South African papers constructed a narrative in which each country's actions are justified by their historical victimhood. Repeatedly mentioning the Holocaust and South African Apartheid shows that collective memories of these events and the accompanying feeling of collective victimhood are used to establish a position as a moral authority and with this legitimize its country's actions. Opposing good versus evil and victim versus enemy reinforces this effect. As a result of these strategies, a humanitarian discourse is dominant in all articles.

Results showed that a blend of war journalism, humanitarian journalism, and peace journalism traits were used in the articles. While war journalism typically focuses on current events, and peace journalism uses historical and social context more often to explain the causes and consequences of conflicts, these articles combine both by using past trauma to explain what is happening and justify actions. A humanitarian discourse was applied using the past as a framework that reinforced national narratives and moral superiority. This confirms that reporting on international conflicts is influenced by

nationalistic and ethnocentric biases, shaping how conflicts are made sense of. New insights this thesis provides highlight the important role history plays in different types of journalism and is not limited to peace journalism.

5.4 Limitations

This thesis used discourse analysis as a method to examine media coverage of the *South Africa v. Israel* ICJ genocide case. While discourse analysis offers valuable insights into the narratives and themes presented in media articles, several methodological limitations should be considered. One notable limitation is the sample selection. The thesis analyzed news- and feature articles published in Israeli and South African papers. A broader approach could have included articles from a distant nation with a similar traumatic past such as Japan or Germany. Incorporating an analysis of journals from these countries would have added an outsider's perspective to the comparative analysis, enriching the analysis with diverse interpretations and potentially contrasting discursive strategies. This would offer a more nuanced understanding of global media portrayal, enhancing the generalizability of the findings.

Another limitation is the difference in the tone of voice used between news articles and feature articles. Journalists took on a more personal tone of voice in the feature articles that were analyzed. While, in the news articles they reported more distantly. The distance was created by citing official sources and reporting on events 'without' interpreting them. Perspectives from the public, citizens, or other viewpoints were excluded. In the feature articles, different points of view were presented, despite this often being the author's opinion, which usually was in line with the paper's stance. Due to the journalists' distancing in the news articles, this study is, in part, an analysis of how the case was discussed in court. To prevent this one could solely use feature articles in future research.

Because *South Africa v. Israel* is still an ongoing case, it was impossible to focus on the media representation of the entire case. As a result, the scope of the analysis is limited. The study solely focused on the media coverage in the first weeks of the case. As a result, this thesis overlooks how narratives evolved over time. As the case progressed the ICJ called for a ceasefire, for instance. Moreover, Western support for Israel declined, with

several European countries (which are currently Spain, Belgium, and Ireland) announcing their intention to join the case in support of South Africa (United Nations, 2024). Such developments can influence media narratives and public discourse, emphasizing that this thesis' findings are momentary recordings of the role of the past in the first weeks of the court case. Additionally, to get a better understanding of how newspapers reported on the matter one could focus on articles covering the whole conflict.

Furthermore, the thesis used discourse analysis as a method, which exclusively examines the construction of meaning through language and narrative structures. In doing so one misses the persuasive rhetorical approaches that are used to convince the audience. A rhetorical analysis of the persuasive tactics and strategic goals of the articles would have given more insights into how media frames are used to influence public perception and public discourse. Despite these limitations, discourse analysis is a fitting methodology to study underlying narratives and ideological frameworks within media representations and this way show the role the past played in articles reporting *South Africa v. Israel*. Future research could address these limitations by broadening the sample and scope of the analysis so that it includes more perspectives on the matter and a broader understanding of how the case is reported. Incorporating a different type of analysis would also provide a better understanding of the role of the past in media representation of the conflict.

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