

A Comparative Study on the framing of the Palestinian “March of Return”

“The beginning of wisdom is to call things by their proper name.”

(Confucius)

“Every war when it comes, or before it comes, is represented not as a war but as an act of self- defence against a homicidal maniac.”

(George Orwell, 1937)



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Introduction

This year marks 70-years after the Nakba (Arabic for catastrophe), the year in which the state of Israel was established. Palestinians in Gaza commemorated this fact by organizing the “March of Return”, a series of protests that begun on March 30, 2018, and led to in a harsh confrontation on May 15, 2018 the exact day that marked the Nakba.

During the three months of the “March of Return” media outlets differed in their framing of the confrontation between Gaza and Israel. Some media outlets have referred to Israeli violence as their right to defend themselves and their borders while others have criticized it for being an outright massacre.

This article will analyse the framing of the violence during the “March of Return” in two Dutch newspapers (*Trouw* and *NRC Handelsblad*) and one Arabic newspaper (*al-‘Arabī al-Jadīd*). It will apply a content analysis to determine how news clippings of both articles effected the way the Palestinian and Israeli side were presented to the reader.

Methodology

The newspapers that will be used in this article are the following *Trouw* and *NRC Handelsblad* and *Al-‘Arabī al-Jadīd*.

Trouw is a Dutch newspaper that started in 1943 as an illegal Christian protestant newspaper that resisted the German occupation during the Second World War. After the war it became a newspaper that represented the protestant segment of Dutch society. Nowadays however, they do not exclusively write for that religious segment but their new is still effected by their previous religious identity.¹ The *NRC Handelsblad* is a liberal-minded Dutch “quality” newspaper established in 1970. The term quality stands for the fact that it aims to provide its readers with adequate background information on news events. *Al-‘Arabī al-Jadīd* is a global media network which issues a newspaper. It was established in 2014 and aims to provide an independent and objective editorial live.²

This article with focus on the medium of the actual newspaper and will entail all articles on the “March of Return” at its start on March 30 and the events of May 15. Thus news articles from the *Trouw* and *NRC Handelsblad* on March 30 and 31, and May 15 and 16 will be analyzed.

¹ Trouw. “Over Ons.” <https://www.trouw.nl/overons/>, last accessed on 16 May 2018

² The New Arab. “About Us.” <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/aboutus>, last accessed on 16 May 2018

The newspaper clippings that will be selected are those that report on the situation in Gaza, those that do interviews with either the Gaza or Israeli side on the violent confrontation, and official statements of the newspapers that express the opinion of the newspaper editors. The clippings will be added to the appendix of this article.

This research is thus a qualitative comparative content analysis. What will be analysed are the way the following elements are presented:

- The causes and goals of the “March of Return”
- The support for the “March of Return”
- Causes of Violence
- Causes of Death
- Israeli side
- Palestinian side

This is done through looking at the terminology used, who and what is quote in interviews and what additional information is provided on the context of the “March of Return”.

Limitations of this article include the fact that only newspapers have been used. Many people get their information from other sources such as television, network websites and social media. The conclusions of this research are therefore not necessarily applicable to other forms of media.

Furthermore, this article is limited in the number of newspapers it has analyzed. I did not include for example more politically right- oriented newspapers such as *de Telegraaf*, nor did it include Western newspapers of other countries. Also, it did not include Arab-language newspapers. Lastly it is limited in the “March of Return” related events that it includes. Only the events surrounding March 30 and May 15/16 are included.

However, a relevant analysis is still made about how the Dutch newspapers have dealt with presenting and framing the events surrounding the “March of Return”. This article therefore provides its readers with an important insights that they can take into account when reading on the case of Palestine/Israel whether they support the Israeli or Palestinian side, or are neutral.

Theory

This article will make use of the term “framing” to analyze the way the “March of Return” has been presented in the newspapers. Framing is defined as the ‘process of culling a few

elements of perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights connections among them to promote a particular interpretation'.³ Framing is done through *priming* in which the frame introduces or raises the salience or apparent importance of certain ideas that influence the way an audience interprets the news. It is done through using key-words, stereo-typed images, quotations and sentences.⁴

Framing can lead to *bias*, meaning 'consistent patterns in the framing of mediated communication that promote the influence of one side in conflicts over the use of government power'.⁵ It can also lead to *news slant*, meaning that individual news reports and editorials are characterized by framing that favors one side over the other in a current or political dispute.⁶

Because this article looks at the framing of a dispute external to the Netherlands, the competition for government resources defined in *bias* is not relevant. News slant however, is. The reports on the confrontation around the "March of Return" will be analyzed for their possible favoring one side over the other.

A difference can furthermore be made between 'episodic' and 'thematic' framing, the former focusing on individual examples of big events, and the latter on a particular issue. Analyzing the March of Return gives this research an episodic focus as it is one example of the wider Israeli- Palestine conflict.

Earlier research

Many studies have been done on the coverage of the Israeli- Palestine conflict, many of which conclude that in Western countries prominence is given to the Israeli perspective.

News coverage of the first intifada was done in two researches. A 2002 research that looked at US news coverage (*New York Times* and the Associated press wire service) found that during the intifada of 1987 Palestinians were framed more positive than before and were seen as victims.⁷ A second study on media coverage and the intifada was published in 2004. It used qualitative and quantitative research tools coverage of Palestinian children in several international news outlets. The results showed that Palestinian children have little media

³ Robert M. Entman. 2007. "Framing Bias: Media in the Distribution of Power." *Journal of Communication* 57: 163-173, p. 164

⁴ Robert M. Entman. 1993. "Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm." *Journal of Communication* 43(4): 51-58, p. 52

⁵ Robert M. Entman. 2007. "Framing Bias: Media in the Distribution of Power." p. 166

⁶ Robert M. Entman. 2007. "Framing Bias: Media in the Distribution of Power." p. 165

⁷ John A. Noakes and Karin Gwinn Wilkins. 2002. "Shifting frames of the Palestinian movement in US news." *Media, Culture & Society* 24: 649-671

access and issues relating to them rarely feature in the dominant news narrative despite the privileged position of the Middle East crisis in the selected news outlets.⁸

A study on the representation of Palestinians and Israelis during the first and the second intifada was published in 2010.⁹ It combined content analysis of Flemish daily newspapers and in-depth interviews with journalists to investigate any imbalance and bias in favor of the Israeli point of view. They found the Flemish news offered a balanced view on the two intifadas, although some news outlets clearly favored the Israeli point of view and others the Palestinian.

The second intifada was also subject of a 2009 study that compared news coverage of killings in the *New York Times* and *Chicago Tribune*.¹⁰ Results indicated that both framed Israeli-Palestinian conflict violence in such a way as to legitimate Israeli killings by implicitly justifying Israeli violence and assigning more prominence to the Israeli perspective. Results also suggest that the newspapers de-legitimated Palestinian violence by implicitly condemning Palestinian killings.

A long-term comparative research was published in 2003.¹¹ It focused on the pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian biases by looking at quantitative indicators of news coverage in the *New York Times* and *Ha'aretz* in several time-periods (1987-8, 2000-1, and post- September 11, 2001). It found that the *New York Times* is more favorable toward the Israelis than Palestinians, and that the partiality has become more pronounced with time. *Ha'aretz* is also more favorable toward the Israelis, but less so than the *New York Times*.

A study of 2010 specifically focused on the dichotomy in the US and Israeli news coverage of the Palestinian- Israeli and Fatah- Hamas conflicts in January 2008.¹² It found that although some national narratives on national security influence the reporting on the Israeli- Palestine conflict. Israeli news overtly labeled Palestinians as terrorists which the US news did not.

⁸ Nashat A. Aqtash, Anna Seif and Ahmed Seif. 2004. "Media Coverage of Palestinian Children and the Intifada." *The International Journal for Communications Studies* 66(5): 383-409

⁹ Annelore Deprez and Karin Raeymaeckers. 2010. "Bias in the News?: The Representation of Palestinians and Israelis in the Coverage of the First and Second Intifada." *The International Communication Gazette* 72(1): 91-109

¹⁰ Mohammad Elmasry. 2009. "Death in the Middle East: An analysis of how the New York Times and Chicago Tribune framed killings in the second Palestinian intifada." *Journal of Middle East Media* 5(1): 1-46

¹¹ Matt Viser. 2003. "Attempted Objectivity: An Analysis of the *New York Times* and *Ha'aretz* and Their Portrayals of the Palestinian- Israeli Conflict." *Press/Politics* 8(4): 114-120

¹² Robert L. Handley and Amani Ismail. 2010. "Territory under siege: 'their' news, 'our' news and 'ours both' news of the 2008 Gaza crisis." *Media, War & Conflict* 3(3): 279-297

Furthermore, the news framed Fatah versus Hamas conflict as an “us” versus “them” conflict demonizing the latter.

Two recent studies have been done on the issue of framing in the media of conflict between Israel and Palestine. The first was published in 2011 in Australia.¹³ It examines the relationship between Australian press coverage of and public opinion on the Israel-Palestine conflict using a framing perspective. It is a long term study using almost 10,000 articles of two Australian newspapers: *The Australian* and *Sydney Morning Herald* and measuring public opinion through surveys. Applying content analysis to the articles, the study found that the articles overall did not favor one side over the other, but that they did focus primarily on Israeli settlements at the expense of the issue of Palestinian refugees. Furthermore the conflict was brought as an one between conflicting parties with no historical context or significance of international law. Concerning the public opinion the article found that respondents identified more with the Palestinian narrative.

A research published in 2013 compared the coverage on the Israeli- Palestine case by *Al-Jazeera* and *Al-Arabiya* during the 2008/2009 Gaza conflict and during the subsequent peace.¹⁴ It concludes that both networks used framing mechanisms to highlight Palestinian perspectives over Israeli ones and frame Palestinians as victims of Israeli aggression. It came to this conclusion by doing a comparative content analysis

The news

30- 31 March

On the 31st of March *Trouw* published two articles. The first has as its first sentence: “*Hamas ceases the 70-year existence of Israel as opportunity for protests.*”¹⁵ It continues to describe how Palestinians as being sent by Hamas thus presenting the confrontation as a border confrontation between Hamas and the Israeli Army. Furthermore, it states that “*soldiers said that they were attacked*” and “*shot at the instigators*”, even though it does acknowledge that an underage Palestinian died.

¹³ Eulalia Han and Halim Rane. 2011. “Australian Press and Public Opinion on the Israel- Palestine Conflict.” *Media International Australia* 141: 58- 69

¹⁴ Mohamad Hamas Elmasry, Alaa el Shamy, Peter Manning, Andrew Mills, Philip J. Auter. 2013. “Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya framing of the Israel-Palestine conflict during war and calm periods.” *Journal of Communication Gazette* 75(8): 750-68

¹⁵ “Hamas grijpt het 70-jarig bestaan van Israël aan voor protest. Wie meedoet, stuit op keihard optreden van het leger” (‘Hamas takes the Israeli 70-year birthday as an opportunity for protest. Who joins is confronted with harsh military action’) March 31, 2018

The article also states that Palestinians were driven away from their homes 70 years ago. It does not however, relate this to the cause of the protests which it sees as the fact that Gaza borders are closed. The news article calls the protests a “*new tactic by Hamas*” and claims that “*Hamas demands the return of Palestinians to their land*”. In this last sentence they exclusively claim that Hamas wants Palestinians to return, not Palestinians themselves. It furthermore states that Hamas is a “*radical group*”, which might undermine implicitly the “March of Return” protest tactics and the demand for return. It ends by stating that Israel is “*very concerned*” for more casualties.

The second article¹⁶ repeats the news of the first and adds the international reactions in the United Nations. It described that Palestinians instigators were specifically targeted by the military who they first attacked with burning car-tires, Molotov cocktails and stones. Its states that Israel had warned Palestinians beforehand that they would react the way they did.

In the *NRC Handelsblad*’s article of March 31¹⁷ states that Palestinian protest ended in a “*bloodbath*”. The article describes that the protestors that were a victim to Israeli violence ignored the Israeli demand to stay 700 meters from the border, but that there were also other protestors that did follow the orders. Furthermore, the article specifies that the protests are not a provocation by Hamas, but an initiative for what was meant to be a peaceful protest “*supported largely by the Palestinian population*”. It thereafter provided context information about the history of Gaza and stated that the cause for the protests is for Palestinians to return to the land of their ancestors and raise international awareness on the situation in Gaza.

In March *al-‘arabiyyah al-jadīda* focused more attention on the “March of Return” than the previous two newspapers: two full pages. On the 30th of March it devoted two pages to the preparations and motivations of the “March of Return”, which will take place predominantly in Gaza (six different camps have been set up) but also in the West Bank. The beginning of the march is marked by “land day” commemorating March 30, 1976 when an Israeli announcement to expropriate land led to Palestinian protests and Israeli violence in response killing and wounding many protestors.

It includes in its description the difficult situation Gazanians live in “*under the siege of the occupier*” (Israel) and states that in the Protestors Palestinians from all parties are united.¹⁸

¹⁶ “VN-leider wil onderzoek naar dodelijk geweld Gaza” (‘UN leader wants investigation into deadly violence in Gaza’) March 31, 2018

¹⁷ “Palestijns protest eindigt in bloedbad” (‘Palestinian protest ends in bloodbath’) March 31, 2018

¹⁸ “Masīrat al-‘awda” (‘March of return’) March 30, 2018

Goal of the protestors is the return to Palestinian land (in Israel) and the end of the (Israeli) occupation. The article describes that the protests are intended to be peaceful but that Israel has threatened to use violence not only against protestors who come close to the border, but also against bus companies transporting them.¹⁹

On March 31 *al-‘arabiyyah al-jadīda* states that an Israeli massacre of Palestinians, who they state rightfully protested against Israel, took place at eastern border of Gaza.²⁰ Israeli violence made 14 Palestinians “*martyrs*” and wounded 1300. The article quotes leaders of Fatah and Hamas stating that the “March of Return” unites all Palestinians and sends a clear message to the world that Palestinians will not back down in the fight for their rights. Furthermore, the article mentions that 55 Palestinians were wounded in during protests in the West Bank.

In another article, the newspaper interviews witnesses of the protests. Quotes of the protestors include: “*the longing for our land is stronger than everything else*” and “*we teach our children that the land was robbed by the occupation*”.²¹

15-16 May

Both Dutch newspapers have more articles on the confrontation of May 15 than the start of the “March of Return” on March 30. In *Trouw* the framing of the protest changed from protests against the closed borders, to protests against the moving of the embassy.²² *NRC Handelsblad* mentions the ‘return’ aspect of the “March of return” stating that that the goal of the protests is to return to the land of their parents and grandparents and to gain international awareness of the situation in Gaza.²³

Whilst *Trouw* on March 30 stated that the protests were the complete responsibility of Hamas, it stated on May 15 that while the protests were at first a popular supported initiative it has been “*completely embraced by Hamas*”.²⁴ The newspaper thus adjusted its framing slightly while the *NRC Handelsblad* kept with its claim that the protest was a shared protest by Palestinians with different backgrounds. The *NRC Handelsblad* in its reporting also interviewed and quoted Palestinians that were both against violent confrontations, as well as

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ “Majzara Isrā’īliyya fī yawm al-arḍ” (‘Israeli massacre on Day of the Land’) March 30, 2018

²¹ Kibār wa ṣiḡhār yastathkirūn al-waṭan al-maslūb (‘Old and young remember the stolen land’) March 31, 2018

²² “Massaal protest bij grens Gaza loopt uit op bloedbad” (‘Largescale protests near Gaza border end up in bloodbath’) May 15, 2018

²³ “60 doden, duizenden gewonden” (‘60 deaths, thousands wounded’) May 15, 2018

²⁴ “Massaal protest bij grens Gaza loopt uit op bloedbad” (‘Largescale protests near Gaza border end up in bloodbath’) May 15, 2018

people who did use violence.²⁵ They thus provided a more nuanced view of the protestors than *Trouw* who pictured the Palestinian protestors as violent youths destroying Israeli farmland, who want to enter and take over Israel, and who are sent by but disappointed in Hamas.²⁶

Following these viewpoints, *Trouw* states very explicitly that Hamas and the Israeli military share responsibility for the Palestinian casualties.²⁷ It painted Palestinian protestors as people who were sent by Hamas and who take pleasure in singing battle songs and sending burning kites across the border even though they knew they would be met with violence if they would come close to the Israeli border.²⁸

This is especially true when looking at the quotes of Israeli citizens in the *Trouw* that among other say about the Palestinian protestors “*They are making a party out of it*” (referring to the battle songs), “*rotten- Arabs*”, and “*We gave them land when we left Gaza, and this is what we get in return.*”²⁹ The quotations by *Trouw* of Palestinian protestors verify their violent actions: “*Thanks to us the ground there is burning*”.³⁰ But they also frame the youth as dying for Hamas and disappointed by the Hamas leadership: “*The leaders need martyrs*” and “*We helped you in the war of 2014, now it is your turn to help us*”.³¹

In the *NRC Handelsblad* responsibility for the deaths is not linked to Hamas. Direct cause of the deaths were Israeli firing at protestors who “according to them” (e.g. the Israeli Military) came too close to the Israeli border and the use of teargas. The newspaper even defined the Israeli military actions as a “*bloody repression of the Palestinian protestors in the Gaza-strip*”.³²

NRC Handelsblad mentions the death of innocent Palestinians such as an eight month old baby and two journalists. The newspaper does mention that “Israel” accuses Hamas of using

²⁵ “60 doden, duizenden gewonden” (‘60 deaths, thousands wounded’) May 15, 2018

²⁶ “Massaal protest bij grens Gaza loopt uit op bloedbad” (‘Largescale protests near Gaza border end up in bloodbath’) and “Op de kibboets aan de grens met Gaza brandt het graan” (‘On the Kibbutz next to the Gaza border, the corn is burning’) May 15, 2018

²⁷ “Een verjaardag met een rouwrand” (‘A birthday with a mourning’) May 16, 2018

²⁸ “Op de kibboets aan de grens met Gaza brandt het graan” (‘On the Kibbutz next to the Gaza border, the corn is burning’) May 15, 2018

²⁹ “Op de kibboets aan de grens met Gaza brandt het graan” (‘On the Kibbutz next to the Gaza border, the corn is burning’) May 15, 2018

³⁰ “Hamas trekt zich terug, maar het protest is niet over” (‘Hamas pulls back, but the protest is not over’) May 16, 2018

³¹ Ibid.

³² “Kloof tussen VS en Europa in reactie op bloedbad Gaza” (‘Gap between the US and Europe in their reaction Gaza bloodbath’) May 15, 2018

protestors as human shields, and quotes Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu saying: “*Our brave soldiers are defending the borders of Israel.*”³³ Other than *Trouw*, the *NRC Handelsblad* focuses on the legal aspect of Israeli violence at the Gaza Israeli border. It devotes an entire article on the violation of international law by Israeli violence in which it quotes two human rights organizations: Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.³⁴

Like *Trouw*, the *NRC Handelsblad* quotes both Palestinians and Israeli’s, but their quotation differs. It provides the Israeli perspective by quoting Israeli citizens supporting the moving of the American embassy. The quotes include primarily positive comments on Trump, but on the issue of the violence in Gaza one quote says: “*Hamas is stirring up people, and if you breach through a border, there will be deaths.*”³⁵

Where *Trouw* framed the Palestinian protestors as proud of their violence the quotes of the *NRC Handelsblad* frame the Palestinian protestors as citizens who, if they are not dying quickly by Israeli bullets, are dying slowly by the dire situation they live in. Quotes include: “*we have nothing to lose*” and “*Nobody cares about us, they want us to die slowly.*”³⁶ Furthermore, the newspaper devoted an article on the experience of Palestinian protestors.³⁷ In it the day after the many deaths of Monday May 14 are described, the day when many of the dead were buried and many wounded laid in hospital beds. The article quotes a 13-year old boy who protested (“*we want our land*”) and got wounded, but they also quoted his mother who disagreed with her son’s protesting (“*So, did they give it to you?*”).

The article describes overfull hospitals and quotes wounded Palestinians. It also describes that Egypt will open its borders so that severely wounded can receive treatment in Egypt, and stated that at the border with Erez in Israel (North of Gaza) Israeli ambulances brought severely wounded to hospitals in Israel and in the West Bank, showing a side of Israel that was not mentioned in *Trouw*.

The *NRC Handelsblad* also shed light on international opinions on the Gaza-Israel occupation. It stated that while the United States stands behind Israel and lays full

³³ “60 doden, duizenden gewonden” (‘60 deaths, thousands wounded’) May 15, 2018

³⁴ “Internationaal recht met voeten getreden in Gaza” (‘International law violated in Gaza’) May 16, 2018

³⁵ “Fijn om te weten dat we nog vrienden hebben” (‘Nice to know we still have friends’) 15 May, 2018

³⁶ “60 doden, duizenden gewonden” (‘60 deaths, thousands wounded’) May 15, 2018

³⁷ “Daar is de drone weer. Rennen!” (‘The drone is back. Run!’) May 16, 2018

responsibility for the deaths with Hamas, European leaders carefully criticize the Israeli government.³⁸

Al-‘Arabī al- Jadīd, as was the case in March, devoted more articles in its newspaper to the Palestinian- Israeli confrontations. On the 15th of May the newspaper harshly criticized Israel for its massacre of Palestinians in the occupied territories and criticizes the international community for not intervening in preventing Israeli violence.³⁹ It explicitly criticizes Arabic and Islamic countries who left “*Palestinians in Gaza to face the Israeli occupation alone*” which it considers as a result of American and Israeli politics that keeps them busy with other cases such as Syria.⁴⁰ The newspaper also mentions several countries that did condemn the violence such as Turkey and on May 16 it devotes an article to non-Arab countries calling for an investigation into the Palestinian massacre.⁴¹

Interviews were done with protestors who said their means of protest were peaceful.⁴² Furthermore, not only the protests in Gaza are mentioned, but also protests in the West Bank and Jerusalem as well as protests against “*Israeli occupation*” outside of Palestine, such as in London, England.⁴³

On May 16 *al-‘Arabī al-Jadīd* in an article focuses on the effects of the “*slaughter*” mentioning the burials of the “*martyrs*” and innocent children, the full hospitals and empty streets, and the Israeli snipers who are still guarding the border with Gaza.⁴⁴

The news articles continuously reference the Nakba thus linking the confrontations of 15 May 2018 to its historical context. This was explicitly done in a 5-page supplement on the Nakba and the Palestinian- Israeli confrontation that accompanied the newspaper of May 15. It refers to the Nakba as the day an entire population was deprived of its human rights and as a day

³⁸ “Kloof tussen VS en Europa in reactie op bloedbad Gaza” (‘Gap between the US and Europe in their reaction Gaza bloodbath’) May 15, 2018

³⁹ “Majzara Ghaza, filastīn tatahaddī al-Nakba wahīdatan al-ālāf al-ḍahāyā” (‘Massacre in Gaza, Palestina challenges the Nakba alone, thousands of deaths’) May 15, 2018

⁴⁰ “Ghaza wahīdan tuwājih wahshiyat al-ihtilāl” (‘Gaza faces the cruelty of the occupation alone’ May 16, 2018

⁴¹ “Ijmā’ duqalī ‘alā al-tahqīq bi-mazr’a ghaza” (‘International consensus on investigation into Gaza massacre’) May 16, 2018

⁴² “Mushāhadāt min milyūniyat al-Nakba: lasnā huwāh mawt” (‘Scens from the Nakba milion: we do not love death’) May 15, 2018

⁴³ “al-Nakbah fī thikrāha al-saba‘īn” (‘70-year remembrance of the Nakba’) May 15, 2018

⁴⁴ “Filastīn taghraq bi-ṣadmat al-mathbaḥa” (‘Palestine drowns in the silence of the massacre’) May 16, 2018

that will never be forgotten by Palestinians⁴⁵ and as a war crime that has been ongoing for 7 decades.⁴⁶

Table 1: March 30 – 31

	Trouw	NRC Handelsblad	Al-‘Arabī al-Jadīd
Cause and goal of “March of Return”	“ Hamas sends protestors”, “Against the closed borders”	“Dire situation of Gazians”, “gain international awareness for situation in Gaza”	“commemorate Land Day”, “Return to Palestinian land (in Israel)”, “stand for Palestinian rights”, “end the occupation”
Support for the March of Return	“ Hamas”	“Palestinian population”	“Palestinian movement”, “ Hamas”, “Fatah”, “all Palestinians”
Cause of violence	“Palestinian (Hamas) instigators”	“Protestors not following orders”	“protestors met with violence”
Cause of Deaths	“Palestinian instigators met with specific Israeli response”	“Israeli response to protestors not following their orders”	“Israeli violence”, “gas-bombs”
Israeli side	“Israeli Military”	“Israeli Military”	“Occupying force”
Palestinian Side	“ Hamas as a radical group”, “Palestinians”, “Instigators”	“Palestinians”, “Protestors”	“the Palestinian movement”, “united in the movement”, “victims”, “martyrs”, “civilians”, “Peaceful”

⁴⁵ “Shāba fī al- saba‘īn” (‘Young at 70’) May 15, 2018

⁴⁶ “al-Nakba... jarīmat ḥarb mustamirra munthu 7 ‘uqūd” (‘the Nakba... War crime ongoing for 7 decades’) May 15, 2018

Table 2: May 15 – 16

	Trouw	NRC Handelsblad	Al-‘Arabī al-Jadīd
Cause and Goal of “March of Return”	“Moving of the American Embassy”, “Call by Hamas to protest”	“Series of Protests” “return of Palestinians to the villages and cities of their parents and grandparents”, “International awareness on situation in Gaza”	“commemorate Nakba”, “demanding their rights which is to return (to Palestinian land in Israel)”, “end the occupation”
Support for the March of Return	“Popular protest turned into Hamas-led protest”	“violent and non-violent protest”,	“All Palestinians”, “In Gaza, West Bank and Jerusalem”,
Cause of Violence	“Israel aims to avoid massive influx Palestinians”	“Israeli answer to largescale protest”	“there are no consequences for Israeli violence”
Cause of Deaths	“responsibility for deaths shared between Hamas (radical terrorist group) and Israeli army”	“unproportioned Israeli action”, “Drones, teargas, bullets”, “Bloody repression by Israel of Palestinians”	“Israeli violence”, “Israeli snipers”, “massacre”, “slaughter”, “International community also responsible”
Israeli side	“Israeli Military”, “disappointed citizens”, “unproportioned violence”, “democratic nation”	“Israeli Military”, “Violence”, “citizens in support of Trump”,	“occupier”, “perpetrator of Human Rights”
Palestinian Side	“Radical terrorist organization Hamas”, “Protestors”, “Citizens manipulated by and supporting Hamas”, “Poor and uneducated”	“People from different backgrounds”, “Protestors”, “poor and uneducated” “supporting and not supporting violence”	“Martyrs”, “occupied territories”, “victims”
Additional Information	Editorial comment	Human Rights organizations on Israeli Violence and International law	Supplement on the Nakba and the history of Palestine

Analysis

Comparison

We can see a discrepancy in the way the confrontation of March 30 is described by the two Dutch newspapers. *NRC Handelsblad* agrees with *Trouw* in stating that Palestinians protestors disobeyed the Israeli orders, but also provides a context by saying that many did follow. While *Trouw* writes on March 31 that Hamas is responsible for the protests, they changed their writing on May 15 and 16 into saying the protests enjoy popular support. However, they do frame the protests as mainly organized by the “*radical group Hamas who wants to return*” as one of their “*new tactics*” while the *NRC Handelsblad* focuses more on the fact that people feel forced to protest because of the dire situation they live in. Therefore the *Trouw* mainly focuses on the violence of the Palestinian protestors and the *NRC Handelsblad* focusses both on violent and non-violent protestors and less on Hamas.

al-‘Arabī al-Jadīd differs from both Dutch newspapers. It does mention that Israel had warned Palestinian protestors not to come close to the border between Israel and Gaza, but it does not see the fact that Palestinians disobeyed the Israeli threat as a provocation. Rather, it frames Israeli violence within the broader Israeli policy of occupation of Palestine. Concerning the protestors, the newspaper states that these enjoy popular support by all Palestinians and Palestinian parties, both inside and outside Gaza. It clearly describes Palestinians as a people who are deprived of their basic Human Rights by the “*occupying force Israel*” and therefore rightfully protest. It focusses less on violence of Palestinians during the protests and more on the background motives of the protestors. Interviews thus include the view of Palestinians before, during and after the protests the pain and sorrow of living under “*Israeli siege*”.

Concerning the goals of the protests, *Trouw* switches their framing. While on the March 31 they state that the protestors protest the closed borders between Gaza and Israel, on the 16th of March they state that the protestors demonstrate against the opening of the American embassy. While this is true, it is only part of the reason for protesting, for the march is called “*March of Return*” because the main goal of the protestors is the return to the land of their ancestors. The *NRC Handelsblad* does articulate this latter fact and adds that Palestinians also want to raise international awareness about their situation. *Al-‘Arabī al-Jadīd* mentions the goal of the protests being first the “*rightful return*” of Palestinians to their land, and, second a reminder to the world that the Palestinian case is still living and that Gaza citizens will stand for their rights.

Referring to the violence used by Israel and the resulting deaths of Palestinians, *Trouw* frames the responsibility of loss of lives as shared between Hamas and the Israeli military. It frames Israeli violence as necessary to avoid Palestinian violence supported by Hamas from entering Israeli territory. Furthermore the newspaper does not focus much on what kind of Palestinian casualties fell during the protests, especially non-violent casualties. While the *NRC Handelsblad* mentions the death of an 8-month old baby and two journalists, *Trouw* states that “according to Palestinians, children died”, thus not presenting it as a fact but through a quote. *Al-‘Arabī al-Jadīd* puts the responsibility of Palestinian deaths on Israel for using violence, but also on the international, including Arab and Muslim nations, because they did not do anything to prevent the violence. In its articles it mentions the deaths of children and it terms the Israeli violence as a “massacre” and a “slaughtering”. Furthermore, its terminology differs from the other newspapers: it does not refer to Palestinian deaths as deaths, but as “martyrs”, meaning that they died standing for what they believe in, namely return to “Palestine”.

Both Dutch newspapers use quotes that shape both the Palestinian and Israeli side. *Trouw* quotes Israeli citizens who live close the border with Gaza and who are framed as being victimized by Hamas. Israeli citizens are also quoted by the *NRC Handelsblad* but in that case they are framed as Trump supporters because he moved the American embassy to Jerusalem. The Palestinians quoted by *Trouw* are proud of their violence and are described to only want Israeli disappearance, while the *NRC Handelsblad* also quotes Palestinians who are against violent Palestinian protest. *Al-‘Arabī al-Jadīd* does not quote the Israeli side of the conflict. It does extensively quote Palestinians both inside and outside Gaza which frames them as victims of “the occupier”, as standing for their rights, and as durable resistance.

Another difference between the newspapers is that the *Trouw* wrote a clear editorial comment articulating “the view of the newspaper” in which it explicitly states that Hamas being a radical terrorist organization sent its citizens into death because it knew that Israel would react with violence to demonstrators. It does acknowledge that Israeli violence did not comply with international law, but nevertheless is the only “democratic country in the region”. *NRC Handelsblad* added an analysis of the violence by two international Human Rights organizations in which the Israeli actions are condemned by reference to international law. *Al-‘Arabī al-Jadīd* included a 5-page supplement on 70 years after the Nakba in which it interviews Palestinians and reflects on the development of Palestine after the establishment of Israel in 1948. In it the newspaper also quotes Palestinians on the “March of Return” protests.

Theory

Although framing does not always necessarily imply a lack of fairness, it does often characterize people or events, either negatively or positively. Similar to the results of the 2010 study of Handley and Amani Ismail on the “us” them “dichotomy”, *Trouw* also framed the Palestinian side of the conflict as “them”, being violent instigators who do not follow orders. This framing also includes the quoting of Israeli citizens negatively through terminology such as “rotten Arabs”. This can be seen as an anti-Palestinian bias and as the use of stereotypes and damaging language.

NRC Handelsblad neutralized the characterization of Palestinians as “them” by offering different Palestinians a voice. As such Palestinians and Palestinian protestors were quoted that were both for and against the use of violence. However, *Trouw* focused on the Israeli civilians who felt victimized by Palestinians and by Hamas, the *NRC Handelsblad* kept to a framing of Israel as powerful military force. This, in combination with the condemnation of Israeli violence, could be argued as being an anti-Israeli bias.

Al-‘Arabī al-Jadīd frames Israel as being the clear “them”, using aggressor words such as “occupation force”, “slaughter” and “massacre”. Palestinians are framed as “us” by the newspaper by articles identifying with the Palestinians. Palestinians are described as “rightful” and “victims”. Furthermore, the newspaper does not interview Israelis on their take on the conflict.

Framing can also be used to legitimize certain actions. In the case of the framing of the “March of Return” in the *Trouw* newspaper, the demonizing of Hamas as radical terrorist organization and as the driving force behind the violence and subsequent deaths of demonstrators partly legitimizes Israeli military action. *Trouw* also explicitly shares the opinion of its newspaper in the editorial comment. In it, it states that Israel is the only democratic country in the region thus implicitly legitimizing its use of violence. *NRC Handelsblad* oppose this legitimization of the use of Israeli violence by condemning it as a “bloody repression” and by interviewing international law and Human Rights specialists concluding that the Israeli violence was out of proportion and illegal. *Al-‘Arabī al-Jadīd* also opposed this legitimization and harshly criticizes Israeli violent action. It also criticizes the international community for not intervening in the Israeli violence, something the two Dutch newspapers do not do. *Al-‘Arabī al-Jadīd* legitimizes the Palestinian protests by calling it their right to claim “their land” back thus providing a moral opinion on the Israeli as the wrongdoer, and Palestinians as being rightful.

All newspapers mention the dire situation citizens live in Gaza. *NRC Handelsblad* does this more extensively than *Trouw* by interviewing and quoting more Palestinians and by explaining the “March of Return” as related to the situation in Gaza. *Trouw*, also mentions the dire situation in Gaza but states that that is no reason for attacking Israel, especially because of the role of Hamas in creating the living conditions. *Al-‘Arabī al-Jadīd* mentions the living condition in Gaza the most by continuously referring to life of Palestinians under Israeli siege. It also provides more historical and political context that the two Dutch newspapers describing in more detail the Nakba, Land Day (March 30, 1976) and protests outside of Gaza. Also, it describes in more details than the other newspapers where the protests took place. While *Trouw* and *NRC Handelsblad* only mention there were protests on near the border between Gaza and Israel, *Al-‘Arabī al-Jadīd* mentions in what region of Gaza the protests took place, as well as Palestinian protests in the West-Bank and Jerusalem.

Explanatory factors

The website of the Dutch government has devoted a page to the political relationship between the Netherlands and Israel which it defines as: broad and good. Many Dutch and Israeli companies, and cultural and social organizations work closely together. Furthermore, the Netherlands intensively communicates with Israel about the peace process between Israel and Palestine and about Human Rights. Concerning the peace process, the Netherlands supports a two-state solution.

The economic and political relationship between the Netherlands and Israel could be the reason that both newspaper do not harshly criticize Israeli military action, although the *NRC Handelsblad* does so more than *Trouw*.

Religious background of *Trouw* and liberal background of *NRC Handelsblad* can offer an explanation. Ties between Christians and Israel are close, as could be seen by the role of evangelical Christian Pastors Jaffress and Hagee, at the opening of the American embassy in Jerusalem. In an article on May 22, *Trouw* published an article on the relationship between Christians and Israel.⁴⁷ In this article it quotes a Dutch pastor saying that the violence in Gaza is a biblical prophecy. It also states that orthodox- protestant churches in the Netherlands all

⁴⁷ Trouw. 2018. “Voor miljoenen Christenen brengt Trump het einde der tijden dichterbij.” <https://www.trouw.nl/religie-en-filosofie/conservatieve-christenen-trumps-steun-aan-israel-bevordert-de-wederkomst-van-christus~afe31c55/?> (22 May 2018, last accessed 5 June 2018)

share a love for Israel. *Trouw*, which started as a Christian newspaper, states on its website that their religious background still influences their news reporting.⁴⁸

The fact that *al-‘Arabī al-Jadīd* supports the Palestinian point of view agrees with the earlier mentioned results of the 2013 study by Elmasry and el Shamy. The Arabic newspaper more extensively reports on the Palestinian-Israel confrontation than the two Dutch newspapers. Furthermore, their reporting is in favor of Palestinians and opposes Israel. This can be explained by the fact that the Palestinian case is one that the Arab world strongly relates to emotionally. Seeing Israel as perpetrator and Palestinians as victims thus largely agrees with the opinion of the Arab speaking public.

Conclusion

Both Dutch newspapers do criticize Israeli violence the way the Arabic newspaper did, although both acknowledge that it is un-proportioned and in the case of the *NRC Handelsblad* illegal under international law. Both Dutch newspapers also acknowledge the fact that Palestinian protestors ignored Israeli orders, something the Arabic newspaper disagrees with. This latter frames Israel as the sole perpetrator, and Palestinians as the sole victims.

The differences in framing will leave the reader of each newspaper with different opinions on the Israeli- Palestinian confrontations during the “March of Return”. The reader of *Trouw* will be left with the impression that Palestinians in Gaza adhere to the Hamas and its terrorist tactics which is why they attacked the border with Israel. They will see Hamas as wanting Israeli land and that Israel, in attempting to protect its borders, fired specifically on provoking Palestinian instigators.

The reader of the *NRC Handelsblad* will believe that the “March of Return” is made up of Palestinians with different backgrounds and is based on historical grievances and an unattainable situation in Gaza. They will agree with *Trouw* readers that some Palestinian protestors did provoke the Israeli military by not following their order, but they will at the same time argue that Israeli violence was un-proportioned and illegal since it also killed many peaceful protestors.

The reader of *al-‘Arabī al-Jadīd* will largely disagree with the other two readers and will state that Israel has for 70 years deprived Palestinians from their rights and their land, they will

⁴⁸ Trouw. “Over Ons.” <https://www.trouw.nl/overons/>, last accessed on 31 May 2018

consider the “March of Return” as a rightful protest and the Israeli action as unacceptable but in line with constant Israeli occupation.

Without concluding which frame is right or wrong (I trust in the reader’s abilities) this research shows that even though each of the newspapers state they are independent, their readers will each have a different opinion on the “March of return” showing that they are influenced a certain ideology.

The danger herein lies in the moral judgement that news sources make, especially dichotomous moral judgements, which nihilate the “other’s” legitimacy and prevent any dialogue. In a world where factors like Facebook-likes determine the ideological “news-bubble” in which one lives, it becomes all the more important for the individual to actively gather news from sources with different ideological backgrounds, even those that are far from one’s ideological point of view.

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