

Received on (04-09-2018) Accepted on (15-12-2018)

Main Researcher

Dr. Mohammed El-Astal

1,*

Racism and Manipulation in Non-Standard Narratives: A CDA-Based Study of *The Jerusalem Post's* Letters to the Editor

¹ University Name & City (Main)

The Department of Applied Linguistics and Discourse Studies, The School of Linguistics and Language Studies, Carleton University, Ottawa,

* Corresponding author:

e-mail address:

mohd41@hotmail.com

Abstract

Much of the current research on letters to the editor within media literature centers on how well letters mirror the ideal of public involvement in discussions about current issues and the potential of this debate for a more deliberative sort of democracy (Young, 2011). This being the case, this CDA-based study attempted to find out how the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and Palestinians were discursively depicted in the letters to the editor published between December 6, 2017, and April 9, 2018, in *The Jerusalem Post* newspaper—an English and French Israeli newspaper. For this purpose, a systematic random sample of 25 letters to the editor were selected from the newspaper's website.

For answering the two questions developed for the purpose of this research paper, the following CDA analytical tools were utilized: presupposition, generalization, passivization, and structural oppositions. Based on the findings obtained from the study at hand, the texts analyzed were found on one hand ideological, biased, and manipulative in terms of depicting the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as an identity-based conflict; and contained covert racial prejudice against Palestinians on the other.

Keywords: Letter to the editor, CDA, racism, Palestinians, *The Jerusalem Post*.

العنصرية وقلب الحقائق في الخطاب الإعلامي غير التقليدي:

دراسة تحليلية نقدية لعينة من رسائل القراء إلى المحرر بصحيفة الجيروزاليم بوست الإسرائيلية

الملخص

كثير من الدراسات التي تناولت بالتحليل رسائل القراء إلى المحرر في الخطاب الإعلامي تمحورت حول كيفية تصوير الرسائل للنقاش العام حول قضايا المجتمعات المختلفة، وحول إسهام هذا النقاش في تحقيق ديمقراطية توافقية حقيقية لهذه المجتمعات (Young, 2011). والحال هذه، تسعى هذه الدراسة، من خلال استخدام الباحث فيها لمنهج التحليل النقدي للخطاب، إلى تحديد الصورة التي ترسمها رسائل قراء صحيفة الجيروزاليم بوست الإسرائيلية للفلسطيني وللصراع الفلسطيني-الإسرائيلي كذلك—الجيروزاليم بوست صحيفة تصدر من القدس باللغتين الإنجليزية والفرنسية. لتحقيق هدف الدراسة، قام الباحث بتحليل عينة عشوائية منتظمة (تم اختيارها من موقع الصحيفة الإلكتروني) من الرسائل المنشورة في الفترة بين السادس من ديسمبر، 2017، والتاسع من إبريل، 2018.

للإجابة عن سؤال الدراسة، استخدم الباحث أربع أدوات من أدوات منهج التحليل النقدي للخطاب وهي: الافتراض، التعميم، التورية، والمتقابلات اللغوية. بناءً على نتائج التحليل النقدي للنصوص، خلصت الدراسة إلى ما يلي: (أ) صورت النصوص التي تم تحليلها الصراع الفلسطيني-الإسرائيلي على أنه صراع هوية خلافاً للواقع، و (ب) تضمنت النصوص التي تم تحليلها عبارات عنصرية تجاه الفلسطينيين.

كلمات مفتاحية: رسالة إلى المحرر، التحليل النقدي للخطاب، العنصرية، الفلسطينيون، صحيفة الجيروزاليم بوست

Introduction

Who and what gets represented; who and what does not; and how happenings, individuals, things, actions, and relationships are discursively represented and portrayed in the media were, are, and will always be significant questions for critical discourse analysts. The significance of these questions stems from the fact that the media employs representational strategies that may be ideological (Machin & Mayr, 2012). A germane example of this is van Dijk's (2000) argument that ethnic minorities are mostly depicted as active agents when they do bad things and in a passive role when they do good things.

This paper is concerned with racism and manipulation of facts. Teo (2000) distinguishes between overt racism which is often violent and practiced in less modernized societies and covert racism which is much more subtle and thus insidious. The latter form of racism is the subject matter of this paper. Regarding manipulation, Polyzo (2015) argues that texts' producers can manipulate the audience by extending certain facts and beliefs as authentic and unquestionable.

Interestingly, Young (2011) divides media content into standard narratives such as news articles, features, editorials and columns, and non-standard narratives such as letters to the editor (LEs). An LE is a genre (Mémet, 2005) through which readers discuss and comment on current issues (Pounds, 2006). For young (2011), letters to the editor appear to be means of introducing taboo, unacceptable, and unproven narratives into the mass media content. They advance very opposing (from all sides) ideas, narratives, and logics about the issues being discussed.

While literature has paid much attention to examining some of the potentials embedded in texts produced by print mass media such as news items (Sheyholislami, 2007; Teo, 2000), editorials (Atai & Mozaheb, 2013; Matu & Lubbe, 2007), and texts written by the elite such as newspapers' columns (McElmurry, 2009), little attention has been paid to texts produced by newspapers' readers in the form of 'letters to the editor', especially LEs related to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. According to Young (2011), much of the current research on letters to the editor within media literature centers on how well LEs mirror the ideal of public involvement in discussions about current issues and the potential of this debate for a more deliberative sort of democracy. I chose the Palestinian-Israeli conflict for examination here because I have the shared background knowledge about the conflict which is necessary, according to Polyzo (2015), for understanding ideological statements.

With this mind, this study aims to fill this gap in literature through finding out how the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the Palestinians themselves are discursively depicted in the LEs published in *The Jerusalem Post* newspaper—an Israeli newspaper. For this purpose, the following research questions (RQs) were developed:

1. How do the LEs published between December 6, 2017, and April 9, 2018, in *The Jerusalem Post* newspaper discursively depict the Palestinian-Israeli conflict?
2. How do the LEs published in *The Jerusalem Post* during the time span of the study discursively portray Palestinians?

Drawing on Machin and Mayr (2012), this study builds on the thesis that ideologies, inequalities, bias, and racial prejudice are discursively constructed (through linguistic recourses), mirrored, defended and challenged. For them, language is not a system of grammatical rules but a set of semiotic recourses (linguistic and visual), and individuals are aware that words and visual elements carry particular affordances or potentials (p. 17)—such potentials include ideologies, inequalities, bias, and racial prejudice. In this regard, Miller (2002) points out that what people know about the world in general and their societies in particular depends on how things are portrayed to them and that knowledge in turn tells them what to accept, what to reject, and what to do.

Based on the findings obtained from the study at hand, the texts analyzed were found manipulative, ideological and biased on one hand, and contained covert racial prejudice against Palestinians on the other.

After reviewing the literature, the paper discusses the theoretical concepts that were employed to orient inquiry and analysis, explains the methodology, displays and analyzes the results, and finally ends up with drawing some conclusions.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

In his 10-year long (1996-2006) CDA-based study in which the author examined the discursive representations of refugees, immigrants, and asylum seekers in *The Guardian*, *The Observer*, *The Times*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Daily Mail*, and *The Mail on Sunday* newspapers, Khosravini (2009) found out that racism increased when there was a relevant world event such as the 9/11 attacks in 2001, and the Madrid bombing in 2004. In the same vein, Atai and Mozaheb (2013) employed van Dijk's (1998) approach of CDA in their study in which they investigated the representation of Iran's nuclear program in 40 editorials published in *The Guardian*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Times*, and *The Independent* between August 2007 and August 2010. The results obtained from their study showed biased representation of Iran's nuclear program.

Teo (2000) critically discourse-analyzed the ideological construction of racism embedded within the structure of *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Daily Telegraph* newspapers in Australia, concluding that both newspapers enhanced the marginalization of Vietnamese immigrants in Australia. Van Dijk (1991), in his major study on press in Britain, highlighted the significance of genre-specific features of news reporting, and demonstrated how manipulation of such features, like quotations and sources for example, could play an important role in micro-linguistic acts based on a racial ideology.

Using CDA to analyze a single column on Arellano controversy published in the *Chicago Sun-Times* English newspaper, and to analyze the readers and other columnists' reactions to the said column in the *Hoy* Spanish newspaper, McElmurry (2009) found out that the construction of 'us' versus 'them' powerfully manifested itself in the texts examined. Similarly Lillian (2006) analyzed in her CDA-based case study the writings of a single Canadian popular writer revealing that all forms of racist discourses that have been identified in other countries were generated in Canada.

Saeed (2007) meta-analyzed how the media in Britain represented ethnic minority groups, concluding that the media in Britain depicted minorities as 'alien other', and this depiction manifested itself in a racist way. In a similar vein, Atkin and Richardson (2007) analyzed in their study, in which they employed the pragma-dialectical model of argumentation, a sample of 86 letters to the editor written about Muslims in *The Guardian* revealing that unreasonable arguments could perpetuate racial inequalities.

Theoretical Framework

Based on the type of inquiry and the questions developed for this study, the critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach was employed. Historically, CDA was developed by Teun van Dijk, Norman Fairclough, and Ruth Wodak, supported by the University of Amsterdam, in the early 1990s. Today, CDA is an established paradigm in linguistics (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). Conceptually, Wodak and Meyer describe CDA as a constitutive interdisciplinary, problem-oriented approach that examines complex social phenomena rather than studying "a linguistic unit per se" (p. 2); and Lin (2014) describes it, "Not as a unitary discipline but as a cluster of interdisciplinary approaches" (p. 214). For Lin, CDA consists of the following approaches: (1) van Dijk's socio-cognitive theory of critical discourse studies (CDS), (2) Wodak's discourse-historical approach (DHA), and (3) Fairclough's dialectical-relational approach (DRA). Hence, being constitutive

interdisciplinary and problem-oriented in nature is what makes it different from discourse analysis (DA).

Interestingly, van Dijk (as cited in Machin & Mayr, 2012) depicts CDA as the study of indirect (or implicit) meanings in discourse; and Fairclough (1995) defines it as a way of seeing language as it intersects and interacts with its wider social and political surroundings. Wilton (2010) indicates that CDA attempts to create connections between discourses and social context (p. 94) suggesting that language is not only a tool for producing discourse, but also a site of conflict in itself; and Richardson (2007) contends that CDA assumes that every part of a textual content is the outcome of a choice. That is to say that we choose a way over another to construct a sentence or to describe a person, an action or a process.

According to Wodak and Meyer (2001), CDA is associated with terms that are central for understanding it such as discourse, critique, power, and ideology. For them, critique refers to making the interconnectedness of things apparent. It aims at uncovering ideologies and power structures embedded within texts. It is important to mention here that 'critique', for them, does not mean 'negative' as commonly understood. It means that social phenomena should not be taken for granted; instead, it should be critically challenged. Moreover, the concept critique reflects the need for understanding how language functions in producing and delivering knowledge and in exercising power.

As for the term discourse, Lemke (1995) defines it as the social activity of creating meanings employing symbolic systems, including language, in a particular setting; and Wodak and Meyer (2001) perceive it as a social practice that suggests a dialectical relationship between a given discursive event and what frames it such as "situation(s), institution(s), and social structure(s)" (p. 5).

In terms of the areas of application, Lin (2014) indicated in her methodological review of the role of critical discourse analysis (CDA) in applied linguistics that CDA methods have been applied in analyzing media and educational discourses. In media analyses, Fairclough (1995) contends that van Dijk's framework is employed to show relationships between media texts, how these texts are produced and how they are comprehended, and to show the relationships between all these together and the broader social practices within which they are embedded. In addition, a distinction should be made between 'macro' and 'micro' structures when media discourses are analyzed. Macrostructure analysis is concerned with the overall content and the overall form of the text and microstructure analysis is concerned with the "semantic relations between propositions", the syntactic and lexical features of the text, and its rhetorical characteristics (Fairclough, 1995, p. 30). On the macro-level, this study focused on the relationship between the overall content of the LEs and the social context, and on the micro-level, the focus was on the semantic relations between propositions and on the lexical and rhetorical characteristics.

Methodology

Besides providing background information about *The Jerusalem Post*, this part of the paper explains how the data was collected and the analytical tools employed for examining the data. Conceptualization is the process through which researchers clearly define the terms used in the study to avoid ambiguity and misconception (Zikmund, 2000).

Data Collection

For the purpose of the study, 25 LEs were selected from *The Jerusalem Post* website (<http://www.jpost.com>). *The Jerusalem Post* is an independent broadsheet English and French Israeli newspaper based in Jerusalem. It was founded in 1932 during the British Mandate of Palestine (Wikipedia, n.d.).

These LEs were selected from the period between December 6, 2017, and April 9, 2018. December 6 was the day on which the president of the United States, Donald Trump, gave a speech on Jerusalem recognizing, in that speech, Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. The period from early December, 2017, to early April, 2018, was selected purposively because it witnessed, besides Trump's speech, a number of significant events such as the arrest of Ahd Tamimi, a prominent 16-year old Palestinian activist, and the 'March of Return' protests on the Gaza Strip borders. All these issues have received a widespread wave of reactions and comments locally, regionally, and internationally; and the media, of course, was not a way from that wave of standard and non-standard narratives.

During the period from December 6, 2017, to April 9, 2018, *The Jerusalem Post* published 124 issues out of which 42 issues had LEs related to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. From these 42 issues, a systematic random sample of 21 issues was drawn. The first issue was selected randomly from the first 2 issues (the issues published on December 7 and 8, 2017) on the list and then every other issue was selected systematically from the 42 issues listed. Hence, the issues selected per month were as follows: from the month of December, 2017, the 7th, 10th, 12th, 14th, and the 27th; from the month of January, 2018, the 3rd, 9th, 12th, 14th, 18th, 28th, and 31st; from the month of February, 2018, the 4th, 8th, 15th, and 27th; from the month of March, 2018, the 13th, 18th, and 26th; and from the month of April, 2018, the 3rd and the 8th. Some LEs were found irrelevant to the subject matter of this research paper and thus excluded and some issues had more than one LE so the total number of LEs analyzed was 25.

Analytical Tools

For examining how Palestinians were discursively depicted in the LEs collected for analysis, the following CDA analytical tools were utilized: presupposition, generalization, passivization, and structural oppositions. These analytical tools, as explained by van Dijk (1993), Huckin (1997), Teo (2000), and by Machin and Mayr (2012), helped in answering the two questions developed for the purpose of this research. Presupposition helped in answering both questions; while the rest of the tools helped in answering only the question on how Palestinians were discursively portrayed (RQ 2).

Presupposition. Machin and Mayr (2012) perceive presupposition as a concealment linguistic strategy. For them, it occurs when texts' authors imply meanings without overtly expressing them or when they display things as taken for granted while in fact they are contestable and ideological. For example, the statement that 'the college should not continue imposing high fees on students' presupposes that the fees students are paying are high. According to Polyzou (2015), presupposition examination is crucial for uncovering ideologies and manipulation in texts.

Generalization. Teo (2000) defines generalization as the extension of the attributes or actions of a specific and specifiable group of individuals to include a much more general and open-ended group. For example, there is a clear-cut element of generalization in the statement that 'all Palestinians support the murder of Jews'.

Passivization. Machin and Mayr (2012) describe passivization as a concealment linguistic strategy employed by texts' producers. In passivized situations, agents are either omitted or backgrounded which is ideologically significant (Huckin, 1997). For example, the statement that 'ten students were killed in the shooting incident' does not tell who killed the students—who is the agent responsible for the incident. In general, texts' producers use passivization as a strategy to conceal agency and responsibility for an action (when the agent is omitted), or as a strategy for de-emphasizing and belittling agents (when the agent is backgrounded).

Structural oppositions. Van Dijk (1998) defines structural oppositions as pair(s) of concepts or terms that are contrary in meaning. Such structural oppositions can be explicitly or

implicitly included. When they are overtly included like 'them versus us', they are referred to as ideological squares.

Findings

This part of the paper pertains to displaying, interpreting, and explaining the results gained from the analyses of the 25 LEs published in *The Jerusalem Post* between December 6, 2017, and April 9, 2018. The study results were treated here in order based on the analytical tools explained in the methodology.

Presupposition

Machin and Mayr (2012) argue that all language use, including the simple sentences we say, is filled with presupposition and people do not continually analyze what others say—to a large extent, people subconsciously process texts. Here are some excerpts for analysis extracted from the LEs being examined:

1. There was no "historical injustice done to the Palestinian Arab people in its displacement and in being deprived of the right to self-determination following the adoption of General Assembly resolution 181 (II) of 1947, which partitioned Palestine into an Arab and a Jewish State," contrary to the claims made in the PLO's 1988 independence declaration.

(December 7,

2017)

2. Until now, nearly every country, including in the West, has called for Jerusalem to be a shared capital. [...] This proposal, which has always been viewed by Israel as stupid and antithetical to Jewish history and interests, has not stopped the West from trying to mediate between Israelis and Arabs.
(December 10, 2017)

3. When joined with Christianity's replacement theology, there was no oxygen left for the Jews until the Balfour Declaration of 100 years ago. The violent Arab reaction at that time, 30 years before the modern State of Israel was born, was not much different from what is happening today.
(December 14, 2017)

4. I strongly object to Ilan Baruch's suggestion in "Sigmar Gabriel is right" (Comment & Features, January 9) that "Israel's relationship with the Palestinians in the territories is reminiscent of Apartheid [in South Africa]."
(January 18, 2018)

5. As is well known, Arafat and his successor, Mahmoud Abbas, have faithfully honored this commitment [commitment to peace accords]. In fact, not a single Israeli has been killed or injured by Palestinians since 1993.
(January 31, 2018)

6. [Regarding the two-state solution] The Palestinians were never interested in a state of their own. They just don't want the Jews to have one. (February 4, 2018)

7. Gershon Baskin criticizes bitterly those who don't agree with him about the existence of a people called "Palestinian." [...] Regarding this, why does the UN

Partition plan of 1947 mention numerous times a Jewish state and an Arab state, but nowhere a “Palestinian” state? In what respect do the Palestinians have a separate identity from other Arabs, taking into account that they share the same history, ethnic identification, religion and language?

(February 27,

2018)

8. These people are Arabs who live in the Land of Israel. [...] We are Jews, they are Arabs, and we both live in the Land of Israel. (March 13, 2018)

9. It is the Arab intransigence and belief in their final destruction of Israel that is the real reason there is no peace between the Arab residents of the mandated territory the British called Palestine, and the Jewish State of Israel. (March 26, 2018)

A careful scrutiny of the 9 excerpts above presupposes that the conflict is an identity-based conflict in which, as Hicks (2001) explained, differences and tensions arise out of the different backgrounds (e.g. ethnic, cultural, national-identity, or religious) of the parties involved. It is clear that these texts concealed the nature of the conflict there depicting it as a conflict between Palestinians and Israelis in some situations (texts 4 and 5); between Arabs and Jews in some other situations (texts 1, 3, 7, 8, and 9); and between Israelis and Arabs or Palestinians and Jews (texts 2 and 6).

To elaborate, none of these texts showed that the act of expelling Palestinians and occupying their land was the underlying reason behind the conflict between both sides. Interestingly, in the fifth text above, the LE writer was commenting in contemptuous language on an article written by another author in which that author said, “The underlying reason Palestinians throw rocks at our soldiers is the 50-year-long occupation” (published on January 31, 2018). The LE writer here does not agree that the occupation is behind the conflict which obviously conceals the fact that part of the land was occupied in 1948 by a people led by Zionists whose slogan was “A land [Palestine] without a people [Palestinian people] for a people [Jewish people] without a land” (Muir, 2008, p.55); and the rest of that land was annexed in 1967 (the 50-year-long occupation mentioned above). Besides, this also conceals the fact that the UN resolutions, according to The Institute for Palestine Studies (2012), guaranteed the right of return for those who were expelled and their land was occupied.

The reason behind portraying the conflict between both sides as an identity-based conflict is to facilitate concealing the fact that there was a state called Palestine before Israel was established and Golda Meir, the fourth Israeli prime minister, herself was a Palestinian, as she said in an interview available at www.youtube.com (n.d.). She said in the same interview that she held a Palestinian passport between 1921 and 1948 after she immigrated from Ukraine to Palestine when Palestine was under the British mandate.

Hence, depicting the conflict this way presupposes that the conflict is between Arabs as a race and Israel as a state and these Arabs do not belong to a state called Palestine—as if Palestine as a state and Palestinians as the people of that state do not exist. This clearly reflects the attitude of the Israeli people towards Palestinians. This argument is evidenced by the following numbers and percentages: Palestinians were referred to as Palestinian Arabs in the first extract above (11.11%), as Palestinians in the fourth, fifth, and sixth (33.33%); and as Arabs in the second, third, seventh, eighth and ninth extracts (55.55%). Interestingly, the ninth extract above in which Palestinians were depicted by the LE author as “Arab residents of the mandated territory the British

called Palestine” enhances this argument. Besides these numbers and percentages, here are more excerpts extracted from the 25 LEs for analysis:

1. When the Arabs living in Palestine rejected the UN partition plan and attacked the nascent Israeli state with evil intent, they became fully responsible for all the consequences of their aggressive actions. (December 7, 2017)
2. Just prior to the Six Day War, the UK purchased a swath of land in Jerusalem within 60 meters of the 1949 armistice line. It remains undeveloped. Was it purchased for a new embassy to an Arab or Palestinian state [?]. (December 12, 2017)
3. Your January 2 editorial “Wanted: Palestinian pragmatism” calls on the Palestinian Authority’s leadership “to be pragmatic and put aside its extreme rhetoric.” The problem with this statement is that the Arab populace has no concept of a democratic society. (January 3, 2018)
4. Where is the difference between this stoning [stoning at Israeli soldiers by settlers] and the stoning by young Arab youths against soldiers? (January 12, 2018)
5. If such a murder [the killing of a Rabbi by a Palestinian] happens again, the village the terrorist comes from (our police can likely determine this) should be bombed indiscriminately. [...] In the final analysis, fewer lives, both Jewish and Arab, will be lost if this is done. Have we got the guts? (January 14, 2018)
6. No Palestinian state ever existed on this land or anywhere else in the area. Despite this fact, Israel was prepared to negotiate. At a conference in Khartoum, the Arab [including Palestinians] response was no negotiations, no peace, no recognition of Israel. (January 18, 2018)
7. Is she advocating full equality, including citizenship and voting rights for all Arabs residing within these large swaths? [the West Bank] (January 28, 2018)
8. According to Bar-Ilan University’s Mordechai Kedar, there is no starvation in Gaza. Fake news is a ploy often used by the Arabs. (February 8, 2018)
9. The number of Arabs one sees when visiting our hospitals [Israeli hospitals] suggests that such a scenario reflects reality. (February 15, 2018)
10. And is it shocking if US Sen. Chuck Schumer, too, suspects that an independent Arab state in Palestine would endanger Israel? (March 18, 2018)
11. With regard to “Erdogan: You are a terrorist • Netanyahu: You are a butcher” (April 2), the uproar about Israeli forces killing Gazan Arabs trying to violently force their way into Israel is disingenuous. (April 8, 2018)

In addition to the 5 excerpts from the first group of excerpts in which Palestinians were referred to as Arabs, a careful examination of the 11 extracts above shows that Palestinians were referred to as Arabs in all of them. The question that lends itself here is why Jordanians are Jordanians, Syrians are Syrians, and Lebanese are Lebanese but Palestinians are Arabs. In terms of race, they all are Arabs but in terms of nationality, Syrians are Syrians and Palestinians should be Palestinians.

For the writers of these LEs, obliterating nationality and projecting race shows the world, especially those who are not well acquainted with the conflict and its roots, that the inhabitants of that land (other than Jewish) do not belong to the land but to the Arab World (countries other than Palestine which does not exist for them). This, in fact, explains why some Israelis demand Palestinians to settle in the twenty-one (other than Palestine) member-states of the Arab League; and explains why Israel refers to the 1.5 million Palestinians living within its borders as Arabs although they were there and they had Palestinian passports before Israel was established. What follows extends clear examples of this way of thinking:

1. Regarding this, why does the UN Partition plan of 1947 mention numerous times a Jewish state and an Arab state, but nowhere a “Palestinian” state? In what respect do the Palestinians have a separate identity from other Arabs, taking into account that they share the same history, ethnic identification, religion and language?

(February 27, 2018)

2. You really have to stop referring to the Arabs here as “Palestinians,” and also stop calling their areas “Palestinian.” It never was theirs.

(March 13, 2018)

Generalization

A careful analysis of the LEs selected for this paper shows a clear-cut employment of generalization in a number of situations. For example, the sentence, “No, Gaza’s residents are not being held ‘hostage’ by ‘war lords.’ They support Hamas and the murder of Jews, and make no secret of it”, quoted from the LE published on February 8, 2018, reveals that the LE writer generalized that all people in Gaza support murdering Jews and they all support Hamas which is considered as a terrorist movement in North America and some other countries in the West. Besides, so doing incites the world against Gaza, justifies the siege imposed on it, and enhances bias and hatred—needless to mention here that not all people in Gaza support Hamas. In addition to this situation, the following sentence quoted from the LE published on March 26, 2018, depicts another situation in which Palestinians were labeled as supporters of Israel and Jewish people destruction: “Dr. Baskin complains about conditions in the Gaza Strip but fails to mention that the conditions are those that the inhabitants chose when they elected Hamas, and continue to choose when they call for the destruction of Israel and the Jewish people”. Another germane example of generalization employment is the following text extracted from the LE published on February 15, 2018:

Regarding “PA forces rescue soldiers who strayed into Jenin” (February 13), imagine this scenario: One of the stone throwers in such an incident injures himself and thinks: “I must go to an Israeli hospital and have my injury attended to.” The number of Arabs one sees when visiting our hospitals suggests that such a scenario reflects reality. I therefore suggest that a blacklist be maintained by an appropriate authority that lists locations in which such incidents occur. The residents of these locations would be ineligible to visit any Israeli health facility for, say, a year from the date of the incident.

The first thing noticed here is that the LE writer depicted Palestinians (referred to as Arabs) as ‘stone throwers’ who stone Israeli soldiers and seek treatment at Israeli hospitals when they injure themselves. The writer extended the action (throwing stones) of specifiable persons (in most cases kids and teenagers) to include a much more general group of people, depicting that as a

reality. The writer based his judgment on the number of Palestinians (labeled as Arabs) who receive medical treatment in Israeli hospitals. Not all Palestinians who receive medical care in Israeli clinics and hospitals do that for injuries from throwing stones at Israeli soldiers.

Later in the text above, the writer suggested blacklisting the entire locations in which Israeli soldiers are stoned and after that preventing all the residents of those locations from seeking medical treatment in Israeli hospitals for a certain period of time. Besides generalizing the action to the entire locations, the LE author generalized the punishment. This is seen as a collective punishment which is prohibited under the treaties of the international humanitarian law (Darcy, 2010). In the words of Grotius (as cited in Darcy, 2010), "No one who is innocent of wrong may be punished for the wrong done by another" (p. 31). Actions should not be generalized and so punishment. Doing so begets nothing but hatred, bias, and violence. Below are more examples of generalization:

1. So it is with EU-dominated Europe's continuing war against the Jews, this time via its proxies, the Palestinians. (December 14, 2017)
2. The problem with this statement [call on Palestinian leadership to be pragmatic] is that the Arab [Palestinian] populace has no concept of a democratic society. It simply follows what its leaders tell it to do. (January 3, 2018)
3. As for "Palestinians attack car of Greek patriarch in protest against land deals" (January 7), the patriarch has also been targeted by Arab Israelis [Palestinians in Israel]. Do we need these people? They should be deported in order for us to have a population that does not breed hate. (January 9, 2018)
4. As a tourist in Israel for the Pessah [Passover] holidays, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to IDF [Israel Defense Forces] soldiers, whose professionalism and fortitude protected nationals and tourists alike from the hordes of terrorists attempting to stream into Israel from Gaza during Seder [a feast] night. (April 3, 2018)
5. When these soldiers [IDF] defend the border (and their lives) by killing one of those violent demonstrators, they are accused of killing a "peaceful" demonstrator. (April 3, 2018)
6. Ayn Rand once said: "In any compromise between good [Israelis] and evil [Palestinians], it is only evil that can profit." She was right. (April 8, 2018)

A precise consideration of the above listed extracts reveals the following elements of generalization: Palestinians were labeled as proxies for Europeans to fight against Jews in the first text. In the second, they were described as democracy-illiterate which was not logical because they could be non-democratic but not democracy-ignorant. Palestinians living in Israel (depicted as Arabs) were referred to as hatred breeders that should be deported in the third item. Notably, the writer employed the word 'deport' here which implies that these people have no legal right to be there. Besides, hatred breeders are there in every society but there is no logic in labeling an ethnic minority as so. In the fourth text, tens of thousands of Palestinians participating in the 'March of

Return' protests on Gaza borders were described by the LE writer as hordes of terrorists. Let's assume that there were 'terrorists' among them but could they all be terrorists including women, children, and elderly people? In the same vein, the fifth excerpt depicted the 'March of Return' protesters on Gaza borders as violent. In the last extract, Palestinians in a clear-cut racist way were depicted as evil while Israelis as good.

Passivization

The agent-patient relations (who does what to whom) is ideologically significant for texts' producers (Huckin, 1997). Texts' producers use passivization as a strategy to conceal an agent responsible for a given action, or as a strategy to background agents with the purpose of belittling them. A perfect example of passivization is the sentence, "We left them beautifully cultivated greenhouses and land, having been lovingly attended to by the Jewish families living there before they were thrown out", extracted from the LE published on February 8, 2018. Simply, this statement suggests that the people of Gaza were granted a land that belongs to Jewish families who were thrown out of Gaza. The last part of the sentence was misleadingly written in passive voice—the agent was missing. The author here concealed the fact that Ariel Sharon, the former Israeli prime minister, unilaterally decided to withdraw from Gaza in 2005. In other words, the sentence does not tell that Jewish families [settlers] living in Gaza were thrown out by Sharon who forced them to do so and the land was returned to its owners due to a peace agreement signed between both sides in Oslo in 1993. Table 1 below shows more examples of passivization:

Table 1: Passivized Sentences Extracted from the Texts and the Date of Publishing

#	Passivized Sentences	Publishing Date
1.	"I was angry at the soldiers for degrading the Israeli army by allowing themselves to be attacked by teenage girls and then backing away."	Dec. 27, 2018
2.	"It was with extreme shame and sadness that I read "Soldier stoned in Bet Shemesh."	Jan. 12, 2018
3.	"In 2000 and 2008, the Palestinians were offered more than 95% of their demands."	Jan. 18, 2018
4.	"It is explained how terrible the humanitarian situation is in Gaza."	Jan. 22, 2018
5.	"When these soldiers defend the border (and their lives) by killing one of those violent demonstrators, they are accused of killing a "peaceful" demonstrator."	April 3, 2018
6.	"Ten of the Palestinians killed were known terrorists."	April 3, 2018
7.	"Ten terrorists were identified so far among the dead."	April 8, 2018

A careful consideration of Table 1 above reveals that the agent was missing in all situations except the first one in which the agent was backgrounded. For Huckin (1997), when agents are backgrounded, they are belittled. This situation relates to the incident in which Ahed Tamimi, a 16-year old Palestinian girl, slapped an Israeli soldier and as a result she was arrested. In the second situation, the agent was an Israeli citizen. Palestinians were depicted as stone throwers but in this situation the agent was not a Palestinian so he was concealed. In the third situation, it was clear that there was a lack of evidence to support what the LE writer went for. Nobody has ever said that the Palestinians were offered more than 95% of their demands in 2000 and in 2008. Implicitly, this depicts Israel as a peace maker and Palestinians as unrealistic and impractical.

With regard to the fourth and fifth situations, it was obvious that the two writers ideologically concealed agency and responsibility for the actions. Israel in both situations was criticized. It was criticized by international prominent figures for the miserable situation in the Gaza Strip and for using excessive force against protesters on the border as well.

In the last two situations that referred to the same incident, concealing the agents in such scenarios was expected. The ten people killed were on the Palestinian side of the border participating in the 'March of Return' protests when they were shot dead. In fact, nobody investigated what happened to know whether the dead people were terrorists or not. When there is lack of evidence, concealing the agent is an expected act.

Structural oppositions

Structural oppositions are pair(s) of concepts that are contrary in meaning (van Dijk, 1998).

Table 2 below provides some examples of such terms for analysis:

Table 2: Structural Oppositions Extracted from the Texts and the Date of Publishing

#	Structural Oppositions	Publishing Date
1.	"The violent Arab reaction at that time, 30 years before the modern State of Israel was born."	Dec. 14, 2018
2.	"All this proves that Arab hostility has no relation to what Israel does."	Dec. 14, 2018
3.	"Nowhere is there any mention of an aggressive Israeli action to thwart our adversaries in Gaza."	Jan. 22, 2018
4.	"No Palestinian state ever existed on this land or anywhere else in the area. Despite this fact, Israel was prepared to negotiate."	Jan. 18, 2018
5.	"As for our own morals, the playing field between us and the terrorists is not level."	Jan. 14, 2018
6.	"The patriarch has also been targeted by Arab Israelis. Do we need these people? They should be deported in order for us to have a population that does not breed hate."	Jan. 9, 2018
7.	"In the next war, we must be prepared to win, to finally put a stop to our enemies. Collateral damage? Their problem, not ours."	Feb. 8, 2018
8.	"The Palestinians were never interested in a state of their own. They just don't want the Jews to have one."	Feb. 4, 2018
9.	"We are Jews, they are Arabs, and we both live in the Land of Israel."	March 13, 2018
10.	"In any compromise between good and evil, it is only evil that can profit."	April 8, 2018
11.	"I wish to express my deepest gratitude to IDF soldiers, whose professionalism and fortitude protected nationals and tourists alike from the hordes of terrorists."	April 3, 2018
12.	"One has to feel sorry for our soldiers defending the border with the Gaza Strip – they face ever-growing violence by the Palestinians."	April 3, 2018
13.	"Israeli forces rightly defend the border from the fanatics who seek to kill."	April 3, 2018

As Table 2 above shows, the first item depicts Israel as a modern state while Palestinians (referred to as Arabs) as violent. Interestingly, this depiction falls in harmony with Teo's (2000) understanding of covert racism which is much more subtle and thus insidious and happens in modernized societies. Consistently, Palestinians were portrayed in the second as hostile and in the third item as adversary, while Israel on the contrary of that. In the fourth item, Israel was depicted

as a peace maker who was always ready for negotiation while Palestinians were implicitly portrayed as non-pragmatic.

In comparison between 'us' (the Israelis) and the terrorists (the Palestinians), item 5 portrayed Israel as a moral state fighting against terrorists who have no morals. In the sixth item, the LE writer openly asks authorities in Israel to deport Arab Israelis (Palestinians living in Israel before it was established) out of the country describing them as hatred breeders because they stoned the car of the Greek patriarch for selling Palestinian lands to Israel. Similar incidents happen everywhere in the world. Remarkably, the LE writer used the word 'deport' (not expel) here which implies that these people have no legal right to be there although their fathers and grandfathers were there before Israel was established.

In the seventh, tenth, and ninth items, the LEs writers overtly used the terms 'their problem' versus 'not ours'; 'good' versus 'evil' and 'we are Jews' versus 'they are Arabs' consecutively. Van Dijk (1998) referred to this way of depiction as ideological squaring. In the first situation here, the author blamed Palestinians for any collateral damage that any future war might cause. Interestingly, the eighth item depicted Palestinians as a failing people who do not want to success and let Israelis success too.

In the eleventh and twelfth items, Palestinians were portrayed as terrorists and violent and Israeli soldiers as professional defenders and protectors. It is worth mentioning here that not in non-standard narratives only Israeli soldiers were described as moral and professional but in standard narratives too. Israel's army was always depicted as one of the most moral armies in the world that fight against terrorists. This is the second time here in which Palestinians were referred to as violent and terrorists. Again, in the last item, Israeli soldiers were portrayed as rightly defenders fighting against illegal fanatics. This item relates to the protests taking place these days on Gaza side of the border known as the 'March of Return' protests.

Conclusion

For the purpose of this study, two research questions were developed. The first question pertains to how the Palestinian-Israeli conflict was discursively depicted and the second to how the Palestinians themselves were discursively depicted in the letters to the editor published in *The Jerusalem Post* newspaper between December 6, 2017, and April 9, 2018.

The findings obtained from the lexical analysis of texts revealed that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict was mostly depicted as an ethnic-based (between Arabs and Jewish) and as national-identity-based (between Palestinians and Israelis) conflict. Hicks (2001) describes tensions that arise out of ethnic, cultural, national-identity, and religious differences as identity-based conflict. To elaborate, the LEs examined in this study depicted the conflict in a way that conceals the fact that expelling Palestinians and occupying their land were the real causes of the conflict. The LEs analyzed never showed that part of the land was occupied in 1948 and the rest was annexed in 1967. Interestingly, Polyzo (2015) referred to this type of depiction as manipulation in which texts' producers can manipulate the audience by extending certain facts and beliefs as authentic and unquestionable; and Van Dijk (1991) argued that manipulation can play an important role in micro-linguistic acts based on a racial ideology.

In addition, the lexical analysis of texts also revealed that the LEs analyzed contained covert racial prejudices against Palestinians. To clarify, the lexical analysis of the texts showed that these texts contained ideological, biased and racial presuppositions, generalizations, passivized statements, and structural oppositions. For Halliday (as cited in Machin & Mayr, 2012), word choices within texts are important for understanding the type of language used by producers. This being said, what follows summarizes what the study found in this regard: (a) sixteen (64%) out of the 25 LEs examined referred to the conflict between both sides as a conflict between Arabs as a race and Israel as a state. This way of depiction presupposes that Arabs do not belong to a state called Palestine—as if Palestine as a state and Palestinians as the people of that state do not exist.

(b) There was a clear-cut employment of negative generalization in nine situations (36%) in which all the Palestinians were labeled as follows: proxies of Europeans to kill Israelis (December 14, 2017), a populace who has no concept of a democratic society (January 3, 2018), hate breeders (January 9, 2018), supporters of Hamas and murdering Jews (February 8, 2018), stone throwers (February 15, 2018), supporters of Israel and Jewish people destruction (March 26, 2018), terrorists (April 3, 2018), violent (April 3, 2018), and as evil (April 8, 2018).

(c) There was an obvious employment of passive voice to conceal facts in 8 situations (32%). In one of these situations (December 27, 2017), the agent was backgrounded, while in the rest the agent was omitted (Table 1). Huckin (1997) in this regard argued that texts' producers use passivization as a strategy to conceal an agent responsible for a given action, or as a strategy to background agents with the purpose of belittling them. For example, in the LE published on February 8, 2018, the statement, "Jewish families living there [Gaza] were thrown out" was misleadingly passivized. It is clear that concealing the agent here (who was the former Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon) misleads the text receivers.

(d) Thirteen (52%) of the texts analyzed contained overt and covert pair(s) of concepts that were contrary in meaning as defined by van Dijk (1998). In these texts (Table 2) Palestinians were negatively depicted while Israelis were positively portrayed. For example, Palestinians were labeled as hostile, while Israelis as friendly in the LE published on December 14, 2017; as terrorists, while Israeli soldiers as professional defenders in the LE published on April 3, 2018; and as evil, while Israelis as good in the LE published on April 8, 2018.

With all these findings in mind, it is clear that all forms of racist discourses that have been identified in other countries (van Dijk, 1991; Teo, 2000; Lillian, 2006; Atkin & Richardson, 2007; Saeed, 2007; Khosravini, 2009; McElmurry, 2009; Atai & Mozaheb, 2013) are produced in Israel. However, as this study has looked at a limited number of letters to the editor regarding the very long Palestinian-Israeli conflict, it is difficult to extend large scale conclusions on this complicated and complex issue.

References

- Atai, M. R. & Mozaheb, M. A. (2013). The representation of Iran's nuclear program in British newspaper editorials: A critical discourse analytic perspective. *International Journal of Society, Culture & Language*, 1(2), 15-33.
- Atkin, A. & Richardson, J. E. (2007). Arguing about Muslims: (Un)Reasonable argumentation in letters to the editor. *Text & Talk*, 27(1), 1-25.
- Darcy, S. (2010). Prosecuting the war crime of collective punishment: Is it time to amend the Rome statute? *Journal of International Criminal Justice* 8, 29-51.
- Fairclough N (1995) *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. London: Longman.
- Hicks, T. (2001). Another look at identity-based conflict: The roots of conflict in the psychology of consciousness. *Negotiation Journal*, 17(1), 35-45.
- Huckin, T. (1997). Critical discourse analysis. In T. Miller (Ed.), *Functional approaches to written text: Classroom applications* (pp.78-92). Washington, DC: ERIC.
- Khosravini, M. (2009). The representation of refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants in British newspapers during the Balkan conflict (1999) and the British general election (2005). *Discourse & Society*, 20(4), 477-498.
- Lemke, J. L. (1995). *Textual politics: Discourse and social dynamics*. London: Taylor and Francis.
- Lillian, D. L. (2006). Neo-conservative racist discourse: A Canadian case study. *Word*, 57(1), 71-95.
- Lin, A. (2014). Critical discourse analysis in applied linguistics: A methodological review. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 34, 213-232.
- Machin, D., & Mayr, A. (2012). *How to do critical discourse analysis: A multimodal approach*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Matu, P. M. & Lubbe, H. J. (2007). Investigating language and ideology: A presentation of the ideological square and transitivity in the editorials of three Kenyan newspapers. *Journal of Language and Politics*, 6(3), 401-418.
- McElmurry, S. E. (2009). Elvira Arellano: No Rosa Parks: Creation of "us" versus "them" in an opinion column. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 31(2), 182-203.
- Mémet, M. (2005). Letters to the editor: A multi-faceted genre. *European Journal of English Studies*, 9(1), 75-90
- Miller, D. (2002). Promotion and power. In A. Briggs & P. Copley (Eds.), *Introduction to Media* (2nd ed.) (pp. 41-52). London: Longman.
- Muir, D. (2008). A land without a people for a people without a land. *Middle East Quarterly*, 15(2), 55-62.
- Polyzou, A. (2015). Presupposition in discourse: Theoretical and methodological issues. *Critical Discourse Analysis*, 12(2), 123-138.
- Pounds, G. (2006). Democratic participation and letters to the editor in Britain and Italy. *Discourse & Society*, 17(1), 29-63.
- Richardson J. E. (2007). *Analyzing newspapers: An approach from critical discourse analysis*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Saeed, A. (2007). Media, racism, and Islamophobia: The representation of Islam and Muslims in the media. *Sociology Compass*, 1(2), 443-462.
- Sheyholislami, J. (2007). Yesterday's «separatists» are today's «resistance fighters»: Mainstream media as agents of hegemony. In J. M. B. Paniagua, G. L. García, P. S. Cremades, & E. S. Alegre (Eds.), *Critical Discourse Analysis of Media Texts* (pp. 95-110). Aldaia, València: Guada Impresores, S. L.

- Teo, P. (2000). Racism in the news: A critical discourse analysis of news reporting in two Australian newspapers. *Discourse & Society*, 11(1), 7-49.
- The Institute for Palestine Studies (2012). D.1 U.S. Ambassador to Jordan David Hale, confidential memo on the debate in Jordan concerning the Palestinian right of return, Amman, 5 February 2008. *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 41(2), 219-226.
- Van Dijk, T.A. (1991) *Racism and the press: Critical studies in racism and migration*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Van Dijk, T. (1993). *Elite discourse and racism*. Sage: London.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (1998). *Ideology*. London: Sage.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2000). Parliamentary debates. In R. Wodak & T. A. van Dijk (Eds.), *Racism at the Top, Parliamentary Discourses on Ethnic Issues in Six European States* (pp. 45-78). Klagenfurt: Drava Verlag.
- Wikipedia (n.d.). The Jerusalem post. Retrieved from <https://en.wikipedia.org>
- Wilton, S. (2010). State culture: The advancement of 'Canadian values' among immigrants. *International Journal of Canadian Studies*, 42, 91-104.
- Wodak, R. & Meyer, M (2001). Critical discourse analysis: History, agenda, theory, and methodology. In R. Wodak and M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse analysis* (pp. 1-33). London: Sage.
- Young, N. (2011). Working the fringes: The role of letters to the editor in advancing non-standard media narratives about climate change. *Public Understanding of Science*, 22(4) 443-459.
- YouTube (n.d.). An interview with Gilda Meir where she states being Palestinian. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L0ZFeDWhlDo>
- Zikmund, W. G. (2000). *Business research methods*, (6th ed.). NY: Dryden Press.