The Israel-Palestine war from the eyes of Italian media

A critical discourse analysis of Open and Il Corriere della Sera

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ABSTRACT

The conflict between Israel and Palestine has often been in the spotlight globally over the past eight decades. The most recent escalation, started on 7 October 2023, is just the latest chapter of tensions that date back at least since the end of World War II and the consequent establishment of the state of Israel in Palestinian territories. When escalations between Israel and Palestine hit, media from all over the planet direct their attention to the region. This is also the case for Italy and Italian media, especially with the rise of online media. Through the use of media bias and media representation, media platforms can create and adopt specific narratives to portray conflict such as the one between Israel and Palestine. These narratives, as this study will show, can often be unobjective and not impartial, possibly shaping how audiences perceive these events. Open and Il Corriere della Sera are two popular Italian news media platform with a strong online presence. The two titles are significantly different from one another in both their histories and their approach to reporting. Il Corriere della Sera is older and more established, being the more read newspaper in Italy. Open, on the other hand, is a younger publication which publish solely online, without a printed version like most other traditional newspapers. Through Critical Discourse Analysis, this thesis will investigate the presence of media bias, media representations and media narratives in articles from both publications regarding the conflict between Israel and Palestine between 7 October 2023 and 13 February 2024. This period comprises various significant events from the latest escalation, including the first attacks, a temporary truce with hostage exchanges, South Africa's claim against Israel to the International Court of Justice and a controversy at the Italian national music festival Sanremo. Other than understanding which narratives were adopted by Il Corriere della Sera and Open between 7 October 2023 and 13 Feburary 2024, it is interesting to assess how differently, if at all, publications that seem to be quite different at their cores report on such a topical subject as the conflict between Israel and Palestine.

KEYWORDS: *Media bias, Media representation, Media narrative, Italian online media, Israel-Palestine war*

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The tensions between the State of Israel and Palestine have enjoyed international attention since the end of the 1940s. The establishment of the State of Israel in May 1948, on land that until then had belonged to Palestine, sparked wars and conflicts, still ongoing nowadays, that have been dividing opinions worldwide. Since 2007, much of the focus has been on the so-called Gaza Strip, a piece of Palestinian land bordering Egypt which, since then, has been governed by the Palestine-based terrorist organisation Hamas.

After a couple of years of reduced hostilities, (the last significant escalation was in May 2021) the situation took a massive wrong turn in recent times. On 7 October 2023, a missile strike from Hamas killed around 250 Israelis. This led to a response from Jerusalem leading to the death of roughly 230 Palestinians in Gaza. Fighting has been enraging since, with the world watching and various countries taking sides once again. Some sided with Israel, such as the United States, other with Palestine, including Turkey.

Italy, which will be the country investigated in this thesis, is an interesting example for various reasons. Since its establishment, Italy has usually been a supporter of the State of Israel. The reasons behind this general trend may be different. One of them may be, for example, Italy's past. During World War II, the Italian fascist regime was arguably the biggest ally of the German Third Reich, which tried to exterminate the Jewish population. Taking Israel's side, in other words, may be a way for Italy to break ties with its dark past and support a people that suffered an incredible tragedy also due to the role played by Mussolini and his regime.

Another reason to openly support Israel might be to follow the leadership set out by the United States in the so-called West. The United States have been one of the most active advocates of the legitimacy of Israel to exist in that territory, and Italy has been largely sharing its views since the end of World War II. This does not only concern the conflict between Israel and Palestine. In December 2023, for example, Italy walked out of the Belt and Road Initiative, a massive project launched by China, after the US Government put some pressure on Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni.

Going back to the conflict between Israel and Palestine, the events that have been taking place since 7 October 2023 seem to have caused contrasting sentiments to surface in Italy. For example, most Italian politicians from the current ruling Government coalition condemned the recent attacks perpetrated by Hamas on Israel. However, on 10 October, the Italian Parliament failed to agree on a Resolution concerning the conflict, with the opposition parties pushing to include Israel's expansion policies as a key factor for the lack of peace. This absence of unified views highlights how this issue divides the Italian political landscape.

Moreover, there have been, and still are, various citizen initiatives and demonstrations throughout the country, some supporting Israel, some in favour of Palestine. In other words, both the political landscape and the general public in Italy seem to struggle to find shared positions on the conflict between Israel and Palestine, especially after the recent intensification of the conflict. With this lack of uniformity about the issue in mind, it is interesting to analyse what role media, more specifically online newspapers, play in creating and spreading narratives about the war between Israel and Palestine.

The main concepts deployed in this thesis are media bias, media representation and media narrative. Media bias will be intended as those editorial choices, made when reporting about a specific topic, that provide readers with somewhat limited perspectives (Spinde et al., 2022). Media representation entails the portrayal of events and the parties involved in them in a way that normalise certain points of views over others, possibly influencing in the audience's perceptions of them (Fürsich, 2010). Media narrative, finally, stands for the way in which a story as a whole is told by a media platform, in this case Open and the online version of Il Corriere della Sera. Media narratives can thus be considered as the result of using specific types media bias and media representation. Consequently, this thesis will investigate the following research question:

What were the main narratives portrayed by Open and Il Corriere della Sera when it comes to the conflict between Israel and Palestine between 7 October 2023 and 13 February 2024?

In addition to analysing media narratives, this thesis will rely on the concepts of media representation and media bias. The different conceptualizations of media narrative, media representations and media bias will be discussed in the next chapter, the Theoretical Framework. In order to answer the main research question, the following sub-questions will be inquired into:

To what extent was there media bias in Italian online newspapers reporting about this latest chapter of the conflict between Israel and Palestine?

What types of media bias were present in such media coverage?

Societal Relevance

The societal relevance of analysing the trends concerning the conflict between Israel and Palestine in Italian online media is, first and foremost, the lack of available academic literature on the topic. Italy, including most of its media, has often been a vocal supporter of the Israeli cause. The reason behind such a trend may be explained by a discussion that took place at the beginning of November, one month after the latest escalation, on the Italian channel La7 between Massimo Gramellini and Gad Lerner, both journalists. Gramellini pointed out that media in Europe and Italy present a different sensitivity towards the Israeli people due to the horrors of World War II and the strong antisemitic sentiment of the time. Lerner doubled down by claiming that this stronger sensitivity needs to stay, as some might start to consider Israel as an encumbrance and that antisemitic sentiment might be awakened. Given that many prominent journalists have clear stances

on Israel, it is interesting to investigate if and how these positions are reflected in the Italian media landscape when it comes to conflict escalations.

The sample for this thesis will consist of online newspaper articles published on two different Italian news outlets. The first one is Il Corriere della Sera, one of Italy's oldest and most read newspapers. In its online version, Il Corriere posted various articles about the conflict during the period investigated, including 24-hour live blogs almost on a daily basis. Both its nationwide influence and resources it deploys to cover the events, including a correspondent based in Tel Aviv, make it an excellent source for a study such as this one. The second newspaper selected for the sample is Open, a fully online title founded in December 2018. Open was launched by Enrico Mentana, one of the most popular journalists and newscasters in recent Italian history. Its mission, as stated on its website, is to create an online newspaper that values young people.

The choice of Il Corriere della Sera and Open aims at understanding if publications with significantly different backgrounds present different kinds of media bias. The former was founded in 1876 and has historically employed the most prominent Italian journalists from Indro Montanelli to Massimo Gramellini. The latter, on the other hand, is not six years old yet and is run by a younger and less experienced team. It prides itself for its fact-checking activities, with a dedicated WhatsApp line available to anyone who wants to verify a fact or report suspected fake news. Both Il Corriere della Sera and Open do not have a clear and explicit political ideology and have voiced their independence from any political pressure. Understanding how possible media bias might differ in different publications will provide more insights on the various ways it is used and possible reasons behind it. When tensions between Israel and Palestine rise, the topic becomes one of the most covered on all types of media, from newspapers and social media to newscasts and talk shows. This, at least concerning online newspapers, was also shown during the research of the sample analysed in this project, as will be shown in the Methodology chapter.

Scientific relevance

The scientific relevance of the research question and the sub-questions included in this thesis lies in the fact that online news media developed relatively recently and, because of their role in spreading information and knowledge, need to be better understood. Academic contributions that are concerned with media coverage of the conflict between Israel and Palestine in different countries provide various pieces that can be put together and help to identify different trends on a global level. This is especially true in a time where this conflict is dividing the world and create tensions in regions far away from the war zone. For example, Spain, Norway and Ireland recently recognised the legitimacy of the state of Palestine, leading to Israel recalling its ambassadors in the three countries. These developments, thus, clearly have a global impact and the media is playing a key role in how information is being spread, possibly impacting different audiences in different ways.

The three concepts around which this thesis is structured, media narrative, media representation and media bias, have been part of media and communication research for quite some time. On the other hand, the

role of media itself has changed rapidly in the past few decades, with the online world offering new opportunities for news outlets. For example, articles can now be published at any time and from any place that has an internet connection. This means that topics can be covered to a much greater extent and that news media platform can reach their audiences in real-time with more content. This new role of the media and news platforms in different places in the world needs to be addressed further in academic literature to better assess how they construct narratives and fall into biases as their presence in society keeps increasing.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, the theoretical concepts that will be deployed during the analysis of the articles selected will be outlined. The research question for this thesis revolves around the concepts of media narrative, media representation and media bias in the context of Italian online news media reporting on the conflict between Israel and Palestine between Israel 7 October 2023 and 13 February 2024. Throughout this chapter, theories concerning the concepts of media narrative, media representation and media bias will be investigated to provide a structure to this thesis and help to identify what gaps previous research might have left.

All three concepts have been extensively theorised, with different definitions and usages surfacing as the role of media transformed, becoming more relevant and accessible with the rise of the online world. Consequently, it is important to outline how media narrative, media representation and media bias are intended in this thesis, as these will be the elements that will be sought for in the analysis. Having a solid theoretical framework based on previous research will make it possible to build the research model.

Despite having different scopes and definitions, the concepts of media narrative, media representation and media bias are intertwined as they are all processes that media platforms can use to convey their messages to their audiences. As following sections will point out, media bias and media representation can be seen as two components in the construction of media narratives. Consequently, investigating the presence of bias in reporting certain events and analysing the representation of the parties involved will make it easier to understand which narratives were adopted.

Media narrative

In order to understand what media narrative means, it is necessary to briefly outline the concept of narrative. Dajani Daoudi and Bakarat (2013) stated that narratives are ways in which different communities tell the story of an event. According to the authors, narratives can be "designed to support specific positions and views" (Dajani Daoudi & Barakat, 2013, p.55). Media narratives, consequently, are the way in which events are portrayed by media platforms, which in this case are Italian online news media outlets. In case of conflicts, such as the one between Israel and Palestine, narratives tend to abound and go in various directions. Narratives can be spread by government leaders, the media and historians but also in the household (Dajani Daoudi & Barakat, 2013).

In the case of Israel and Palestine, Dajani Daoudi and Bakarat (2013) argue that criticism of the respective narratives is almost a taboo as there are various factors at work keeping narratives from changing and being criticised, including by the media. One of these factors is emotional. A critical Jew is often labelled as a 'self-hating jew', while critical Palestinians are often attacked by members of their own community. In other words, criticising the general narrative can lead Israelis or Palestinians to be excluded, or worse, from with them (Dajani Daoudi & Barakat, 2013).

Despite providing useful insights on narratives in the context of the conflict between Israel and Palestine, Dajani Daoudi and Bakarat (2013) focussed on the narratives adopted by historians and other academics from Israel and Palestine. This thesis, on the other hand, will investigate the narratives adopted by media platforms, in this case the two Italian online newspapers Open and Il Corriere della Sera. The role of media, especially online, became increasingly prominent, making it one of the most effective ways to adopt and possibly spread narratives about a topic that has an undeniable global impact.

Moreover, the study covered the issue of national narratives in Israel and Palestine, with a focus on 1948 (Dajani Daoudi & Barakat, 2013). This thesis, on the other hand, will inquire into a much more recent period, between 7 October 2023 and 13 February 2024. This is because, mostly due to the fact that the escalations have been ongoing since October 2023, the most recent developments in the conflict between Israel and Palestine have not yet been extensively covered in the available literature.

Narratives attempting at justifying the conflict, whether it is in favour of Israel or Palestine, are defined as conflict-supportive narratives (Oren et al., 2015). These narratives, according to Oren et al. (2015), fill the human need of having a coherent picture about the world they live in and maintaining a positive self-image. In other words, Israelis might support pro-Israel narratives to justify the legitimacy of their country, while Palestinians might support the narratives depicting Israel as an invader backed by the West to claim territories as their own. However, this thesis will focus on the narrative regarding the conflict between Israel and Palestine adopted by Il Corriere della Sera and Open, two Italian online newspapers. This will help to understand if there are topics concerning the conflict that are treated as taboo in these media outlets. Narratives about the conflict adopted by countries not directly involved is one of the aspects that the available literature often fails to address.

Dajani Daoudi and Bakarat (2013), for example, highlighted how the different narratives about the conflict between Israel and Palestine often boil down to one key point. Pro-Palestine narratives revolve around the idea that the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 is a symbol of imperialism and a threat to the legitimacy of the Palestinian state, while narratives supporting Israel justify its existence as an example of self-determination or realisation of God's historic promise to the Jewish people (Dajani Daoudi & Barakat, 2013). However, Dajani Daoudi and Bakarat (2013) focus only on the narratives about the conflict between Israel and Palestine adopted in the two countries involved. This thesis, on the other hand, will focus on what narratives are adopted by countries that are not directly involved in the war, in this case Italy. Given the current global reach and the long history of the conflict, it is interesting to analyse how media in the rest of the world choose to portray it.

As mentioned, this study will rely on the concept of media narratives which, as suggested by Pasquinelli and Trunfio (2020) occurs when news reporting is based on what is called non-objective criteria, or biases, a concept that will be analysed further in this chapter. For example, news outlets are the ones in charge of deciding what is considered newsworthy and what goes into the oblivion. This thesis will focus both

on what events are covered by Open and Il Corriere della Sera and on how the events that do get coverage are reported and if specific narratives can be identified. Establishing and spreading media narratives may result in the construction of polarised opinions among the public, as pointed out by Takas et al. (2023). The authors, whose work focuses on political and media representations and narratives during the COVID-19 pandemic, point out that single events can have a decisive role in how specific narratives are constructed. Media outlets are at the centre of the process of constructing narratives and have them spreading among the public (Takas et al., 2023). When it comes to the COVID-19 pandemic, Takas et al. (2023) found that western media constructed narratives aiming at discrediting the Chinese and Wuhan governments, while Chinese media focussed on emphasising the measures undertaken by China to try and stop the disease to spread (Takas et al., 2023).

Pasquinelli and Trunfio (2020) also raise a similar point, underlining that narratives created by news media contribute to how various phenomena are perceived and understood by the public. The impact of media narratives in shaping public opinion was also analysed by Miskimmon and O'Laughlin (2017), who expanded upon the concept of strategic narratives in the context of wars. Through strategic narratives, actors such as politicians try to create shared meanings to shape the people's behaviours. This, as the authors argued, can be amplified by news media platforms, which may project and spread these narratives into the general public. Given that the period and topic investigated in this project were dense with noteworthy occurrences, it is interesting to analyse if, how and when Italian media outlets reshaped their narratives of Israel, Palestine, and the long-standing conflict between them. However, it needs to be mentioned that this thesis will focus on the content of the articles and the possible narratives present and not how the public perceived them.

Media representation

If media narratives are ways of recounting certain events, media representation involves portraying others by creating specific realities and normalising certain world views (Fürsich, 2010). This, as Fürsich (2010) argued, might influence the way audiences perceive specific groups of people. In other words, media representations help to construct media narratives, since portraying groups in specific ways over longer periods of time might lead to the creation of narratives. The way in which media represent different groups can reinforce the way such groups are perceived in a society (Allen & Bruce, 2017). This may be even truer during the current age of social media, where news outlets can post their articles on various platforms and reach larger audiences. According to Allen and Bruce (2017), indigenous, marginalised, non-White communities in western countries are often represented in a negative way by the media by spreading stereotypes and highlighting negative events concerning these communities.

Much of the available literature on media representation, however, focusses on how, for example, indigenous or immigrant communities are represented in the media by the dominant group. This thesis, on the other hand, will focus on how the events in Palestine and Israel are represented in online Italian newspapers. Consequently, this thesis will fill a gap in literature concerning the way in which international affairs and and

conflicts on foreign lands are represented. When it comes to available literature, Allen and Bruce (2017) investigated how indigenous communities in New Zealand are represented by a media landscape dominated by white journalists. Similarly, Kinefuchi and Cruz (2015) analysed the representation of Mexican immigrants in the United States. Despite being restricted to significantly different communities, most studies conclude that the representation of the Other often presents problematic features as it is characterised by biases and misrepresentations.

However, both Allan and Bruce (2017) and Kinefuchi and Cruz (2015)'s works focus on how communities are perceived by other groups within the territories in which they live. On the other hand, narratives about countries and communities are arguably also adopted abroad, especially when in comes to a globally impactful event such as the conflict between Israel and Palestine. Italy, for example has traditionally supported Israel. Consequently, the media narratives adopted about the conflict between Israel and Palestine in Italy remain important, as its descriptions on media outlets are among the most easily accessible for the public, especially in the digital media age.

There are contrasting conclusions among available literature on how the media world represents the Israel-Palestine conflict. For example, Robinson Divine (2019) pointed out that since its establishment in the 1940s, the state of Israel went from being portrayed as a symbol of those who survived the horrors of the Holocaust to a coloniser capable of genocide. On the other hand, Bukar (2020) found that media representations of Palestine in Western media have often been tainted with Islamophobic stereotypes. According to him, three factors have enhanced generalised representations of Palestinians as well as Islam and the Arab world in the West. The factors behind the spreading of stereotypical representations of these communities are the Western interest in raw materials, (mostly oil) from the Middle East, the support of unpopular regimes in the area and for the State of Israel (Bukar, 2020).

Drawing from the literature mentioned above, this thesis will investigate the ways in which the conflict between Israel and Palestine was represented by Il Corriere della Sera and Open and if these media followed any of the trends. More specifically, Robinson Divine (2019) and Bukar's (2020) claims will be investigated to understand if Open and Il Corriere della Sera adopted Islamophobic stereotypes or portrayed Israel as a coloniser when reporting about the escalations of the conflict between 7 October 2023 and 13 February 2024. Moreover, the analysis will help to understand whether there are other possible representations of Israel and Palestine when it comes to the conflict between them as the ones outlined by Robinson Divine (2019) and Bukar (2020) might not be only ones deployed.

Media bias

The concept of media bias has been analysed by different authors, especially over the past quarter of a century. However, the definition of this concept varies depending on the authors and the topic covered. Media bias, according to Spinde et al. (2022), is a way of reporting that selects specific news, but also specific ways

of covering the news by wording it in a way which provides the audiences with limited viewpoints. According to a study from Rodrigo-Ginés et al. (2024), media bias has been spreading since the mid-20th century, when journalism moved away from neutrality and objectivity in favour of a more committed and opinionated form.

Spinde et al. (2022) argued that media bias has a significant impact on how the news is perceived both on an individual as well as collective level. According to them, the effects of being exposed to biased media coverage can include "group polarisation, intolerance of dissent, and political segregation" (Spinde et al., 2022, p.2). They pointed out that effective tools to contrast the possible negative effects of media bias have not yet been fully developed, especially in today's age where the Internet plays a prominent role and information travels much faster than ever. The low awareness concerning media bias among readers was also stressed by Hamborg (2023). According to Hamborg's (2023) work, the main issue does not lie in the fact that news coverage is not objective, but it is, rather, that the general public might not notice the bias. The main reason behind this is, according to the author, that developing critical news assessment skills requires substantial effort, which is hard to apply on a routine basis.

Existing available literature on media bias often focusses on journalism in the United States. For example, according to Pan et al. (2023), media bias in US media outlets appears more frequently in news articles about domestic politics and social issues, while the coverage of economic affairs usually presents significant similarities among different platforms. Concerning the coverage of foreign affairs, which is what this thesis will focus on, Pan et al. (2023), argue that the discrepancies found in different US media platforms are linked to individual journalistic style, without necessarily showing signs of bias. Consequently, it would be interesting to assess whether this is a phenomenon proper of the United States or if it can be applied in a similar manner to, for example, the Italian media outlets included in this thesis.

Suwarno and Wening (2020), who analysed the media coverage of the Israel-Palestine war, identified four factors contributing to the creation of media bias. The first one is the role of advertisers. Advertisers, according to the authors, might disregard bias if a certain news piece brings in more readers, without following a specific agenda. The second factor is the government. In this case, news outlets may align themselves with the narratives supported by the ruling class. The third case is sensitivity to powerful interests. The authors define powerful interests as "media owners, readers, advertisers, public figures, organisations, and the like" (Suwarno & Sahayu, 2020, p. 223). These categories, especially the audience, fuel the competition between various players, who strive to gain recognition and approval from readers. The fourth and last factor of media bias analysed by the authors is sensitivity to the competitors, which seems to have a minor impact. According to them, the most influential factors causing media bias are governments and readers.

Different types of media bias have been identified in different studies, often depending on the topic researched. When analysing news coverage of US politics, D'Alessio and Allen (2000) identified three types of media bias: gatekeeping bias, coverage bias and statement bias. Gatekeeping bias refers to the editors' choices made when deciding which stories will be covered and, consequently, which ones will not. Coverage

bias concerns the amount of content written about one specific side compared to the others. Finally, statement bias includes the interjection of media members' own opinions when covering a specific topic.

Expanding on the work of D'Alessio and Allen (2000), Rodrigo-Ginés et al. (2024) identified 17 types of media bias, which they classified in two different ways: the author's intentions, and the context in which the bias occurs. When considering the author's intentions, the different types of bias can be divided into spin bias and ideology bias. When analysed according to the contexts, the same 17 types of media are divided into the same three categories used by D'Alessio and Allen (2000): coverage bias, gatekeeping bias and statement bias. For this thesis, the focus will be on the division based on the context in which the reporting takes place, as conclusions on the authors' intentions are not easily identifiable from a sample that includes articles written by different journalists and even by entire newsrooms.

Figure 1 shows how Rodrigo-Ginés et al. (2024) divided 17 media biases when it comes to the context in which the bias could be found.
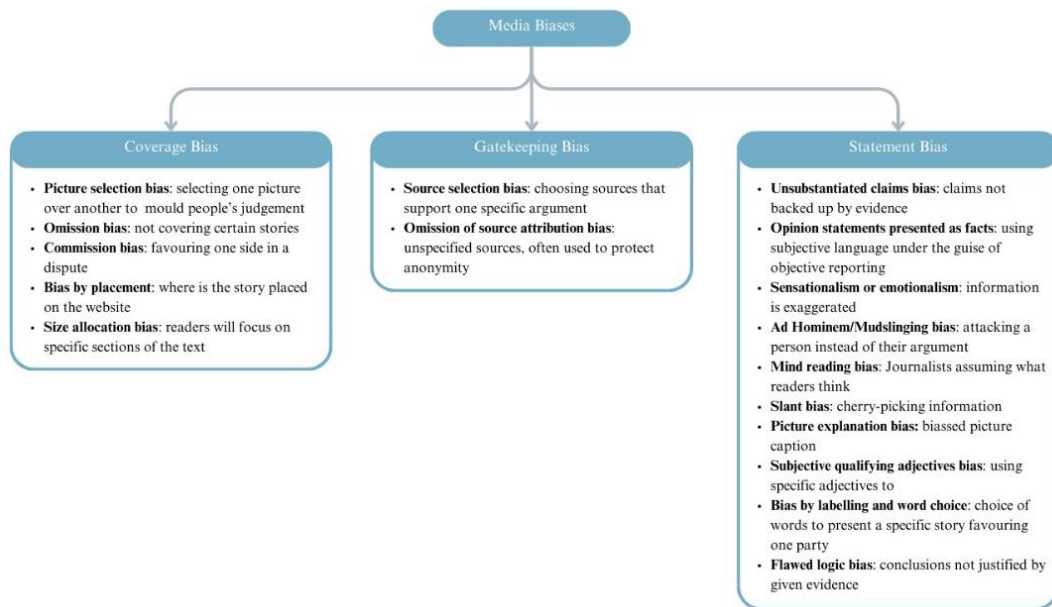

Figure 1. The 17 types of media bias identifies by Rodrigo-Ginés et al. (2024).

Not all the 17 types of media bias identified by Rodrigo-Ginés et al. (2024) are applicable and useful for this research. The two biases concerning pictures (picture selection bias and picture explanation bias) will not be included as this thesis deals with the text of the articles. Bias by placement will also not be taken into consideration as the articles analysed are from online outlets, where they were placed in chronological order. The two types of media bias concerned with the audience (size allocation bias and mind reading) will also be excluded as this study does not deal with audiences. Finally, the Ad Hominem/mudslingin bias will also not be included in this research as the topic investigated does not concern one single person. It also needs to be stressed that Rodrigo-Ginés et al. (2024) placed source selection bias and omission of source attribution bias in coverage bias as well as gatekeeping bias. In this thesis they will be treated as types of gatekeeping bias as
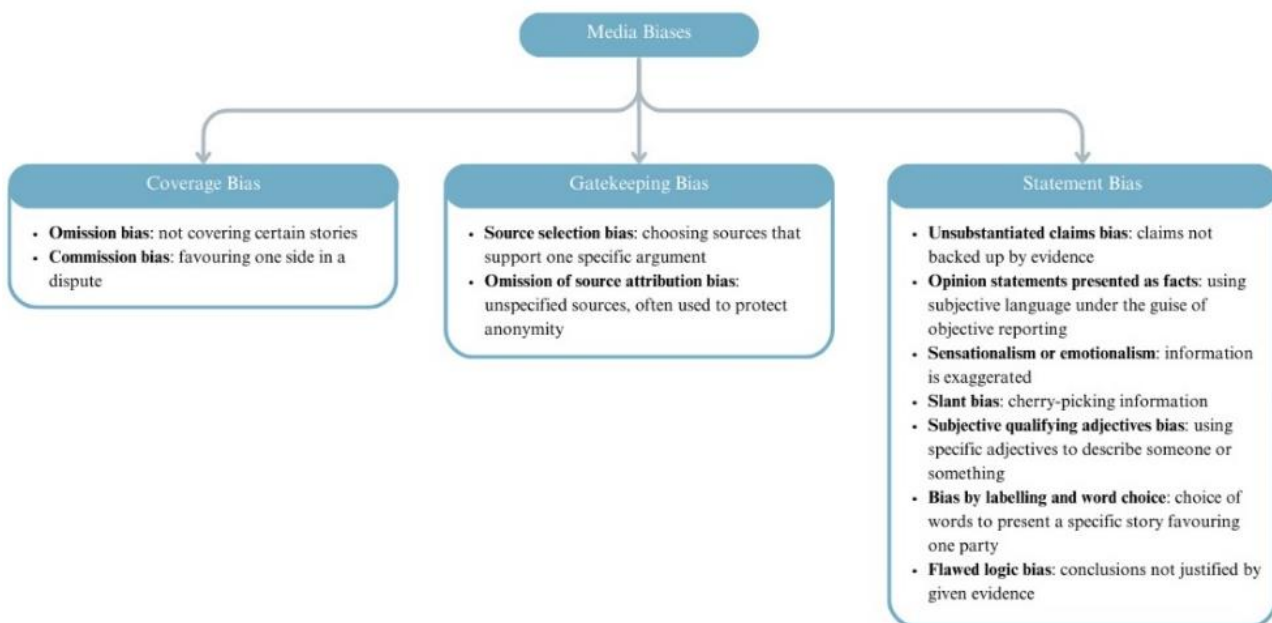

Figure 2. The 11 types of media bias used in this thesis.

they both are consequences of editorial choices to decide what gets, or does not get, covered. Figure 2 shows the 11 media biases which will be included in the analysis.

The concepts of media narrative, media representation and media bias will be used the backbone of the analysis of the articles published by Open and Il Corriere della Sera about the Israel-Palestine conflict between 7 October 2023 and 13 February 2024. The methodology in details, together with the samples included in the research, will be discussed in the next chapter. While reading and analysing the articles, the presence of the media biases shown in Figure 2 will be investigated, assessing what types of biases are more present in which title. Moreover, the analysis process will include looking for stereotypical representations of Israeli and Palestinians, as laid out by Robinson Divine (2019) and Bukar (2020). Finally, the analysis will look for possible narratives that Open or il Corriere della Sera might have adopted during the period investigated.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter will outline the methodology used in the analysis and a description of the sample of the articles, published by Open and Il Corriere della Sera between 7 October 2023 and 13 February 2024. The methodology chosen to answer the research question and the sub-questions included in this thesis is Critical Discourse Analysis. The approach taken in this thesis draws from the literature and guidelines on Discourse Analysis made available in Canvas for the course on qualitative data analysis methods. Lupton (1992) wrote that Discourse Analysis inquires into the social, political and cultural dimensions of communication. In other words, Discourse Analysis deals with both the text and the context. The text includes grammar, syntax and rhetorical devices, while the context takes into account the process of production and reception of discourses (Lupton, 1992). This thesis will only focus on the production of discourses, in this case through narratives, representations and biases, and not their reception since the role of the audience. i.e. the receptors of discourse, is not part of the research question.

Usually, Critical Discourse Analysis focuses on power and power relations and "is of prime importance in unveiling hidden agendas" (Caldas-Coulthard & Coulthard, 2023, p.3). Exchange of information, especially on certain topics, can be seen as a power dynamic. For example, Lupton (1992) underlined how the ways in which healthcare information is communicated by health professionals and media has an impact on how the public perceives health issues. In a similar manner, this thesis will investigate the ways in which Open and Il Corriere della Sera communicated information about the conflict between Israel and Palestine between 7 October 2023 and 13 February 2024. On paper, both publications claim not to follow specific agendas or ideologies and be impartial. Through Critical Discourse Analysis, thus, it will be possible to investigate their extents of neutrality and objectivity.

According to Machin and Mayr (2012), Critical Discourse Analysis can reveal narratives, representations and biases where they might not be as apparent. This methodology, the authors claimed, allows for a better understanding of how text and language are used to describe an issue. Caldas-Coulthard and Coulthard (2023) point out that Critical Discourse Analysis is an essential tool for researchers interested in discovering underlining narratives, which is the aim of this study. Usually, this type of analysis considers power as the main underlining structure in creating media narratives. In this thesis, power is considered as the ability of media platforms to create and spread narratives among their public and possibly shape their worldviews. Despite being a somewhat less apparent type of power relation, media outlets retain the role of gatekeepers of information, deciding what goes out into the public and what does not.

The purpose of Critical Discourse Analysis is to decode various representations of the world found in texts and other means of communication (Caldas-Coulthard & Coulthard, 2023). In a similar way, this thesis aims at understanding the narratives, representations and biases present in the coverage of the conflict between Israel and Palestine by Open and Il Corriere della Sera. Therefore, applying Critical Discourse Analysis proves to be an appropriate methodology for such a topic.

Sampling method

In total, 42 articles published on Il Corriere della Sera and Open between 7 October 2023 and 13 February 2024 will be analysed. There will be 21 articles per title. It needs to be mentioned that there was a disparity in the amount of articles available from the two publications as Il Corriere della Sera had a larger number of articles that would fit the sample for this thesis. However, for the sake of a fair and equal research, the same amount of articles was selected. A more in-depth description of the articles included in the sample is provided in the sub-sections below. A higher focus will be given to the periods that condensed the most relevant developments, since media coverage was higher in those periods. First, the days immediately after 7 October 2023, of Israel's response to the attacks launched by Hamas. After that, the focus will be on articles published between 24 November 2023 and 1 December 2023, when a temporary truce between the parties involved was called. The third period highlighted in this thesis is the legal action undertaken by South Africa against Israel on 29 December 2023 in front of the International Court of Justice. For these events, the focus will be on the day of and immediate days after South Africa's initiative and on 26 January, the day on which the International Court of Justice ruled.

The last period on which the research will focus is between 7 and 13 February. During this time span, the conflict between Israel and Palestine somehow made the headlines once again in Italy. During the Italian national music festival Sanremo, Italian rapper with Tunisian origins Ghali brought a person dressed as an alien on stage. When asked if they had anything to say, the creature whispered something into the rapper's ear, who then said "stop the genocide". Sanremo is the most watched event in Italy, with well over 50% of the ratings, meaning that Ghali's words echoed throughout the whole country. In the following days, the Israeli ambassador in Italy publicly said that Sanremo should not be used as a stage to spread hate and superficial messages on such a delicate topic. Moreover, the CEO of RAI, the Italian state-owned television broadcasters which transmits Sanremo had presenter Mara Venier read a letter on live TV. In the letter, the CEO pledged his solidarity to Israel, with Venier adding that it is a view shared by everyone in RAI.

Such an approach will help to understand how this latest chapter of the war between Israel and Palestine, which commenced on 7 October 2023 and is still ongoing, is portrayed during its most heated phases. Data will be collected by searching for articles on the online versions of both Il Corriere della Sera and Open. The text of the articles included in the research will be collected from both platforms. After that, they will be analysed to find possible specific narratives, representations and biases. Understanding how the two sides involved are represented is a key step into identifying narratives and media bias. Moreover, analysing the Sanremo and South Africa cases, will provide further insights on how the two newspapers covered events that are not necessarily related to the events on the war field. Both the first days after 7 October 2023 and the truce between 24 November and 1 December 2023 were filled with articles concerning the more military side of the conflict. On the other hand, the coverage of Ghali's statement at Sanremo and South Africa legal action delve into different sides of the conflict.

Sample description

Open

The 21 articles selected from Open for this thesis are all authored by Redazione, the Newsroom. This choice provides more consistency within the sample from this title and offers a portrait of its general style. The sample was collected by typing the keywords 'Israele', 'Palestina' and 'Hamas' in the search bar of the Open website. The keywords were researched individually and not together, meaning that there were three rounds of inquiry. !4 articles were selected from the research of the keyword 'Israele', three from 'Palestina' and four from 'Hamas'. The focus of the research was on the very first days of the escalation, the truce between the end of November and the beginning of December, the key dates in South Africa's claim to the International Court of Justice and the days of the Sanremo controversy.

When searching for 'Israele', most of the results focus on the first days of the conflict, with seven of the fourteen articles from this section included in the analysis covering this timeframe. Three articles cover the truce between 24 November and 1 December 2023, with two each for the Sanremo controversy and South Africa's legal action against Israel. Moreover, the research showed that the articles resulting from the keyword 'Israele' in Open's archives decreased in frequency throughout the period investigated. Roughly the same number of articles was published between 7 October 2023 and the end of that month and between 1 November 2023 and 13 February 2024

When researching the keyword 'Palestina', only three articles from the results were included in the sample for this thesis. The main reason for this is that the keyword 'Palestina' provided significantly fewer results than 'Israele' and some of the articles were overlapping. One of the articles is from the very first moments after the attacks of 7 October, while the other two are about the ruling by the International Court of Justice in the case that South Africa brought against Israel.

When researching the keyword 'Hamas', it is easy to note that the word tends to gain relevance when tensions rise. Before 7 October 2023, the latest article appearing is dated December 2022. Prior to this single article, there was a hiatus of over a year in Open's archives, with no articles in the results until May 2021, when there was another escalation in the conflict. Similarly to what occurred during the research of the keyword 'Palestina', the number of articles decreased over time, with a similar number of articles between 7 October 2023 and the end of that month and between 1 November 2023 and 13 February 2024. There is no mention of the Sanremo debacle in articles written by Redazione and some of the results overlapped with the ones from the keywords previously researched. The four suitable articles that are included in the sample are all about the first days of the escalation. Most of the article from Open concern the first days after 7 October 2023 as there were not enough suitable articles covering the other highlighted periods.

Il Corriere della Sera

For the 21 articles on Il Corriere della Sera, the research was conducted in a slightly different way than for Open but a few similarities between the two titles were found. Unlike Open, Il Corriere della Sera can count on a correspondent journalist in Tel Aviv, Israel: Davide Frattini. Many of the articles included in the sample analysed in this thesis are written or co-written by Frattini. This is because, being a correspondent in the field, his articles are the most present in Il Corriere della Sera's covering of the conflict. Moreover, the online version of the newspaper has a section in its menu called "Israele", the Italian word for Israel, which includes a significant number of articles concerning the recent developments in the conflict between Israel and Palestine, which escalated on 7 October 2023.

Four rounds of research were conducted through Il Corriere della Sera's archives and they all showed a trend that was also identified when looking for articles on Open. For example, the first month or so of conflict, from 7 October 2023 to the end of that month, received by far and large more coverage than the period between November and 13 February 2024. Another similarity between the two titles is that the keyword Israele was the one that led to the highest number of articles.

The first round one was through the Israele section mentioned above, which provided 13 of the 21 articles in the sample. Most of them were written by Il Corriere della Sera's correspondent from Israel. Five of the 13 articles were published in the first days of the conflict, namely 7 and 8 October 2023. These five articles span from reports on the attack launched by Hamas, analysis of the organisation and a piece on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The other eight articles from this round of research concern the truce called between 24 November and 1 December 2023. This was the most present topic when researching articles by Il Corriere della Sera that would be suitable for this thesis. The truce was covered with a high focus on the hostage exchange.

The second keyword researched was 'Palestina'. When it comes to the period of the conflict analysed, the search produced fewer results than the Israele section, some of which overlapped with the ones found in the Israele section. In the end, three were selected from the group to be included in the analysis and they were all authored by different journalists. The first one of them is about the effect of the conflict on the world, the second concerns Hamas' attacks on Israel's communities and the third one is an overview of Hamas' chiefs.

Neither of the first two keywords researched showed relevant results for the two other periods highlighted in this thesis: the legal action taken by South Africa against Israel and the controversy sparked by Ghali during Sanremo. Thus, combinations of more specific keywords were deployed. The combination of 'Ghali', 'Sanremo' and 'Israele' provided three more articles for the sample. The three articles revolve around the Israeli ambassador in Italy's response to Ghali's "Stop the genocide" statement, the rapper's response to the ambassador and the decision of RAI, the Italian state-owned television company, to read a press release in support of Israel.

Researching the keywords 'Sudafrica', 'Israele', 'Corte' (the Italian words for South Africa, Israel and Court), provided two final articles for the sample from Il Corriere della Sera. Compared to the other highlights included in this thesis, the research showed a lower number of articles for the case of South Africa and its legal action against Israel. It was mentioned in two of Il Corriere della Sera's reports about the conflict, which at one point occurred almost on a daily basis. The two reports were the one from 29 December 2023, the day in which South Africa started a case against Israel at the International Court of Justice, and 26 January 2024, the day in which the Court ruled in favour of the African country. The two articles included in the sample are an interview with Micheal Walzer, political theorist from the United States, and a letter written by Alon Bar, the Israeli ambassador in Italy, and published by Il Corriere della Sera. No relevant articles were found on Il Corriere della Sera's online archive concerning the initiation of South Africa's legal action other than the report for 29 December 2023.

Following the general principles of Critical Discourse Analysis set out by Lupton (1992), the analysis was carried out through multiple rounds of reading. During the first one, the focus was on the headlines and the main narratives that could be deducted from each single article included in the sample. The second round of reading entailed the searching for media representations within the articles that could be considered as Islamophobic or antisemite. While reading the articles for the third time, the different types of biases were investigated and identified. The fourth and last round was used to double-check possible inconsistencies and confirm the findings from the previous three reading rounds.

Chapter 4: Results

In this chapter, the results of the analytical process and some of the limitations of the research will be outlined. The results are presented in chronological order, divided into the four main timeframes identified between 7 October 2023 and 13 February 2024. First, the results from the analysis of the articles published by Open will be provided, which will be followed by the one of the articles published by Il Corriere della Sera. This chapter also contains some of the limitations of this study.

Results from Open

7-10 October 2023

The first days of the escalation of the conflict between Israel and Palestine started on 7 October 2023 were the ones receiving the most coverage out of all the periods investigated in this thesis. The articles mainly focussed on Hamas' attack on Israel on 7 October 2023 and the political reactions to the escalation both in Italy and internationally. Often, the articles reporting on political reactions focussed on the views of politicians around the world showing support to Israel. One of the headlines, for example, include Russia's call for peace and the EU support to Israel, but leaves out Iran's support to the Palestinian cause, despite mentioning it further in the article. However, throughout this article, and generally throughout this sample, those supporting Palestine find significantly less room on Open and those showing support to Israel.

Another key result from a first reading of the articles published by Open between 7 and 10 October 2023 on the escalation of the conflict between Israel and Palestine is that Palestine and Palestinians are often excluded from the war, as the Palestinian side is mostly referred to as Hamas. On multiple instances, for example, the articles on Open included Israel but not Palestine when describing the conflict. More specifically, the war is labelled as "Israel-Gaza war" or "war in Israel", and never the war between Israel and Palestine. Not acknowledging Palestine and Palestinians, the side in this conflict which is not Israel is reduced to Hamas, even if other Palestinian political movements raised their voices against Israel's actions. This is, thus, a clear example of Bias by labelling and word choice but also Omission bias, as the war is not being fought only in Israel.

Bias by labelling and word choice was also quite common in the way in which Open represented Hamas, and Palestinians compared to how it represented and Israelis. As mentioned, Palestinian fighters are often called "Hamas" and they are considered "militiamen" carrying out "attacks" and "terroristic raids". The few times that Palestinian fighters were not mentioned as "Hamas", Open used negative and defamatory epithets.

"In total, around one thousand bloodthirsty Palestinians entered the country, went home by home, building by building to massacre Israeli civilians and military"[1]

This specific example is also an instance of Subjective qualifying adjectives bias, since bloodthirsty is not an objective term and no similar terms are deployed when describing Israeli fighters. On the other hand, Israeli strikes are mostly defined as "military operations", "counteroffensives" and simply "raids", reinforcing the narratives on Hamas' terrorism and Israel self-defence.

The sample of articles from Open published between 7 and 10 October 2023, when analysed as a whole, is an example of Omission bias and Source selection bias, as the voices of Palestinian supporters are rarely included in them. On the other hand, there are numerous examples of coverage given to politicians supporting Israel, from the president of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen to the Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and the US President Joe Biden. Amplifying only the voices supporting one side, especially when those voices are some of the most powerful people in the world, also reinforces the narrative of Israel being the victim and Hamas being the only one at fault. Even when reporting on Palestine demonstrations in Italy in support of Palestine, Open focusses on how the people participating are "pro-Hamas" rather than pro-Palestine.

24 November – 1 December 2023

The results showed for the analysis of the articles published by Open between 7 and 10 October 2023 were quite similar to the ones found during the analysis of the articles published during the truce called between 24 November and 1 December 2023. The main narratives identified highlighted the Israeli situation over the Palestinian one. As for the previous period analysed, for example, Israel is fighting Hamas, defined as a terrorist group, and not Palestine. Hamas is represented as the only party at fault, with Open providing a platform echoing the voices of those supporting Israel. Open also provided more in-depth information about some of the Israeli hostages freed during the truce, without mentioning the Palestinians imprisoned in Israel and release throughout the truce period.

The types of media bias most present in Open's coverage of the truce between Israel and Palestine between 24 November and 1 December 2024 were Bias by labelling and word choice and Source selection bias. For example, when discussing the resumption of fighting, Israel's actions are often portrayed by Open as "military operations", while Hamas' are always reported on as terrorist attacks. Moreover, the word "Palestine" is mentioned very rarely, with the newspaper placing a strong focus on Hamas. For example, the truce was between Israeli and Hamas, not Palestinians. The Source selection bias was reflected by the absence of articles

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[1] Translated from Italian to English from https://www.open.online/2023/10/09/israele-hamas-scontri-terroristi/

voicing concerns of those supporting Palestine, compared to a significant inclusion of quotes from sources supporting Israel.

For Open, the truce between Israel and Palestine was not always the main focus in articles on the conflict published between 24 November and 1 December 2023. On the first day of the truce, for example, one article was dedicated to the visit by the Spanish and Belgian Prime Ministers to the Gaza Strip on the first day of the truce. The purpose of the journey undertaken by the two politicians was to show support to Palestine. Here, there were also examples of Bias by labelling and word choice, as the international position of Spain and Belgium was somewhat minimised by Open.

> *"Two countries certainly generally not considered as heavyweights on the international scene, but that, in this moment, play a particular role: they are the ones leading the European Union's political works"[2]*

This way of phrasing it can also be considered as Opinion statements presented as facts, especially since Open pointed out that Spain and Belgium were more relevant at the time just because it was their turn to lead the European Union.

Providing more content on supporters of Israel rather than Palestine, moreover, can also be considered Commission bias, as it can be a way of favouring the Israeli side over the Palestinian one by not covering similar stories concerning the latter. The same can be said for the way in which Open portrayed countries supporting Palestine, diminishing their role and relegating it to almost a casual circumstance.

South Africa's appeal to the International Court of Justice

Concerning the appeal brought forward by South Africa against Israel at the International Court of Justice, Open did not publish any relevant article until a ruling was available on 26 January 2024. By then, once the International Court of Justice did not impose a ceasefire and ruled that Israel was not carrying out a genocide, Open reported mostly on the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's reactions and on the directives that the Court listed for Israel.

When analysing the articles published by Open on this topic, it was not possible to identify specific narratives or representations of any of the parties involved in the appeal. However, the only reactions that Open reported on were mainly from Netanyahu, which is another example of Source selection bias. Palestinian reactions were limited to a short paragraph in one article, where it was just mentioned that Palestinian

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[2] Translated from Italian to English from https://www.open.online/2023/11/24/crisi-diplomatica-israele-spagna-guerra-terrorismo-cosa-e-successo/

representatives, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Palestinian National Authority, welcomed the ruling "for opposite reasons" than Israel. However, this is an example of Unsubstantiated claims bias as no evidence was provided to justify this statement.

7-13 February 2024

Concerning the days surrounding the controversy at the Italian national music festival Sanremo, where rapper Ghali brought out a person dressed as an alien to say "Stop the genocide" on 10 February 2024, Open had a more neutral approach than it had for the other periods investigated in this thesis. In the articles concerning the topic there are no clear narratives found, as they contain information and quotes from people supporting Ghali and Palestine as well people supporting Israel and the Israeli ambassador in Italy.

However, there are instances where media biases were identified. For example, Open defines Ghali's actions as "one of a long series of interventions on the Sanremo stage on the conflict involving Israel and Hamas". First, as in other Open's articles, the parties involved in the war are Israel and Hamas, not Palestine. Moreover, saying that this was one of many instances where participants to Sanremo manifested their support for Palestine is an example of Opinion statements presented as fact bias, as only two out of the 30 artists participating in the music festival, rappers Ghali and Dargen D'Amico, made comments about the conflict or in support of Palestine.

> *"In reality, the artist's (Ghali, ndr) invervention is just one of a long series of interventions on the Sanremo stage on the conflict that involves Israel against Hamas"[3]*

In the articles about this controversy, there was a roughly equal amount of content reflecting the views of supporters of both sides. For example, one article detailed how the Israeli ambassador in Italy criticised RAI for allowing this to happen during what is arguably the biggest stage in the country, while another one highlighted how Amadeus, Sanremo's presenter and artistic director refuted the claims that the festival had been used for political purposes.

Results from Il Corriere della Sera

7-10 October 2023

When it comes to Il Corriere della Sera, the headlines of the eight articles included in this thesis concerning the first days of the escalation of 7 October 2023 mostly show a strong focus on Hamas, its

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[3] Translated from Italian to English from https://www.open.online/2024/02/11/sanremo-ambasciata-israele-ghali-vergognoso-strumentalizzare-odio/

members and its actions. For instance, there were two articles published about Hamas' structure and chiefs: one more general and one more in-depth only on Mohammed Deif, defined as "the ghost of Hamas" and "the mind behind the raid on Israel". The headlines of the articles focussing on Israel highlight Netanyahu's as a man who "invokes unity and counts his mistakes" and Israelis as victims. From a first reading of the sample, the main narratives identified point to Israel being a victim whose citizens are being kidnapped, tortured and killed, with Hamas being an organisation led by people who prefer to remain in the shadows. In one article published on 7 October 2023, for example, the Israeli prisoners are defined as "lambs destined to the slaughterhouse".

A more concrete example is another article published on Il Corriere della Sera on 7 October 2023 deals with three questions, as its headline suggests: "Why always Gaza? What is Hamas? And why does Israel fear Iran's intervention?". At a first reading, the article and its headline appear as an analysis of three important aspects of the conflict. For example, it starts out by pointing out the disparity in deaths between Palestinians and Israelis, with the former having a much higher death toll. The article, however, shows a few types of biases that seem to be present in many of the ones published by Il Corriere della Sera in the first days of the escalation of 7 October 2023 included in the sample for this thesis.

For example, the article also mentions on multiple occasions how Hamas "has control" over the Gaza Strip and the people living there, even if the organisation won the last time elections were held in Palestine. However, there is no mention of Israel "having control" over any territory, despite its size grew considerably by extending into areas that previously belonged to Palestine during the second half of the 20th century. This can be seen as an example of Bias by labelling and word choice, as having control over someone (or something) does not always have positive connotations. In addition, when mentioning the "56 years of occupation of Palestinian territories", the article does not specify who is occupying these territories. This is somewhat an example of Omission bias which leaves out key information, i.e. the fact that it is Israel who is occupying these Palestinian territories.

> *"But after 56 years of occupation of the Palestinian territories, now that between Arabs and Israelis we are the fifteenth war in over 70 years, any solution seems incredibly far"[4]*

The article also mentions that Palestinians on the West Bank do not hold presidential elections out of fear, as surveys repeatedly predict Hamas to win, as it happened in the 2006 legislative elections, after which the organisation established itself as the authority in the Gaza Strip. Currently, the president of Palestine remains Mahmoud Abbas, also known as Abu Mazen, leader of the Fatah movement. A Hamas victory of

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[4] Translated from Italian to English from https://www.corriere.it/esteri/23_ottobre_07/perche-sempre-gaza-che-cos-hamas-perche-israele-teme-intervento-iran-b6717504-6536-11ee-b5e4-dde90023c3c4.shtml

presidential elections would mean their take over the majority of Palestinian institutions. On the other hand, the article says that the West Bank, under Abbas' guidance, remains a corrupt organisation and very much dependant on international aid. This can be seen as an example of combinations of biases. The assumption that Palestinians in the West Bank do not want to vote out of fear can be considered as both Unsubstantiated claims bias, as it is not backed up by any evidence in the article, but also as Opinion statements presented as facts bias, as the trend is presented using subjective language under the guise of objecting reporting.

The articles about Hamas and its members underline how the organisation is well-equipped in terms of warfare technologies and how the most prominent figures are either living outside of the Gaza Strip. One of the few exceptions is Mohammed Deif, defined as a ghost that Israel hunts and keeps missing. Deif's career was thoroughly analysed by Il Corriere della Sera in multiple articles. One of the articles labels him as "a man who, by remaining in the shadow has transformed a handful of guerrilla warriors to a formidable formation". On the other hand, Israeli's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is referred to in one article as Bibi and Mister Safety, and is described as a 74 year-old who has more energy than his collaborators. The different ways of describing Israeli and Palestinian leaders can be considered as Commission bias, as Netanyahu is portrayed in a much more positive light than Deif or any other member of Hamas. Implying that Netanyahu is more energetic than his collaborators can also be identified as both Sensationalism or exaggeration and Unsubstantiated claim bias because it is an exaggerated claim that cannot be corroborated.

24 November - 1 December 2023

When it comes to the truce called between 24 November and 1 December 2023, most of the articles published on Il Corrirere della Sera came from Davide Frattini, the newspaper's correspondent in Israel. The articles revolve around hostage exchanges and the consequences of the end of the truce. Concerning hostage exchanges, the main narrative appears to be focussing on Israeli hostages, with their personal stories on the tragedies they lived through. On the other hand, there was no in-depth story about any Palestinian hostage freed by Israel, despite various articles mentioning them being mostly women and children. For Hamas and the Palestinian side, the main narrative focuses on the organisation's actions, accused of plotting the delay of operations to extend the truce.

Comparing different representations of Israeli and Palestinian hostages freed during the truce was not possible as the latter did nearly enjoy as much coverage as the former. There were, however, a few differences spotted in how the leaders of the two sides were represented. Yahya Sinwar, considered one of the main leaders of Hamas, was called "the boss of bosses" on one article. In Italian, this expression is often linked to organised crime bosses. For example, there is a television series based on Totò Riina, one of Sicily's most ferocious mafia boss, with the same name. The representation of the Palestinian side is always intertwined with Hamas. When mentioned, Hamas is often accompanied by words such as terrorism or terrorists. Israeli forces, however, are always portrayed as an army. In other words, Israeli fighters are represented as national military forces, while Palestinian fighters are often represented as terrorists.

> *"The General Staff is aware that Yahya Sinwar, the boss of bosses, needs to buy time, the drip releases allow him and the Islamist organisation to survive a little longer"*[5]

The main bias types found when analysing the articles by Il Corriere della Sera on the truce between 24 November and 1 December 2023 were Omission bias and Bias by labelling and word choice. The most apparent examples of Source selection biases were found in the two articles recounting the liberation of hostages throughout the week of truce. The stories revolving around Israeli hostages often include detailed stories of their families and their horrible experiences. These are examples of Omission bias as there are no similar articles concerning Palestinian that were held hostages by Israel and freed during the truce. Their mention often stopped at the total number of freed people and the fact that they were women and children.

Examples of Bias by labelling or word choice could be found in Il Corriere della Sera's choice to use the words Israel and Hamas, often disregarding the concept of Palestine and Palestinians. Moreover, as mentioned in the previous paragraphs, the newspaper often makes the distinction between Hamas' terrorism and Israel's military operations. Another relevant is when, in one article, this chapter of the conflict between Israel and Palestine is defined as "the longest ever fought by Israel". This phrasing can be considered as an example of both Omission bias, as it omits the fact that Palestine is fighting this war too and seems to imply that Israel is the only constant in the conflict, and has been fighting all these decades against different enemies.

South Africa's appeal to the International Court of Justice

Despite being an even internationally relevant, as it involves two different countries from two different continents and an international institution, South Africa's appeal to the International Court of Justice accusing Israel of carrying out a genocide against Palestinians did not find much space on Il Corriere della Sera during the period investigated in this thesis. One of the articles mentioning it was a letter written by the Israeli ambassador in Italy, Alon Bar, to the newspaper on 10 January. The second article is an interview with Michael Walzer, a Jewish philosopher from the United States. The main narratives that can be identified in the articles is that Israel is not carrying out a genocide and that Hamas is to blame for the high death toll of civilians in Gaza.

In general, Israel is represented as an entity acting in self-defence, which is what the International Court of Justice ruled. In his letter, Bar defined South Africa's actions as outrageous, stating that the claims were based "on two assumptions, neither of which holds up to close scrutiny". The first wrong assumption would be, Bar wrote, the estimated amount of civilian deaths in Gaza. The second one is that the comments

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[5] Translated from Italian to English from https://www.corriere.it/esteri/23_novembre_27/israele-tregua-prolungata-due-giorni-esercito-si-prepara-offensiva-d4d4c1d0-8d5f-11ee-b4a7-347e05f6b33b.shtml

made by current and former Israeli representatives used to substantiate the genocide claim were spoken "on the emotional wave in the aftermath of the mass slaughter and horrific atrocities committed on October 7". In other words, Bar does say that Israeli officials, or former officials, made genocidal comments, but it was in the heat of the moment and "do not reflect Israel's concrete actions". On the other hand, Hamas is portrayed as an organisation that is willing to sacrifice civilians to win the war.

> *"Israel fights at the same time against a city above the ground and a city below the ground. For Hamas, the city on earth is expendable and what is really important is the city underground"[6]*

Il Corriere della Sera provided a platform to the Israeli ambassador in Italy two weeks before the ruling but did not do the same, for example, for their South African counterpart. This is an example of Source selection bias, which can also be found on a general level about this topic in Il Corriere della Sera, as no similar articles, but from an opposite perspective, were published by the newspaper during the period investigated. Walzer's interview was also characterised by a few examples of media bias. The main type of bias found in this article was Opinion statements presented as facts. For instance, Walzer states that Hamas is fighting a war on two cities in Gaza, one above the ground, where the civilians also live, which is expendable, and an underground one which is far more important. Moreover, the end of the article is another example of Opinion statements presented as facts, as the philosopher claims that "Hamas designed a war that Israel can only fight by killing civilians". Both these statements are not necessarily backed up by any evidence by Walzer but they are presented as hard truths.

7-13 February 2024

The situation regarding Italian rapper Ghali's at the Sanremo festival and the responses generated was covered by Il Corriere della Sera with a few articles often recounting the same story with minor updates each time. Identifying specific narratives was more difficult when it comes to this period compared to other ones from the sample. The articles included quotes from parties supporting each argument, those siding with Ghali and Palestine and those siding with Israel and its ambassador in Italy.

One of the main recurring themes was the reaction of the Israeli ambassador in Italy Alon Bar, who defined Ghali's skit as shameful. Il Corriere della Sera also highlighted the position of RAI's CEO Roberto Sergio, who showed solidarity to the Israeli cause. The newspaper also published articles with sources supporting Ghali. For example, one article covers the story of a lawyer presenting a formal complaint against

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[6] Translated from Italian to English from https://www.corriere.it/esteri/24_gennaio_26/walzer-la-corte-ha-riconosciuto-l-auto-difesa-ma-giudici-non-devono-ignorare-peculiarita-questa-guerra-6181fa3e-bc8c-11ee-996d-60eabc1bbbc8.shtml

RAI, accusing the Italian state-owned broadcaster of "silencing those who are trying to keep attention on what has been happening in Gaza for 4 months now".

As for the narratives, it was not possible to find specific representations of Israel, Palestine, or any of the parties involved in these events. The same can be argued for media bias, as there were no striking examples of any type of media bias. This might be due to the fact that much of the text of the articles were quotes from the people involved in the situation or people who reacted to it.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

This chapter recaps the main findings to help answering the research questions and sub-questions. The results of the analysis will be compared to assess the presence of trends, similarities and differences between the coverage of the conflict between Israel and Palestine between 7 October 2023 and 13 February 2024 by Open and Il Corriere della Sera. Among the main conclusions that can be drawn for both publications are that the number of articles published throughout the period investigated in this thesis decreased with time. The escalation of 7 October 2023 and the truce between 24 November and 1 December 2023 were covered with significantly more articles than South Africa's appeal to the International Court of Justice or the situation with Ghali at Sanremo.

Another quite interesting outcome of this analysis is that the narratives, biases and representations deployed by Open and Il Corriere della Sera when reporting on the war between Israel and Palestine between 7 October 2023 and 13 February 2024 were quite similar. Given that they are significantly different publication, with Il Corriere della Sera being an old institution tied to traditional journalism and Open claiming to be a young platform for young people, one might have expected different approaches to the coverage of such a delicate topic. However, as this chapter will show, both Open and Il Corriere often deployed the same types of media bias, utilised similar representative approaches and adopted similar narratives in this context.

Concerning media bias, the analysis showed that Open deploys fewer types of media biases. The most common ones were Source selection bias and Bias by labelling and word choice. These media bias types were also largely found in the sample of articles from Il Corriere della Sera. However, Il Corriere della Sera presented more instances of different types of media bias, including Omission bias, Unsubstantiated claim bias and Opinion statements presented as facts bias. The analysis showed that, in this case, there was no prevalence of any specific media category (gatekeeping bias, coverage bias, statement bias), as the most common types of bias found were distributed across all three.

Concerning the overlapping types of media bias found during the analysis, their deployment was similar in both Open and Il Corriere della Sera. Source selection bias mostly entailed the two publications giving more room to parties supporting Israel, including, in the case of Il Corriere della Sera, the Israeli ambassador in Italy. Moreover, both publications provided significant more information about Israeli hostages or dead civilians than they did for Palestinian ones. Another trend identified throughout the sample is that the presence of media bias decreased during the period analysed, which is connected to the decrease in number of articles mentioned above.

When it comes to the ways in which the two sides were represented on articles published by Open and Il Corriere della Sera between 7 October 2023 and 13 February 2024, there are a few similarities. No clear sign of Islamophobic or antisemitic representations were found. Rather, the biases found in the analysis were deployed to construct representations of Israel as the victim of the attack on 7 October 2023 and Hamas, rather

than Palestine, as the obscure organisation on the other side. Despite many similarities in types of media bias and representations, there was one main difference in the approach taken by Open and Il Corriere della Sera when reporting on the conflict between Israel and Palestine between 7 October 2023 and 13 February 2024. More specifically, Open focussed more on the reactions and roles of international representatives, while Il Corriere della Sera published more content on Israeli hostages and their stories.

In conclusion, the types of bias and representations identified during this analysis resulted in similar narratives found in Open and Il Corriere della Sera. In general, both publications painted a picture which tends to justify Israel and its actions and reduce Palestine to just the Hamas organisation. The role of Palestine and Palestinians remains in the background throughout the period investigated in both publications. If this trend is not only restricted to these titles but to the Italian media landscape in general, there may be questions about its impartiality and transparency, two fundamental pillars of journalism.

Limitations and future research

Despite adding to the existing literature on the media coverage of the conflict between Israel and Palestine in Italy, the research presents a few limitations. First, the analysis focusses on a period of a still ongoing war, as the escalation which started on 7 October 2023 did not stop on 13 February 2024. This means that the narratives, representations and biases found in Open and Il Corriere della Sera may be now different from what they were in the first stages of the conflict. On the other hand, it was necessary to set a realistic timeframe which could have been investigated.

Moreover, the methodology used to inquire into the research question and sub-questions of this thesis, Critical Discourse Analysis, is mostly deployed when investigating power relations. However, one can argue that media platforms, including online newspapers, do exert some power over their audiences as they decide what the public gets to read and what is being kept out about a specific topic. Moreover, the way in which publications report on a topic can direct the public's opinions towards a specific position. All this shows that the relationship between media platforms and their public can be considered as a power relations, where the former can decide what information to share and how to share it with the latter.

In addition, this thesis includes only two Italian online newspapers: Il Corriere della Sera and Open. Il Corriere was chosen because it is the most read, and one of the oldest, in Italy, with a long history of printed content. Its online presence is also quite solid and digital content is available after paying a subscription. Open, on the other hand, is a much younger publication which only publishes online and does not require any kind of subscription. Therefore, the sample is somewhat heterogeneous, as it has different types of news outlets, but remains a relatively small one. According to the University of Pisa (2022), there were over 400 active online news platforms in 2021, and the number has been increasing.

Finally, the specific events of the conflict between Israel and Palestine between 7 October 2023 and 13 February 2024 included in this thesis were not the only important episodes occurring in this period. For example, Houthi movements in Yemen have been attacking cargo ships trying to cross the Red Sea since mid-October 2023. However, unlike the other events included in this thisis, i.e. the first days of escalations, the truce, South Africa actions and the Sanremo-Ghali affair, the Houthi attacks are still happening and this is the reason why they were not included in this thesis, as their final impact cannot yet be assessed.

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Appendix

List of the links to the articles analysed

Corriere della Sera

#	Date	Title & URL
1	October 7, 2023	Mohammed Deif, il fantasma: chi mente sul raid di Israele contro il capo del braccio militare di Hamas
2	October 7, 2023	Perché sempre Gaza: che cos'è Hamas e perché Israele teme l'intervento dell'Iran
3	October 7, 2023	Attacco in Israele: picchiati, legati e trascinati via. Gli ostaggi sono decine
4	October 7, 2023	Invasione all'alba nelle case in Israele: il terrore di Hamas
5	October 7, 2023	Attacco a Israele: il mondo è in bilico
6	October 8, 2023	Netanyahu invoca l'unità, ma conta i suoi errori in guerra
7	October 10, 2023	Chi sono i capi di Hamas in Turchia e Qatar: il mistero dei nascondigli
8	October 10, 2023	Kibbutz pacifisti: una comunità collettiva che non è più la speranza di pace
9	November 23, 2023	Gaza, parte la mini tregua: verranno liberati i primi 13 ostaggi israeliani. In tutto saranno 50
10	November 24, 2023	Rilascio degli ostaggi israeliani: la liberazione dei prigionieri palestinesi
11	November 24, 2023	Chi sono i tredici ostaggi israeliani liberati
12	December 1, 2023	Gaza, sfollati in fuga verso sud
13	December 1, 2023	Gaza, tornano le bombe: Hamas libera ostaggi
14	November 30, 2023	Attentati, minacce e trattative: la tregua tra Israele e Hamas è la prova più dura
15	November 27, 2023	Israele, tregua prolungata di due giorni: l'esercito si prepara all'offensiva
16	November 25, 2023	Hamas libera ostaggi
17	January 26, 2024	Walzer: "La Corte ha riconosciuto l'autodifesa, ma i giudici non devono ignorare le peculiarità di questa guerra"

18	January 10, 2024	Ambasciatore israeliano in Italia: "La Corte internazionale di giustizia e il crimine di genocidio"
19	February 12, 2024	Ghali da Napoli: "Un esposto contro la replica Rai all'ambasciatore di Israele"
20	February 11, 2024	Stop al genocidio: Ghali con bandiera palestinese e appelli per la pace. Cosa c'è dietro le parole dell'ambasciatore israeliano
21	February 11, 2024	Ghali replica all'ambasciatore di Israele: "Dico stop alla guerra da anni"

Open

#	Date	Title & URL
1	October 7, 2023	Reazioni internazionali: Russia e UE sull'attacco di Hamas
2	October 7, 2023	Israele sotto attacco: razzi da Gaza lanciati da Hamas
3	October 7, 2023	Guerra tra Israele e Hamas a Sderot: scontri in corso
4	October 7, 2023	Attacco di Hamas da Gaza: le reazioni di Antonio Tajani e degli italiani in Israele
5	October 7, 2023	L'operazione "Spade di Ferro": Israele attacca Gaza
6	October 9, 2023	Scontri tra Israele e Hamas: chi sono i terroristi
7	October 9, 2023	Guerra tra Hamas e Israele: ostaggi, violenze e abusi
8	October 10, 2023	Manifestazione a Milano dei giovani palestinesi e italiani dopo l'attacco di Hamas
9	October 10, 2023	Medio Oriente: vertice tra Biden, Macron, Scholz, Meloni e Sunak
10	October 10, 2023	Guerra tra Israele e Gaza: la mozione del Parlamento italiano
11	December 1, 2023	Guerra tra Israele e Hamas: aggiornamenti al 1 dicembre
12	November 24, 2023	Crisi diplomatica tra Israele e Spagna: cosa è successo
13	November 26, 2023	Israele: chi sono gli ostaggi liberati dopo il terzo giorno
14	December 1, 2023	Strategia di Israele a Gaza dopo la tregua
15	November 24, 2023	Crisi diplomatica tra Israele e Spagna: cosa è successo
16	November 26, 2023	Israele: chi sono gli ostaggi liberati dopo il terzo giorno
17	January 26, 2024	Sentenza della Corte ONU: misure cautelari per genocidio contro Israele

18	January 26, 2024	Corte di Giustizia dell'Aja: ordine di misure cautelari contro Israele per prevenzione del genocidio a Gaza
19	February 10, 2024	Guerra tra Israele e Hamas: aggiornamenti al 10 febbraio
20	February 11, 2024	Sanremo: l'ambasciata di Israele critica Ghali, "vergognoso strumentalizzare l'odio"
21	February 13, 2024	Sanremo 2024: Amadeus contro l'ambasciatore di Israele, appelli dei cantanti per la pace e contro l'odio