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Orientalism and the Discourse on Israel/Palestine

A Discourse Analysis of the Representation of the Israel-Palestine
Conflict in Germany after October 7th

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“All knowledge that is about human society, and not about the natural world, is historical knowledge, and therefore rests upon judgment and interpretation. This is not to say that facts or data are nonexistent, but that facts get their importance from what is made of them in interpretation... for interpretations depend very much on who the interpreter is, who he or she is addressing, what his or her purpose is, at what historical moment the interpretation takes place.”

— Edward Said (1981)

Abstract

This study explores the German discourse on the Israel-Palestine conflict since October 7th. It does so by analyzing the discourse that was created by the symbolic elites who were invited to two of the most popular debate shows in German broadcasting. Discourse theory provides the theoretical framework. Discourse analysis guides the analytical framework but is coupled with a concrete method, namely thematic analysis. I transcribe and code a total of 14 debate shows. Thematic analysis is applied to explore the meaning of the data. The concept of Orientalism helps to illustrate that misrepresentations about the conflict and about the MENA region are persistent in the German discourse. The Arab world is perceived as backwards and emotional, while Israel is perceived as facing an existential threat. This study furthermore explores the ideological and historical roots of this misrepresentation. Zionism fundamentally shapes what is known about the history of the Israel-Palestine conflict. This can be explained through the unique German ideology that coupled its historical responsibility for the Holocaust with unconditional support for the state of Israel. In the current discourse this results in an emphasis on national pride, and a sense of virtue and moral superiority towards both Arabs and the UN. “They” are antisemitic and need to learn from “Us” because “We” know and have overcome antisemitism. This study reveals that Orientalism still proves to be an insightful framework to understand Western discourse about the MENA region.

Keywords: Israel, Palestine, Discourse, Orientalism, Germany

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II. Abbreviations

ARD - Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Main channel of German Broadcasting)

BDS – Boycott, Divest, Sanctions (movement)

CDU – Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands (Christian Democratic Union Germany)

FDP – Freie Demokratische Partei (Free Democratic Party)

Hamas - Ḥarakat al-muqāwama al-islāmiyya (Islamic Resistance Movement)

ICJ – International Court of Justice

IDF – Israel Defense Forces

ISIS – Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

MENA – Middle East and Northern Africa

MES – Middle East Studies

SPD – Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany)

TA – Thematic Analysis

UK – United Kingdom

UN – United Nations

US – United States

WWII – World War 2

ZDF – Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (Second German television)

1. Introduction

Over the past six months, the Israel-Palestine conflict has escalated on an unprecedented scale. On October 7th, Hamas attacked Israeli territory. Hamas killed around 1,200 people, mostly Israelis, and took 240 hostages (Reuters, 2023). In retaliation, Israel started a massive bombing campaign on Gaza that continues at the time of writing. The devastation that this created has not been witnessed in recent conflicts. Within 100 days, Israeli bombs killed around 24,000 people. Furthermore, 60,000 Palestinians have been wounded and 1.9 million people (85% of the population) have been displaced (Associated Press, 2024). This brutal attack, combined with the targeting of civilian infrastructure and repeated calls from Israeli politicians to wipe out the Gazan population, led South Africa to accuse Israel of committing genocide in front of the International Court of Justice (van den Berg & Deutsch, 2024). As reflected in the UN General Assembly voting behavior in December 2023, a large majority of countries worldwide condemn Israel's actions and demand an immediate ceasefire (UN, 2023). However, many Western European powers, as well as the US, either abstained or vetoed the resolution for a ceasefire. The US and Germany in particular continue to back Israel by sending weapons which are used to flatten Gaza (Alkousaa, 2024; Hudson, 2024).

In order to carry out these policies, governments to some extent must legitimize their actions to the public. Especially in democratic contexts, language becomes an important tool for legitimizing state policy (e.g. Holland, 2013). While authoritarian governments may enforce their will by coercion, for example through the threat of violence, democratic governments must instead promote consent by shaping public opinion (e.g. Herman & Chomsky, 1988). Hence, the events that occur in Gaza are closely connected to the representations about the MENA region that are produced in the West. It thus becomes important to investigate how the Israel-Palestine conflict is represented and how knowledge is produced to reinforce this representation.

Historically, degrading tropes such as the inherently violent and conflict-ridden nature of the MENA region have been invoked to justify intervention in the region. These dynamics have been traced in depth by Edward Said (1978) in his seminal

work, *Orientalism*. In it, he argues that the Orient is a discursive construct that exists in relation to the Occident, or the West, rather than as a geographical reality.¹ While, according to Said, both concepts have no ontological stability and are made-up human constructs, they serve to identify The Self in contrast to The Other. These discursive constructions are reproduced on all levels of society, in arts, science, politics as well as media. By creating a monolithic representation of the backward Orient, Orientalist discourse legitimizes the domination over the MENA region (ibid.). Ever since Said wrote this book nearly half a century ago, there have been countless instances of Western intervention in the MENA region, which resulted in massive bloodshed, mostly among the indigenous populations. Hence, while Said wrote *Orientalism* in the context of French and British colonialism, I will explore to what extent his ideas remain relevant for understanding contemporary political events that take place in the MENA region, in this case, the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Arguably, nowhere does the unapologetic support for Israel's bombing campaign on Gaza become more apparent than in Germany. In the weeks after October 7th, Germany witnessed an unprecedented crackdown on pro-Palestinian protests (Marsh, 2023). This campaign made no exceptions for Jewish voices, as was seen at the Berlinale 2024, when Israeli filmmaker Yuval Abraham was accused of antisemitism for mentioning the discrimination that his Palestinian co-producer Basel Adra experiences every day. German cultural minister Claudia Roth, who was seen clapping during their speech, defended herself by emphasizing that she only clapped for the Israeli filmmaker (Oltermann, 2024). Hence, understanding the Orientalist discourse in Germany is particularly significant for two reasons. Firstly, because of its current crackdown on Palestinian perspectives and secondly because of the historical role that Germany played in the emergence of the state of Israel in the first place by committing a genocide against European Jews.

¹ Whenever it is referred to "The West" it can be used synonymous with "The Occident". I will refer to the West at times because it is more widely used. The crucial point is that both concepts are human-made constructs.

1.1. Research Aim & Research Questions

The aim of my research is to explore how the concept of Orientalism helps to explain the German discourse on the Israel-Palestine conflict since October 7th. I will do so by analyzing the two most popular debate shows in German broadcasting. They provide an arena in which politicians as well as journalists and experts meet and exchange ideas, therefore shaping discourse. Thus, I aim to investigate how they portray the events since October 7th. However, this discourse did not start on October 7th. Since representation is highly dependent on the historical and ideological context of the case in question, these two dimensions are crucial to gain a deeper understanding of why the representation becomes salient in the first place. Hence, the knowledge production about the history of the conflict and the ideological foundation of this knowledge needs to be investigated as well. This research aim then results in the development of three interrelated research questions:

1. How does Orientalism shape the discourse formation of the Israel-Palestine conflict in Germany after October 7th?
2. How is historical knowledge produced in order to legitimize this Orientalist discourse?
3. What does this knowledge production reveal about the ideological foundations of the Orientalist discourse in Germany?

1.2. Disposition

I begin by reviewing the relevant literature to answer the introduced research questions. In doing so, I explore the literature that critically investigates the knowledge production about the MENA region, the literature that analyzes the role of the media in constructing representations of the MENA region, and the literature that specifically analyzes representations of the Israel-Palestine conflict.

I continue by introducing the theoretical framework that serves to guide this study. Discourse theory emphasizes the importance of language to construct the

social world. Inspired by Foucault, Gramsci, Hall and Laclau and Mouffe, this framework emphasizes the relationship between discourse, power, knowledge, and ideology. Additionally, I introduce the key concepts that serve to specify these rather abstract terms in the context of the MENA region. Those are Orientalism and War Narratives.

In the next section I clarify my methodological approach. Firstly, I show what implications discourse theory has on my methodological approach. Secondly, I illustrate why and how thematic analysis serves as a useful method to make sense of my data. Thirdly, I explain how I collected my data, before clarifying how I coded it in NVivo. Lastly, I situate myself in relation to the study by highlighting my positionality.

The following analysis is divided into two sections. The first section aims to explain how the participants in the debate shows construct an Orientalist discourse in order to make sense of October 7th. The second section then investigates how this discourse is possible in the first place. It firstly explores how meaning is created by tracing the ideological underpinnings of the knowledge that is produced to explain the history of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Secondly, it traces the historical roots of the German belief system that makes this knowledge production possible.

Finally, I conclude by summarizing my findings, discussing the limitations of this study and considering potential avenues for future research.

2. Literature Review

In order to explore the Orientalist discourse surrounding the Israel-Palestine conflict after October 7th, it is necessary to situate the study in the academic literature that has been produced on the topic. The research problem touches upon fundamental questions about the relation between knowledge production in the West about the MENA region. Hence, the first section highlights the literature that has critically investigated how knowledge about the MENA region has been produced. The second section then shines a light on the important role that media plays in making knowledge about the MENA region available for a broad audience. Finally, I review

the literature on knowledge production and media representation of the Israel-Palestine conflict.

2.1 Knowledge and the MENA Region

Edward Said (1978), in his groundbreaking work *Orientalism*, fundamentally criticizes the knowledge production in the West in order to construct what he calls the *Orient*. According to him, academics, writers, and politicians, instead of creating objective facts about the Orient, produce a representation that has less to do with the cultural realities that exist in this region and more with the reinforcement of a discourse that aims to dominate the Orient. This criticism sparked intense debates about the nature of knowledge, how it relates to power, and how it influences the way that the West perceives societies in the MENA region.

While Said focuses on knowledge production in colonial France and Britain, the ideas of his work have spawned a body of literature that emphasizes contemporary contexts. In the context of the US, two comprehensive books have been written by Zachary Lockman (2010; 2016). In *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The history of Orientalism* (2010) he traces broad trends of Western popular and scholarly representations of the MENA region. He concludes that Orientalist stereotypes are prevalent and justify intervention in and domination of societies in the MENA region. Drawing on these findings, in his book *Field Notes: The Making of Middle East Studies in the United States* (2016), he illustrates this trend by concretely investigating the trajectory of Middle Eastern Studies (MES) as an academic field. While emphasizing the importance of the Cold War in producing state-funded research about the MENA region, thus in producing knowledge that is useful for the government, he further complicates this by considering the imagination of the MENA region that led to the rise of MES in the first place. He argues that the contours of MES are fundamentally shaped by a complex interplay between academia and politics, thus shaping Western understanding of the MENA region.

This critical inquiry into the connection between knowledge and representations of the MENA region led scholars of the field to fundamentally reassess the relationship of power and knowledge in the context of the MENA region. Shami

and Miller-Idriss (2016) published *Middle East Studies for the New Millennium*, a comprehensive volume that traces the interplay of politics and academic knowledge production about the MENA region from 2000 to 2010. This period marks a crucial timeframe in the field because of the events of 9/11 and its aftermath that still echo today. In it, Makdisi (2016) argues, that despite a more critical engagement with the MENA region since *Orientalism* was published, many stereotypes that depict the innocent America against the depravity of Islam are still very persistent, especially in popular culture, and academic circles that continue to support the notion of a clash of civilizations. The emerging critical academic output was strongly contested after 9/11. As Shami and Godoy-Anativia (2016) explore, the impact of 9/11 on knowledge production about the MENA region triggered an immense backlash on critical research, leaving academics to feel uncertain about the future of the field. By focusing on the themes of campus surveillance and public criticism of the field, they conclude that the securitization of knowledge constitutes a big challenge to the field of MES. The securitization of knowledge has also been confirmed by Kasaba (2016). With the initiation of the so-called War on Terror in 2003, “the Department of Homeland Security and the National Security Agency have jointly created twelve Homeland Security Centers of Excellence at six universities with grants that approach a total of \$100 million” (ibid., p. 101). At the same time, publicly and privately funded watchdog groups were established to monitor the knowledge production in the field of MES. The argument about attacks on academic freedom is further discussed by Gendzier (2016). By the example of the US invasion of Iraq, she argues that ignorance about the MENA region is a strategic asset for US policymakers. Jarvis (2009) and Holland (2013) both emphasize the importance of language in order to legitimize the War on Terror. In this context, Gendzier also emphasizes the media’s complicity by pushing the US government’s disinformation and using military analysts as news commentators. The role of the media in the production of knowledge will be explored in detail in the following section. Gendzier argues that such a climate creates enormous pressure on universities, who then are pushed to endorse rather than contest foreign policy in order to avoid criticism and funding cuts.

Despite these challenges to the production of knowledge about the MENA region, Bayat and Herrera (2021) argue for an understanding of the region that goes beyond its portrayal as a homogenous entity. They argue that in an increasingly globalized world, it is not sufficient to view it as an insular region. The overlap of complex identities, ideologies and movements negate the validity of simplistic stereotypes. Given the events of October 7th, which are the subject of this study, it is reasonable to question whether the narratives about complexity of the region described by Bayat and Herrera are sufficient to contest conventional knowledge or if Said's initial argument about the discursive construction of the Orient in order to dominate it is still very much in place. Since the media inherits a key role in the production of these discourses, it forms an essential part of my analysis and will be explored in the following section.

2.2 Media Representation and the MENA region

The media takes on a pivotal role in actively shaping our understanding of the world (e.g. Gurevitch et al., 1982). Chomsky and Herman (1988) highlight the importance of the media in what they call "manufacturing consent". By dissecting news coverage on different conflicts, they illustrate how the US media has become complicit in legitimizing US foreign policy by doing selective reporting. Hence, they show that the political and media landscapes are deeply intertwined. In the process of shaping our belief systems, language becomes an important subject. Teun Van Dijk (1991), in his book *Racism and the Press*, argues that media discourse plays an important role in constructing and reinforcing racist stereotypes. These representations then reflect existing power structures within societies. Like Herman and Chomsky, Van Dijk illustrates that these goals are achieved through selective reporting and framing strategies.

Said (1981) explores this process in the context of the representation of the MENA region. In his book *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts determine how we see the Rest of the World*, he argues that the Western media presents a biased and distorted representation of Islam. According to him, Islam is only discussed in the context of conflicts and terrorism, while leaving aside the rich cultural

history of the region. Said emphasizes that those who control the media are very powerful because of their ability to shape belief systems. Drawing on Said's work, John Richardson (2004), in his book *(Mis)representing Islam: The racism and rhetoric of British broadsheet newspapers*, offers an impactful and comprehensive account of British media reporting on issues broadly related to Islam. Analyzing both representations of British Muslims and conflicts abroad like the Iraq war, he concludes that the stereotypes Said already laid out are still prevalent in British media discourse.

As has already been touched upon in the previous section, 9/11 and the following "War on Terror" marked a point of intense polarization. Consequently, it resulted in a vast body of literature regarding the influence of politicians as well as the media on shaping public opinion. A very insightful anthology named *Discourse, War and Terrorism* was published by Adam Hodges and Chap Nilep (2007). It entails discourse studies about how the War on Terror was reinforced through political speeches and the portrayal in mass media. Steuter and Wills (2008), in their book *At War with Metaphor: Media, Propaganda, and Racism in the War on Terror*, illustrate how the media construct narratives by using inflammatory metaphors, dehumanizing the "Other" and preparing for war. In line with that conclusion, DiMaggio (2015) criticizes the media's complicity in US foreign policy by manufacturing consent among the public and normalizing military intervention. In particular, the media representation of Islam as a threat remains persistent. Ahmed and Matthes (2016) illustrate by examining news articles from 2000-2015 that Muslims and Islam continue to be depicted negatively and mostly in relation to migration, war, and terrorism. With the emergence of ISIS, this picture has been further reinforced (Alzyoud, 2022).

Hence, the literature on media representations of the MENA region in general and the War on Terror in particular indicate that Said's assumptions of the discursive construction of the Orient and the Occident in order to dominate the former still hold true and how important the interplay between politics and media is in that regard. However, despite the exhaustive literature on the representation of the MENA region in general, not much had been done on the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Furthermore, those studies mainly prioritize knowledge production in the US, while there is a severe lack of literature on Orientalism in Germany.

2.3 Knowledge Production, the Media and the Israel-Palestine Conflict

Again, it is Edward Said (1979), who brings attention to the representation of the Israel-Palestine conflict. In his book *The Question of Palestine*, he argues that a colonialist mindset is at the heart of the Zionist project, and that the Palestinian narrative is distorted and sidelined both in academia and the media. Together with Christopher Hitchens, he edited the essay collection *Blaming the Victims: Spurious Scholarship and the Palestinian Question* (1988), in which renowned scholars tackle some of the Western misrepresentations of the Israel-Palestine conflict. While scholars such as Said, Khalidi, and Abu-Lughod provide critical assessments of the history of the conflict, Chomsky emphasizes the complicity of the US media in the portrayal of the Israel invasion of Lebanon in 1982.

Ever since this volume was produced, a lot has changed in the academic knowledge production on Israel/Palestine. In particular, Israeli historians such as Benny Morris (1987; 2001), Ilan Pappé (1993; 2006; 2014), Avi Shlaim (1988; 2014), Tom Segev (1993; 2007) and Zeev Sternhell (1998) undermined a lot of the official Israeli state narratives that until the 1980s were uncontested in academia, politics and media alike. However, there is no research that indicates that this scholarship also triggered significant improvements in the work of the media or in politics. To the contrary, Pappé (2014) argues that it triggered a reactionary wave of what he calls “neo-Zionism,” a nationalist ideology that spread throughout Israeli education, politics and media. In fact, many of those scholars paid a high price for their work. Both Pappé and Morris were viciously attacked by the media and politicians (Arnot, 2009; Gendzier, 2016). While Pappé eventually left Israel, Morris was brought back in line, nowadays contradicting his own academic work by blaming Palestinians for what happened in 1948 (e.g. Beinun, 2004). Similar attacks on knowledge production took place in the US, as was the case with Norman Finkelstein, who lost his tenure because of his work on Israel/Palestine (Gendzier, 2016). As Massad (2005) argues: “what makes these anti-scholarship attacks possible and

popular is the existence of a major discrepancy, even a radical disconnect, between popular knowledge and media coverage about the Palestine/Israel conundrum and established scholarly knowledge about the topic” (ibid., para. 4) Hence, the importance of the media in constructing the Israel-Palestine conflict becomes apparent.

More recent studies on media representations of the conflict mainly do comparative analyses of different news outlets and examine the portrayal of the conflict in selected articles. Sanz Sabido (2015) examines representations of the Israel-Palestine conflict in the British press from a postcolonial perspective. By analyzing four different historical periods, she finds an absence of references to the historical role that Britain played in the conflict, which indicates that Britain is ignoring its historical responsibilities. By applying critical discourse analysis, Wang (2017) analyzes 8 articles of *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph* and examines the reporting on a wave of stabbing incidents between 2015 and 2016. She concludes that there are clear binaries of “Us” vs. “Them” in the coverage of both media outlets, portraying Palestinians either as unworthy victims or as violent perpetrators, while Israelis are presented positively. Amer (2017) examines two British newspapers, and two US newspapers, and does a quantitative analysis of word usage in all articles that covered the Gaza war of 2008-2009. He concludes that there are no substantial differences in the coverage of each paper. While on the Israeli side a diversity of views and actors is displayed, the Palestinian side is only represented as Hamas. Furthermore, while Israel is portrayed as trying to reach a ceasefire, Hamas is refusing it. This tendency has been confirmed in a recent study by Attar and King (2023). They analyze 16 articles from news outlets in the UK, the US, Canada and Australia, focusing on the same stabbing incidents that Wang did. They emphasize that Western print papers tend to frame the conflict as a religious dispute. Additionally, they reconfirm the biases noted above, arguing that these outlets empathize more with Israel, while Palestinians tend to be framed as terrorists and antisemitic. Little to no background is given as to why Palestinians might opt to such actions.

Several studies have been conducted to compare Western news outlets with non-Western news outlets. Suwarno and Sahayu (2020) compare the media

coverage of the *New York Times* and the *Jakarta Post* in 2019 and 2020. Contrary to what the previous research suggested, they conclude that both tend to be more in favor of Palestine. Israel is portrayed as provocateur and war criminal nation, while Palestine is depicted as the victim of the conflicts. This conclusion derives from their interpretation that much more aggressive statements from Israeli officials have been cited than of Palestinians. There are some operational issues with this study though. Firstly, they do not clarify which instances they analyze. Secondly, they do not explain how many and which articles they selected. Heni and Chandra (2022) compare *Fox News* with *Detik.com*, an Indonesian news website. By looking into the Israel-Gaza conflict of May 2021 they analyze four articles from each outlet. They conclude that *Fox News* depicts Palestinians, especially Hamas, as Terrorists, while Israel is the victim. For *Detik.com*, the opposite is true. They portray Israel as the aggressor and the Palestinians as the victims.

There is a significant gap in the literature when it comes to the German media representation of the conflict. I found two comparative studies that include German media representations. The first study was conducted by Segev and Miesch (2011), who quantitatively analyze 14 newspapers from five countries over a six-month period in 2010. They find that in all five cases, there was a significant anti-Israel bias. The other study was conducted by Neureiter (2016). By quantitatively comparing German, British and US newspapers, he analyzes the 2010 Gaza flotilla raid. In line with Segev and Miesch, he concludes that especially German newspapers, but also British ones, have a significant anti-Israel bias. However, while both studies seem statistically sound, their initial categorization of words that are deemed to express anti-Israel sentiment are worth pointing out. Segev and Miesch created lists of words that according to them constitute negative or positive attitudes towards Israel. For example, to refer to “occupation” indicates negative bias towards Israel, while referring to “security interests” refers to positive bias towards Israel. However, I would argue that addressing an occupation that is internationally regarded as illegal is the responsibility of critical journalism. Neureiter does not even define what constitutes pro- or anti-Israel sentiment. One only finds a table that shows 90 quotes in German newspapers are supportive of Israel, while 186 are critical. The

question is, what does it mean to be supportive when the military raids a ship of activists that led to the death of 10 activists? Again, quality journalism demands scrutiny, no matter which military caused such incident.

There are several observations to make in the literature on knowledge production and representation of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Firstly, while the first two sections suggest the importance of the interplay between media, politics and academia, all the recent studies on the conflict only analyze news articles. I would argue that the debate shows I am going to analyze potentially give a fuller picture of the overall discourse because it is an arena in which journalists, politicians, and academics – the producers of knowledge – meet and exchange ideas. Secondly, most reviewed studies are fixated on linguistic features of the discourse. By applying thematic analysis, I aim to get closer to the content of the meaning of what is said. Finally, most of these studies do not go beyond the investigation of bias in certain newspapers and how this bias is expressed. By dissecting long conversations, I aim to identify the historical context and the underlying ideological foundations that shape the speakers statements.

3. Theoretical Framework

The following chapter introduces the theoretical framework that guides this research project. Firstly, it introduces the framework of discourse theory. By drawing on Foucault, Gramsci, Hall and Laclau and Mouffe this chapter aims to illustrate how discourse, power, knowledge, and ideology relate to and influence one another. Secondly, key concepts that are relevant to this specific study will be introduced, namely, Orientalism and War Narratives.

3.1 Discourse Theory

The concept of discourse, over the last 50 years, has gained enormous popularity in many academic disciplines. Despite its very wide-ranging and vague definitions, there are underlying assumptions that most scholars of discourse share. The premise of most approaches is that “our ways of talking do not neutrally reflect our world, identities and social relations but, rather, play an active role in creating and

changing them” (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002, p. 1). Thus, language becomes an inherently important mechanism to construct the social world in which we are living and to give it meaning. Importantly, the meaning that we attribute to a word is not inherent in the word itself, but it receives its meaning by social convention (ibid.). Accordingly, meanings are changeable over time because social conventions can change over time. With meaning being created through language and being able to change over time, it is discourse which is the arena of struggle over those meanings. This arena encompasses written text, spoken word and non-verbal communication (Wodak, 2014). Foucault, Gramsci, Laclau and Mouffe as well as Hall contributed immensely to a theoretical understanding of discourse. It is in this theoretical tradition that concepts such as discourse, power, knowledge, and ideology become relevant.

3.1.1 Discourse, Power and Knowledge

One of Foucault’s major contributions to the theory of discourse is his insight on the relationship between discourse, power, and knowledge. Power in a Foucauldian sense is not something that is just exercised by individuals. It is obvious that there are actors in any society who have much more influence than others, such as politicians, journalists, and academics. They take on an important role in the construction of discourse because of the gravity that their speech acts have. I will refer to them as *symbolic elites*, a term framed by van Dijk (2011). As Van Dijk notes, “They have relative freedom, and hence relative power, in deciding about the discourse genres within their domain of power and determine topics, style, or presentation of discourse” (ibid., p. 22). However, and this is the crucial point, they are as much a product of powerful discourse as anyone else. As Foucault argues:

One has to liberate oneself from the constituting subject, from the subject itself, i.e. to arrive at an historical analysis which is capable of clarifying the constitution of the subject in the historical context. It is precisely this that I would call genealogy, i.e. a form of history which reports on the constitution of knowledge, discourses, fields of objects etc., without having to relate to a subject which transcends the field of events and occupies it with its hollow identity throughout history (cited in Jäger, 2001, pp. 38-39).

The concept of genealogy is of fundamental importance for this study. In the context of the German discourse about Israel/Palestine, it is not sufficient to assume that the German discourse is a product of those symbolic elites, but rather to investigate where their discursive contributions derive from. As Kvale (1992) expresses: “The self no longer uses language to express itself; rather language speaks through the person. The individual self becomes a medium for the culture and its language” (ibid., p. 36). Thus, discourse can become powerful because it evolves over a long period of time and shapes the belief systems of those who participate in the discourse. In that way, Foucault does not consider power to be merely restrictive. Rather he states:

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it does not only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression (Foucault, 1980, p. 119).

For Foucault, power becomes the force that constitutes our social world. It drives society, even developing its own institutions like prisons, as he has argued in *Discipline & Punish* (1995).

Here it starts to become apparent how closely connected power and knowledge are. In a Foucauldian sense, they “presuppose one another” (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002, p. 14). Discourse on the one hand creates knowledge and on the other hand it functions as the storage of societal knowledge. By producing and storing knowledge it inherits the power to determine what can be said and what cannot, “it forms consciousness” (Jäger, 2001, p. 35). Assuming that human beings have access to objective knowledge thus becomes highly problematic. Knowledge is a seriously contested subject, because it can serve to reinforce one’s own discursively constructed belief systems, and vice versa one’s belief systems influence the production of knowledge. Van Dijk offers a useful definition of what he calls social knowledge. He understands it as “the shared beliefs of an epistemic community, justified by contextually, historically and culturally variable (epistemic) criteria of reliability” (Van Dijk, 2014, p. 21). This definition helps us to understand firstly, that knowledge is a product of history and culture and secondly, that knowledge

does not need to be factually true. As long as knowledge matches the belief system one inherits, it becomes irrelevant if that knowledge is based on occurrences in the material world. It helps us to reaffirm what we assume to be true through a historical process of knowledge production.

Foucault illustrates this in his book *Madness and Civilization* (1988), in which he dissects the evolution of madness. While initially perceived as something culturally and intellectually enriching, in the modern age it has turned into something that constitutes a threat to society. Hence, under the guise of modern science, a vast body of knowledge has emerged reinforcing the necessity to isolate and mistreat people who suffer from certain mental conditions (ibid.). This is not to say that science cannot contribute to a better understanding of certain conditions that people might suffer from, but what kind of knowledge is produced is always a matter of discursively constructed assumptions. If one regards someone who suffers from mental illness as frightening or disgusting, it is highly unlikely that the knowledge production about mental illness serves the best interest of the ill person. Knowledge production thus is a highly ideological process, as can be seen in the complicity of physicians in the Nazi euthanasia program (Burleigh, 2000). The following section illustrates the relation of ideology and knowledge.

3.1.2 Discourse, Ideology and Hegemony

The concept of ideology has been highly influenced by Marxist thinkers and, ever since, substantially scrutinized by post-Marxist and post-structuralist scholars (Stoddart, 2007). Foucault himself contested the notion of ideology in contrast to his concept of discourse. One of his major criticisms of the Marxist tradition is that it “sees ideology as something fake, which stands in opposition to true knowledge” (ibid., p. 204). For Foucault, knowledge is always linked to power and can therefore never be absolute (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). Since for him there is no absolute truth, ideology becomes an irrelevant concept. If there is no absolute truth, then ideology cannot prevent us from seeing it. While Marx saw the world through the prism of a totalizing ideology, Foucault constitutes the opposite of the spectrum, by denying ideology as a concept and instead introducing discourse (Dant, 1991;

Stoddart, 2007). However, multiple scholars have offered more nuanced approaches to the role of ideology.

Gramsci (1971) introduces the analytical distinction between civil society and political society. The former entails private or voluntary formations such as schools, churches, families, unions, while the latter means state institutions. Power is exercised in both realms, but through very different means. While political society exercises power through coercive force, civil society is the arena in which power is exercised by attempting to establish consent. Intellectuals succeed in creating Hegemony when they establish consent over the ideas of the ruling class (Bates, 1975, p. 353). Hence, especially in a democratic setting, the arena of civil society becomes very important. In this way, Gramsci already indicates the power of language to establish Hegemony of ideas.

Gramsci understands ideologies as systems of ideas. He rejects Marx's purely negative sense of ideology and differentiates between "historically organic ideologies" and "ideologies that are arbitrary", hence offering a more pluralistic concept of ideology (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 376-377). He further elaborates on the significance of historical analysis to understand the interplay of knowledge and ideology to form what he calls common sense:

What must be explained is how it happens that in all periods there coexist many systems and currents of philosophical thought, how these currents are born, how they are diffused, and why in the process of diffusion they fracture along certain lines and in certain directions [...] Every social stratum has its own 'common sense' and its own 'good sense', which are basically the most widespread conception of life and of men. Common sense is not something rigid and immobile, but is continually transforming itself, enriching itself with scientific ideas and with philosophical opinions which have entered ordinary life.... Common sense creates the folklore of the future, that is as a relatively rigid phase of popular knowledge at a given place and time (ibid., pp. 326-327).

He does not refer to discourse, but introduces "common sense", a construct influenced both by scientific and philosophical ideas, which, over time, can develop a relatively rigid form of Hegemony. As Hall (1982) states, he moves away from the assumption that ideologies are simply "the dependent variable in social struggle".

Rather, ideologies gain “relative autonomy” (ibid., p. 78). Ideologies are not just produced and changed by the ruling class; they inherit power themselves.

Laclau and Mouffe (1985) further developed Gramsci’s concept of Hegemony by bringing it together with Foucault’s concept of discourse. While they adopt Foucault’s main ideas about discourse and power, they also emphasize the existence of constant struggle over the hegemony of meaning. However, they reject the Marxist notion of class struggle as the only dimension of political struggle. As did Gramsci, they frame a more pluralistic understanding of political struggle in which people develop “chains of equivalence” in which economic, social, and cultural aspects are merged and potentially constitute the foundation of new hegemonic discourses (ibid., p. 170). Thus, like Gramsci, Laclau and Mouffe contest the notion of ideological power being “a monolithic system that subjugates the masses in the interest of the capitalist class” (Stoddart, 2007, p. 208). However, they do not demarcate it from discourse. Rather, they moved away from an understanding of ideology as something that individuals push as knowing subjects. Ideology is no longer viewed as “false consciousness associated with a false (i.e. idealist) philosophy as it was the case with Marx”. Rather, “it describes the form of knowledge that is available to human beings” (Dant, 1991, pp. 189-190). Similarly, Hall links the terms of discourse and ideology, arguing that “ideological discourses both warranted themselves in and selectively reproduced the common stock of knowledge in society” (Hall, 1982, p. 73), further emphasizing the interplay between ideology and knowledge in discourse.

To conclude, the work of Gramsci, Hall, Laclau and Mouffe adds nuance to Foucault’s discourse theory. While Foucault illustrates the relation between power, discourse and knowledge, their contributions introduce ideology into the realm of discourse and link it to the production of knowledge. Furthermore, they reinforce Foucault’s emphasis on history in the construction of dominant discourses, but simultaneously, by introducing ideologies they grant more space for contestations of Hegemony within discourse. Figure 1 aims to visualize the key aspects of these theoretical considerations.

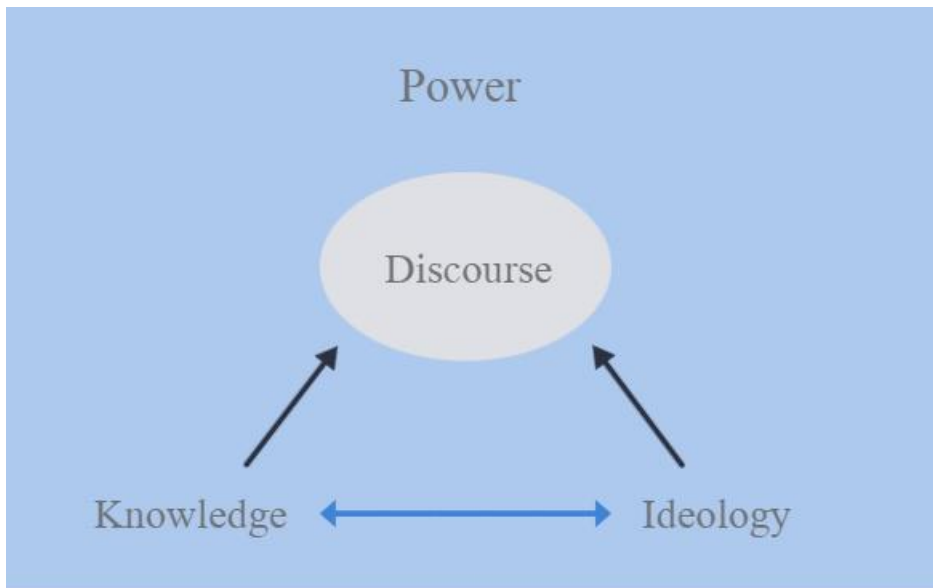


Figure 1: Theory Visualization

3.2 Key Concepts

In addition to the general theoretical framework that I laid out before, in this section I explain the two key concepts that further specify the theoretical framework in the context of the MENA region and war.

3.2.1 Orientalism

The theoretical framework that I laid out, especially the ideas of Foucault and Gramsci, highly inspired the most famous discourse analysis of Western representations of the MENA region. As already introduced in his book *Orientalism*, Edward Said (1978) fundamentally criticizes European representations of the MENA region and introduces the concept of Orientalism. His analysis of *the Orient* is highly influenced by Foucault's discourse theory. Orientalism is defined by Said as "a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience" (ibid., p. 1). He then highlights three more concrete and interconnected dimensions of the term. Firstly, it refers to an academic field that "writes about or researches the Orient" (ibid., p. 2). Furthermore, Orientalism refers to "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'" (ibid.,

p. 2). Thirdly, according to Said, Orientalism must be understood as “the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it” (ibid., p. 3).

Said argues that “without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period” (ibid., p. 3). Said continues by emphasizing that ideas play an important role in creating realities. He makes the point that there is the physical manifestation of a geographical region with longstanding cultures and histories. However, Orientalism does not correspond with “the reality” of this region, but rather aims to establish an “internal consistency” of an idea about the Orient (ibid., p. 5). He asserts that ideas, cultures, and histories can only be understood sufficiently if one relates them to the underlying power relations at play. The unequal power relation between the Orient and the Occident highly contributes to the discourse about the Orient.

Furthermore, the Orient constitutes the Occident. The former is the manifestation of what the latter is not. By Othering the Orient, the Occident creates itself in relation to the Orient and aims to legitimize domination over it. He emphasizes that Orientalist structures go beyond myths and lies. Through continuous investment, it creates its own system of knowledge.

Said distinguishes between manifest and latent Orientalism. The former is an identifiable form of Orientalism. It comprises the “views about Oriental society, languages, literatures, history, sociology, and so forth” (ibid., p. 206). In contrast, latent Orientalism refers to a deeply embedded certainty about what the Orient fundamentally is. Said calls this “an almost unconscious (and certainly untouchable) positivity” (ibid.). These underlying assumptions about what Westerners believe constitutes the Orient are much more rigid, even when Orientalist manifestations change. While writers about the Orient might have different ideas about the Orient

or look at it through different lenses, they all share the same latent assumptions about its separateness and backwardness.

3.2.2 War Narratives

After the Hamas attack on October 7th Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared war against Hamas (Federman & Adwan, 2023). Ever since, this has been the official representation of the conflict, both by Western media and politicians. Hence, the specificities of war become an important analytical consideration.

In his book *Why War? The Cultural Logic of Iraq, The Gulf War, and Suez*, Philip Smith (2005) introduces a promising framework to understand the significant role that narratives play in the legitimization of war. By taking the dynamics of war and how they influence discourse seriously, he offers a valuable addition to Said's framework of Orientalism. Like Gramsci, Smith argues that civil society is the sphere "in which issues of public legitimacy are played out" (ibid., p. 12). In contrast to Gramsci, he emphasizes the importance of discourse which takes place in civil society or as he defines it "the location of the struggles over meaning" (ibid., p. 13).

For Smith, narratives play a crucial role in constructing meaning. They "add subtlety to our understandings of the world and convert situations into scenarios" (ibid., p. 14). They are doing so by drawing on binaries that structure discourses (e.g., the Orient vs. the Occident). He introduces different genres of narratives, of which the apocalyptic genre is the most effective one to legitimize war. According to Smith, the apocalyptic narrative is powerful because it "enables the cultural constraints on violence to be overcome" and to rally support "for the sacrifice of priceless human lives" (ibid., p. 26). It does so by constructing radical moral polarization. The events that are unfolding are driven by an absolute evil force and can only be solved by radical intervention from the righteous hero.

Thus, his insight adds an illustrative dimension to Said's analysis of Orientalism. While Orientalist misrepresentations of the MENA region are deeply embedded in European thinking, it is especially in times of the (perceived) apocalypse that they are brought to the surface and take on the most visible forms, thus creating a

promising time frame for investigation. In fact, the apocalyptic narrative might only work because it draws on the discursive constructions of Orientalism.

4. Methodology

This section's aim is to clarify my methodological approach. Firstly, I will outline how discourse analysis will be applied in this study as a method. In order to systematically dissect the meaning of my data, discourse analysis is paired with another method. This method, namely thematic analysis (TA) will be introduced as well. The subsequent two sections aim to firstly illustrate how I collected my data and secondly, how I analyzed it in NVivo. Finally, I clarify my own positionality to this study.

4.1 Discourse Analysis

As has already been discussed in the theory section, discourse analysis is more than a method, it proposes a way of seeing and making sense of the social world. However, this way of viewing the world also includes very practical implications for one's access to knowledge. Language and its usage are at the core of most discourse analyses. This is the case in this study as well. I will start here by discussing my approach to discourse analysis and which problems I faced in applying discourse as a method. Secondly, I will present and justify my specific methodological approach of data analysis, namely TA.

4.1.1 Discourse Analysis as Method

What makes discourse analysis so interesting is its wide range of applications. Discourse analysis is used in multiple academic fields, from linguistics to psychology and sociology. Generally, I regard that as a big benefit because it creates multidisciplinary exchange, and thus more profound analysis. However, especially for someone who is new to this approach, in this diversity also lies a weakness, because the usage of discourse analysis as a method is very different from researcher to researcher (e.g. Fairclough, 1995). Another potential weakness of discourse analysis, in my opinion, derives from the fact that it does not seem obvious that the

experts in the field have been able to clearly distinguish between its theoretical and methodological implications (e.g. Meyer, 2001).

Despite that, I will propose here that discourse analysis constitutes an extremely useful framework for this study. As the literature has indicated, focusing on linguistic structures of discourse is a very popular approach in the field of discourse analysis. This approach gives insights into the interactional level, how participants in the discourse perform and make use of language to exchange meaning. However, as Dant (1991) emphasizes there are two distinct processes of exchange, of which linguistics on the interactional level is one. The second process takes place in the content of discourse between “the elements of meaning” (ibid., p. 210). These elements of meaning can appear in a single utterance but also across multiple utterances and multiple speakers. Thus, the focus from this perspective is more on the abstract meanings of the content of the discourse. This is where the interplay of knowledge and ideology becomes traceable (ibid.). These elements of meaning are the focus of this study.

Hence, discourse analysis is an approach that allows the researcher to dive deep into the data and thus, to reveal profound underlying features about the case in question. By doing so, it fundamentally contests notions that are regarded as self-evident. However, precisely because discourse analysis is not a clearly defined method of data analysis, it needs to be coupled with such a method. Because the focus of this study is the elements of meaning that are exchanged in discourse, TA will be applied as a promising tool to trace those. Hence, I view discourse analysis as an analytical approach that, anchored in the theoretical framework that I laid out, serves to guide, and elevate the method of TA. On the one hand, it provides TA with a frame for looking into the data and on the other hand it directs the interpretation of the data by emphasizing the deep-rooted connection between discourse, power, knowledge, and ideology.

4.1.2 Thematic Analysis

As has been shown, TA serves as my method for structuring and extracting meaning out of my data. It will thus be presented here. This approach has significantly been

shaped by Braun and Clarke (2006). On a basic level, they define it as “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (ibid., p. 79). Themes here are understood as multifaceted entities that help to grasp the deeper meaning of the data, while codes only capture small facets (Braun & Clarke, 2020). Very important for this study is TA’s flexibility of applying both semantic and latent themes. Where semantic themes capture the meaning of what has been said explicitly, latent themes go deeper to trace the underlying assumptions of certain statements (Byrne, 2021). In this study, both dimensions are of great significance.

This flexibility of TA can also be found when it comes to the relationship between method and theory. As Braun and Clarke (2006) argue, TA can be applied to many different theoretical frameworks. Furthermore, it can be used for inductive as well as deductive research (Braun & Clarke, 2020). In fact, this project draws on a hybrid approach combining inductive and deductive elements to TA (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane 2006; Selvam & Collicutt, 2012). Inspired by Selvam and Collicutt (2012), I adapted the concept of the Hermeneutic circle (See Figure 2). What this means for this study is that discourse theory, coupled with Said’s framework of Orientalism, provided me with the initial themes that I wanted to explore. Those themes were *Orientalism*, *Knowledge*, *Ideology*. Based on these themes, I developed initial codes that served as a starting point for the coding process. However, this neither denied the possibility to create new codes, nor were those initial codes and themes set in stone. As shown in Figure 2, they can be assimilated when the researcher discovers new insights in the data.

This brings me to the next benefit of TA. Braun and Clarke (2006) provide a flexible, but simultaneously very clear and transparent methodological guide on how to conduct TA. They provide 6 steps that will briefly be mentioned here, before being further illustrated in the data analysis section.

1. Familiarizing yourself with your data
2. Generating initial codes
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes

5. Defining and naming themes

6. Producing the report

Braun and Clarke emphasize that these are guidelines but not strict rules that have to be followed precisely. Too much rigidity might negatively influence the research outcome because it would not “fit the research questions and data” (ibid., p. 86). The following two sections will illustrate how I collected my data and how data analysis, according to the framework laid out here, unfolded.

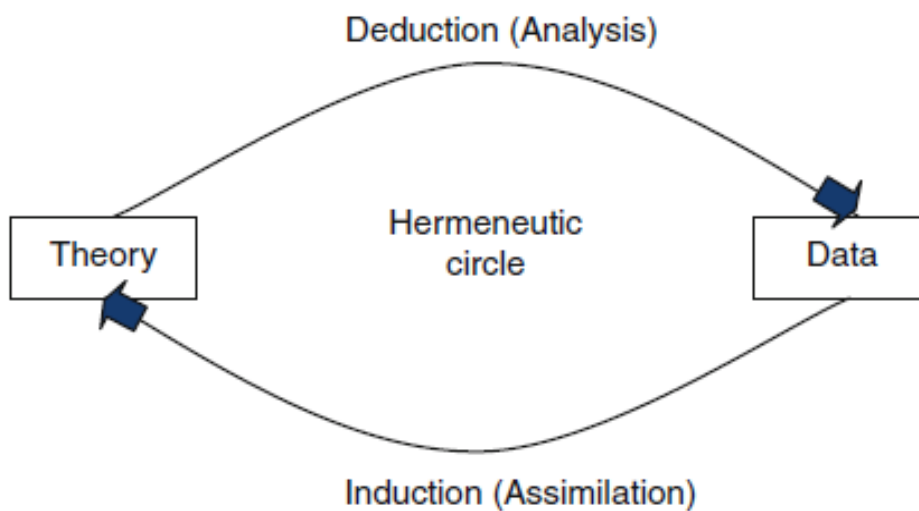


Figure 2: Hermeneutic Circle (Selvam & Cullicott, 2012, p. 89)

4.2 Data Collection

My dataset contains episodes of two of the most popular German debate shows on the *öffentlich-rechtlicher Rundfunk* (German public broadcasting, similar in structure to the BBC), namely Anne Will and Markus Lanz. Both shows are named after their respective hosts. Anne Will, until recently, was the most viewed political debate show on the *öffentlich-rechtlicher Rundfunk* (she stopped hosting the show at the end of 2023). In 2023, the show averaged approximately 3 million views every week (FAZ, 2023). It was aired in prime time – 8:15 p.m. every Sunday night on the channel ARD. Markus Lanz is aired on the channel ZDF and reaches an audience of approximately 1.5 million viewers per episode. However, he hosts three episodes per week, airing every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday at 11:15 p.m.

I selected those two shows because they are aired on the two biggest channels of the *öffentlich-rechtlicher Rundfunk*.

The existence of the *öffentlich-rechtlicher Rundfunk* is anchored to the *Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschlands* (basic law of the federal republic of Germany). The concrete guidelines for its operation are regulated through the *Rundfunkstaatsvertrag*, which obligates the channels to educate the viewers by presenting comprehensive news coverage, to oblige to the principles of “objectivity” and “impartially” in reporting, and to acknowledge diversity of opinions (§11). This is the reason why I chose this sample. Compared to the private media sphere, one might expect a more balanced representation of the conflict because it is the self-proclaimed goal of the *öffentlich-rechtlicher Rundfunk* to be balanced and impartial.

Furthermore, both Anne Will and Markus Lanz are well-known public figures in the German media landscape, and both have leading politicians, journalists, and experts as their guests. Thus, these debate shows offer a promising arena of discourse formation, or what Gramsci would call civil society, with high-profile guests, who are aware of the reach that this platform provides. Thus, opinions that are voiced, and news that are reported on those platforms can be regarded as having a substantial impact on public opinion.

The reason for choosing two different shows was a matter of saturation, rather than clearly illustrating differences between both shows. While there are interesting research questions to be explored regarding the different styles of the hosts, or the atmosphere in the studio, to answer my research questions I very quickly realized that it is not significant to explicitly contrast the shows. This is already a noteworthy observation, though. Rather, the aim was to minimize potential distortion by not exclusively choosing one debate show.

The episode selection followed a strict criterion. Only episodes that explicitly and exclusively dealt with the Israel-Palestine conflict after October 7th were chosen. In the case of Anne Will it was easy because in total she only aired three episodes on the matter. With Markus Lanz this meant to exclude segments that partially discussed the conflict. While this means I have potentially lost some nuances,

it was necessary to keep the scope of this project feasible. Initially, I was afraid that I have to set an arbitrary deadline for episodes to be included in the dataset. However, both shows, after exhaustively reporting on the conflict, stopped discussing it at around the same time. The last episode of Anne Will aired on November 12th. The last episode of Markus Lanz aired on November 15th. This timeline already tells a lot about the creation of the discourse in Germany.

Applying this criterion led me to gather a dataset of a total of 14 episodes, three episodes of Anne Will, and eleven episodes of Markus Lanz. Each Anne Will episode runs approximately an hour, while each Markus Lanz episode runs around 75 minutes. The dataset contains 47 guests, plus the two hosts and one pre-recorded interview with a Holocaust survivor. Of the 47 guests, six participated in both shows. A list of the guests is included in the appendix (III.I).

4.3 Data Analysis

As shown before, to analyze my dataset, I applied TA. By choosing the data, I did already presuppose some theoretical assumptions. By analyzing the spoken word, I was already aware that, in a very broad sense, I wanted to do some form of discursive analysis. Hence, the first step of the analysis was accompanied by an intense reading of the theoretical literature on discourse.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006) the first step of TA emphasizes the familiarization with the data. I divided this process into two steps. Firstly, I watched the debate shows chronologically to get an overview of the data I was planning to analyze. Afterward, I started the transcription process. This process can be very useful to further familiarize oneself with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2021) It was necessary to be able to process the data with NVivo. I was able to download the episodes on the website: <https://mediathekviewweb.de>. Then I uploaded each episode in *Transcriptor*, an AI application to create transcriptions. However, the outcome was very flawed, so I had to go through each episode in detail in order to come up with appropriate transcriptions. This step was immensely valuable because it was at this point that I really felt I reached a deep understanding of the dataset I was using. The aim of the transcription was to “accurately reproduce the

semantic content of the talk, but not details of its deliveries” (Clarke & Kitzinger, 2005, p. 198). Thus, while paying great attention to a precise representation of the spoken word, many linguistic details such as accentuation or accompanying gestures were only captured in rare moments. While this might reveal fascinating facets of the discourse, it was not the aim of this project.

After finishing this process, I started with step two, generating initial codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Codes systematically structure the dataset. They provide “succinct, shorthand descriptive or interpretive labels” (Byrne, 2021, p. 1399). As has been shown in the TA section, I performed a hybrid approach somewhere between induction and deduction. Thus, after finishing the readings on theory, I was already set on some concepts. After I uploaded the data to NVivo, I started to create a codebook. This included the theoretical themes and their sub-themes and codes. For example, *Orientalism* was defined and thus had implications for sub-themes. I added the sub-themes *The Orient*, and *The Occident* and defined those as well. However, it was the data that showed me related codes such as *Hamas*, and *Arab population*, which are embedded in the sub-theme *The Orient*. With the initial codebook at hand, I went through all the episodes chronologically. During this process, I developed as many new codes as possible. Furthermore, I added the surrounding words and sentences to the content of a code to understand the context, thus making the code more transparent (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

While Braun and Clarke (2006) propose to search for themes as the third step, as has been indicated, I already created themes beforehand, based on my theory. Hence, step three was merged into step four, namely reviewing themes. While my main themes stayed mostly fixed over the research process, sub-themes changed significantly. The sub-themes formed the connection between the more data-driven codes and the more theory-driven main themes. Here, I tried to put together the codes into meaningful groups. Sometimes this worked well with the theoretical themes I created in the previous step. In other instances, completely new sub-themes emerged. A case in point is *German Exceptionalism*. This sub-theme did not arrive from clearly defined theoretical assumptions. I created codes, inspired by the data, which – grouped together – portrayed a unique German experience in the

perception of and relation to the Israel-Palestine conflict. It was at this stage that I renamed, regrouped, or completely deleted codes, sub-themes, and themes. Furthermore, at this stage, I started to think about how the main themes relate to one another and to the dataset.

The fifth step is called defining and naming themes (*ibid.*). At this stage, the grouping process should be finalized. What elevates this section from the last one is the focus on the relation to the final research question(s). Byrne (2021) puts it well by stating that “each individual theme and sub-theme is to be expressed in relation to both the dataset and the research question(s).” Hence, the aim is to transform the themes into “a coherent and internally consistent account of the data that cannot be told by other themes” (*ibid.*, p. 1407). Thus, it is necessary to go back into the compiled data of each theme and see if and how they relate to the research question(s) and create a narrative to answer it. The following thematic map aims to visualize this narrative, which will be laid out later (see Figure 3). It is also at this stage that the researcher can finally consider renaming themes or sub-themes, but also select extracts which explicitly underline the narrative that will be written down in step six. This process resulted in the codebook that is attached to the appendix (III.II).

Step six is called producing the report. It includes the final writing of the analysis, however at the same time it is also a final round of inspection. Thus, the researcher must finally consider the narrative put forward and in which order the themes are organized. It is important though, and here the TA and discourse analysis elements come together, that the presentation is supposed to go beyond mere description of the data. Thus, extracts must be embedded into an analytical narrative that draws on the academic literature on the topic.

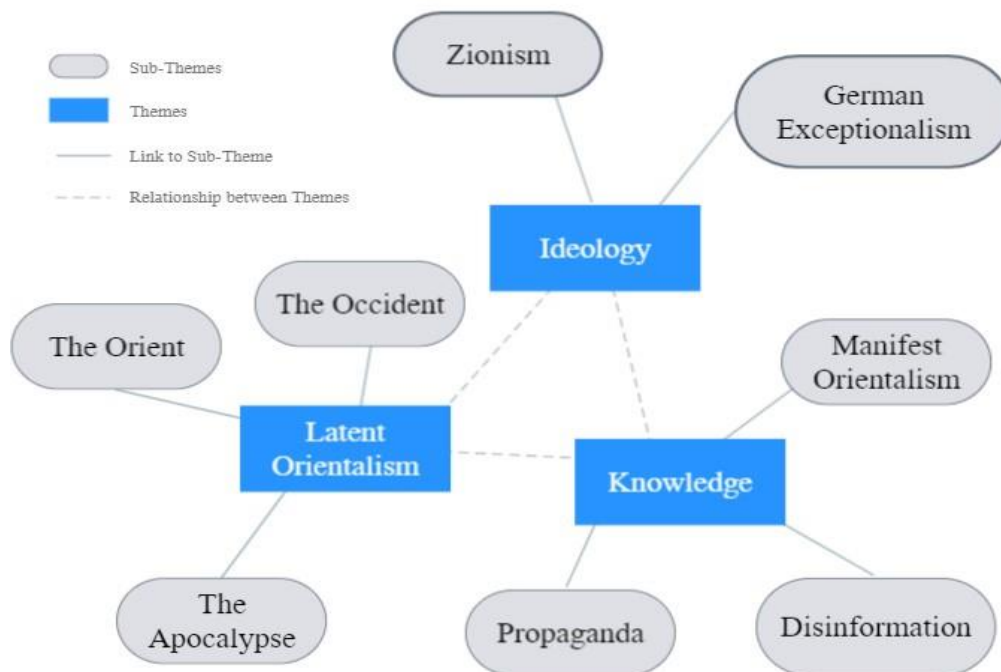


Figure 3: Thematic Map

4.4 Positionality

Applying discourse analysis brings with it ontological and epistemological assumptions that have already been touched upon. While I believe that there are events that occur outside of discourse, for human beings it is hardly possible to abstract it without attributing meaning to it, and thus distorting this objective reality. Hence, the same conclusion is inadvertently true for the researcher. A strength of discourse analysis, in my view, lies in its claim to actively embrace its normative nature. As Van Dijk argued, discourse analysis “is biased – and proud of it” (Van Dijk, 2001, p. 96). Inherent in discourse analysis is a tendency to investigate power structures and to reveal patterns of suppression (ibid.). While this is oftentimes used as a criticism of discourse analysis, this is also what makes it so valuable. A proper discourse analysis underlies a rigorous process of self-reflection. Hence, it is my obligation to highlight my own positionality towards this research project.

As someone who grew up in Germany, I am personally very aware of the complicated relationship that many people in this society have, both with the legacy of the Holocaust and with the state of Israel. It was hard to realize that my great-

grandparents were foot soldiers in the war that brought unspeakable suffering to so many people. In a way I felt fortunate that I did not meet them in person, they died before I was born. Talking about the matter with my grandparents, who were born only after Hitler came to power, was a strange experience. Very understandably, when they talked about childhood experiences, the famine after the war was over is a very significant aspect of their narrative. After all, they were children in a very hostile world, I assume this would fundamentally shape anyone's character. However, what I found worrisome was that oftentimes there was very little self-critique, or critique of their parents. It was no glorification of the Nazis but certainly a narrative of victimization. I found this relatively disturbing, but I also never pushed too hard on being a bit more self-critical. In a way, this rejection to me always seemed like a defense mechanism to keep the family unit intact, but it also blocked the option to really reach the core of the issue. In my own imagination, the state of Israel became this romantic place of the redemption for the Jewish people. This logic reveals a lot about the problems that are addressed in this paper. Nationalist projection of equating the victims of the Holocaust with the state of Israel as well as a nationalist self-identification as German are part of the problem that created the atrocities of WWII in the first place.

This unique experience of mine, being an insider of German culture since it is the culture in which I grew up on the one hand, and studying the MENA region professionally thus, having a much deeper knowledge of it than most Germans on the other, coupled with the unimaginable suffering that is taking place on the ground in Gaza convinced me that I have to write this thesis on this matter. I have obvious biases that I am happy to acknowledge. I do not want to see powerless people suffer. This goes for Israelis who were slaughtered at a music festival, but it also goes when an entire population gets indiscriminately bombed. However, despite atrocities having occurred on both sides any attempt to portray the balance of power as equal, or even seeing Israel as the victim in the overall conflict in my opinion is ignorant and oblivious at best and intentionally and purposefully distorting the core of the issue at worst. Never again is now, and if the German government would be coherent and

take this to heart, they would acknowledge that this also means it is now when it is Palestinian people who are exposed to the most outrageous crimes.

5. Findings & Analysis

This section presents the main findings and analysis from the dataset I coded. It aims to express the relationship of the themes that are visualized in Figure 3. I chose the quotes for this section mainly because of their qualitative force, rather than their quantitative appearance in the codes. That does not mean that codes that often appeared in the data are left out, but it was not the main concern. Codes that do not have many references are reflected in the quotes too because they can provide valuable insights. Despite, or rather because of their rare appearance, they are regarded as valuable for this study. Hence, the quality of what the quotes express is much more important for this analysis than their quantitative reflection in the codes.

I start by showing how Orientalism fundamentally shapes how the Israel-Palestine conflict is represented in German civil society, to borrow Gramsci's term. Secondly, I explore the roots of this portrayal. The knowledge that is produced to create the Orientalist representation of the conflict only makes sense because it relates to a deeper belief system, or what Gramsci called common sense, inherited by the German audience as well as the participants of the debate shows. Both ideology and knowledge influence one another to construct meaning of the conflict, thus shaping this belief system through discourse. This is a historical process, so in order to understand why the discourse in Germany is shaped the way it is, I trace the genealogy of the discourse. Firstly, I show how Zionism as a nationalist ideology that produces knowledge about the conflict is pervasive in the German discourse. Secondly, I illustrate how this is possible because of Germany's unique belief system, highly influenced by its dark past and its self-understanding as a nation.

5.1 Orientalism and the (Mis)Representation of the Conflict

The aim of this section is to illustrate how the Israel-Palestine conflict after October 7th is represented in civil society. Both Gramsci (1971) and Smith (2005) emphasize the importance of this arena to establish consent. Anne Will's and Markus Lanz's

shows constitute this arena because it is the arena where the symbolic elites exchange ideas. Orientalism serves as the framework, through which it is possible to understand the discursive construction of the conflict. It is complemented with Smith's analysis of war narratives. While latent Orientalist misrepresentations of the MENA region are deeply embedded in European thinking, it is especially in times of the (perceived) apocalypse that they are brought to the surface and take on the most visible forms, thus creating a promising time frame for investigation. I illustrate how apparent this becomes in the German civil society after October 7th. I argue that the symbolic elites framed October 7th as constituting an existential threat to Israel, purely driven by barbaric, antisemitic hatred. Consequently, the symbolic elites constructed a dichotomy between the barbarian Orient that threatens to disrupt the peaceful order that was set up by the enlightened Occident.

5.1.1 "Hell on Earth"

In both debate shows, October 7th is depicted as an apocalyptic scenario. The Hamas attack is framed as constituting an existential threat to Israel. In the first episode of Anne Will, spokesman of the IDF Arye Sharuz Shalicar, who was born and raised in Germany, sets the stage for the ensuing discussion by stating:

The country is shocked, me included. I think this 7th of October will accompany me for the rest of my life, and not only me, but all of Israel. I would even claim this is the new Yom Kippur war for my generation. What I mean is that in 50 years my grandchildren, hopefully here in Israel, will hear my stories from this time (Anne Will, 15/10/23).

In a similar vein, Markus Lanz starts his first episode by interviewing the German Israeli policy advisor Melody Sucharewicz.² She frames the events in the following manner:

It is hell on earth, and unfortunately it is not over yet. [...] It is an inferno, it is a bestial war of a dimension Israel did not know before, and, I believe, only few Western democratic countries knew (Markus Lanz, 10/10/23).

² Born in Munich, she was cast by an Israeli reality TV show to become Israeli ambassador and promote Israel's interests in the world. She is closely linked to the Israeli Hasbara work, however, in German public broadcasting she is simply known as an expert on Israel politics (Blumenthal, 2013).

While Shalimar implicates the fragility of Israel by casting doubt into its existence in 50 years from now, Sucharewicz paints a picture of apocalyptic struggle and situating Israel in the ingroup of Western democracies. Undoubtedly, the events of October 7th were horrific. However, claiming that Hamas constitutes an existential threat to Israel is not based on the military realities on the ground, even when considering the escalation with Hezbollah and Iran. In fact, multiple scholars wrote extensively about Israel's military superiority in former conflicts (e.g. Khalidi, 2014; Rogan & Shlaim, 2008; Louis & Shlaim, 2012).

As Smith (2005) shows, this process of exaggerating narratives in times of conflict is a well-known phenomenon. The participants reinforce this apocalyptic genre on several occasions by connecting it to the Holocaust. On November 12th when Israel's bombing campaign has already turned Gaza City into ruins (Debre, 2023), German Israeli entrepreneur Jenny Havemann explains:

It really feels like we are living in a big disaster, in a big nightmare as many call it, very very many Israelis actually compare this to the Holocaust. They say we are living a second Holocaust (Anne Will, 12/11/23).

Similarly, Michael Roth, member of the SPD, summarizes the events by referring to the Holocaust:

What has happened? Israel has experienced the greatest mass murder of Jews since the Holocaust, and based on that we have to derive our statements and actions (Markus Lanz, 11/10/23).

October 7th is portrayed as another chapter of endless Jewish suffering. If one argues this to be the case, it leaves no space for nuance in the discourse, especially in the country that was responsible for the Holocaust. Hence, it creates a Hegemonic discourse that is incontestable. While the Jewish people undoubtedly suffered immensely over centuries of persecution, it is highly problematic to adapt this narrative to the current case. Firstly, it blurs the lines between Israel's actions as a state and Judaism as a religion. Secondly, it completely reverses the power dynamics of the conflict. Again, the aim is not to discredit the very real tragedies that occurred on October 7th, but to highlight how disconnected from reality this narrative is. The issue of Palestinian self-determination has actively been crushed by Israel for over 100 years (e.g. Pappé, 2006; Khalidi, 2020). By now, the state of Israel controls

100% of the land that constituted Palestine under British mandate and commands one of the best equipped armies in the world. In 2022 Israelis elected a far-right government (McKernan, 2022). This government further escalated violence by carrying out Israeli military operations in Palestinian cities, and increasing settlement expansion (e.g. Harb, 2023). Consequently, Palestinians respond with more militant resistance (e.g. Al-Tahhan, 2023). Hence, both claims of Jewish hatred as the driving force for the Hamas attack as well as Israel being the party that is facing an existential threat are only possible to believe when the conflict gets completely stripped of its context.

The Hegemony of the discourse is reinforced by completely rejecting any context to the Oct. 7th outside the frame of the Holocaust. The viewer is explicitly admonished to be quiet about it. SPD General Secretary Kevin Kühnert states the following:

You have to let this sink in, the number of Jewish people that were killed by Hamas last Saturday is the biggest number of Jews since the end of the Shoa. This is the dimension, and, in that context, it is not appropriate to start any ‘yeah, but I don’t like the Israeli government’ discussions. This has nothing to do with it. [...] All these distractions cannot be allowed, and it must be contradicted vehemently in the German public (Markus Lanz, 10/10/23).

Denying the political realities in which the attack occurred, while emphasizing the antisemitic nature and severity of the attack, serves a concrete goal. As Smith (2005) argues, it creates extreme moral polarization. This way, it justifies the retaliation campaign that was prepared. If one is facing the apocalypse, there is no alternative to using brute force to endure. SPD politician, Michael Roth, points this out well:

... this is why now is not the time to admonish Israelis, but now we must support Israel in crushing Hamas and its infrastructure, a terrorist organization that aims to destroy Israel. Everyone must be aware of the fact that this will not go hand in hand with pretty pictures, and it is going to be horrendous. But now is the time to make clear that Israel is the victim. Under international law, Israel clearly has the right and also the duty to protect its population (Markus Lanz, 11/10/23).

Thus, the apocalyptic narrative of the Holocaust is used to construct a Hegemonic discourse to make sure that the German public supports Israel’s actions, no matter

how brutal they are going to be. The Hegemonic discourse thus legitimizes the enactment of dominance over the Orient. Research shows that this strategy has been used in different historical contexts. The discourse literature on the aftermath of 9/11 explores exactly these strategies in the US discourse to legitimize the invasion of Iraq (Jarvis, 2009; Holland, 2013).

In conclusion, both shows serve as platforms to construct October 7th as an apocalyptic event that threatens the existence of the state of Israel. This is achieved by portraying it as a continuation of the centuries long persecution of Jewish people, which mounted in the Holocaust. By emphasizing this picture, the political realities of the Israel-Palestine conflict are completely denied. Framing the conflict this way serves the goal of ensuring public support for a brutal retaliation campaign against the Palestinian population. The Hegemonic discourse of the apocalypse becomes the radical manifestation of a continuous process of dominating the Orient, which Said (1978) illustrated decades ago.

5.1.2 The Orient

As Smith (2005) shows, apocalyptic discourse necessitates a profound moral polarization between the forces of good and the forces of evil. This also reflects the core of Said's argument regarding the construction of Orientalist discourse based on latent assumptions of backwardness and otherness. As has been illustrated in the theory section, a concept like the Occident or the West can only exist in relation to another construct, namely the Orient. Extreme moral polarization further underpins the distinction and legitimizes the domination over the latter. The following two sections dissect this relationship in the German context.

In the German discourse, Hamas becomes the equivalent of pure evil. The most frequently used words that are attributed to Hamas are beasts/bestial, barbarians/barbaric, and inhumane. A statement that captures the radical moral polarization between Israel and Hamas and the dehumanizing language applied to Hamas is expressed by Melody Sucharewicz:

There is only one thing that counts at the moment, and that is not mourning, not to be afraid but to be strong and to look forward and stand behind our army united [...] and that

they take care of this bestial Islamic Hamas, that really cannot be distinguished from ISIS, as you can see from the images that are all over social media, that they would never do such a massacre again. [...] and that the people all over Israel, the children can sleep safely in their beds again, without being afraid of getting dragged out at night by these beasts (Markus Lanz, 10/10/23).

That it is deemed as a useful instrument to draw comparisons between ISIS and Hamas in order to demonize Hamas illustrates how profoundly latent Orientalism is rooted in Germany. Scholars of social movements will acknowledge that while both groups might be considered as offshoots of the Muslim brotherhood in a very broad sense, one hardly finds similarities regarding their theology, strategy, or objectives (e.g. Kaminsky, 2014; Hannase). However, given that Sucharewicz won a contest on how to make effective propaganda for Israel, it is fair to assume she knows about the importance of language in constructing meaning. Coupling Hamas with ISIS only works because it is a manifestation of latent beliefs about the Orient as a homogenous backward place.

While Sucharewicz is closely linked to Israel's propaganda network, one might think that accomplished journalists offer a more nuanced portrayal of the conflict. After all, civil society can potentially be the arena of struggle over meaning. However, the analysis shows that there is total Hegemony in the discourse on Hamas. The representation of Hamas as pure evil was also reproduced repeatedly through the spread of disinformation by journalists. A remarkable example of this unfolds when ZDF journalist Elmar Theveßen joins Markus Lanz. As correspondent from Washington D.C. his job is to present the studio with the latest factual updates on the conflict. Theveßen reports:

When Netanyahu says, what happens now will reverberate over generations, when he yesterday told the US president, they acted worse than the ISIS terrorists, and that is why one needs to treat them the same way, it triggers a lot of fear. But it is understandable when one hears what the office of the prime minister [Netanyahu] revealed that dead bodies of babies were found that were beheaded by the terrorists. That is the moment where one cannot comprehend anything anymore (Markus Lanz, 11/10/2023).

When security expert Florence Gaub pushes back by mentioning that she heard that the claim of beheaded babies was potentially disinformation, Theveßen doubles down by insisting:

The office of the prime minister officially confirmed it today, and it was also discussed in the United States House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (ibid.).

Lanz then reinforces this disinformation by claiming: “It is very good that we do the fact-check via America” (ibid.). What Theveßen does is journalistic malpractice at best and deliberate deception at worst. He just reiterates the official statements of one of the war parties and presents them as facts. Thus, he legitimizes the disinformation that was deliberately spread by Israeli officials and repeated by US president Joe Biden (Scahill, 2023; Tenbarke & Chen, 2023). The huge disinformation campaign that was launched by Israel was not mentioned once (e.g. Marchant de Abreu, 2023; Scahill, 2023). This illustrates how knowledge about the Orient is reproduced to dominate it. Part of the ingroup – the Israeli and US government – claim something about the outgroup – the Orient – and because it matches with latent Orientalist presumptions of Theveßen, he willingly and uncritically accepts and spreads it.

The language that has been applied in the German discourse on several occasions leads the hosts and some guests to reassure the audience that they are explicitly talking about Hamas and that not all Palestinians are evil. However, the discourse around Palestinians at times turns extremely Orientalist and vilifying. Palestinians are repeatedly equated with Arabs as though the whole Arab world is one homogenous block. The Arab world is accused of being too emotional and that they created a climate in which facts do not matter anymore. This becomes apparent during the Al-Ahli Hospital episode in October (Biesecker, 2023). After a rocket hit the Al-Ahli Hospital, several news outlets accused Israel of being responsible for the attack. Soon afterward, multiple sources started to doubt this accusation. When asked by Lanz about the incident and if truth in this conflict still matters, ZDF journalist Katrin Eigendorf, who reported live on the ground from Ramallah, replies:

Well, in the Arab world, what we see right now is, that it does not matter anymore when I look at the Palestinian side. [...] Israel is responsible for everything. The Israeli occupation is responsible for this awful situation, and if one is not willing to dissociate oneself from this narrative, then negotiations are not possible anymore, then rapprochement is not

possible anymore, and I see this as a big problem at the moment (Markus Lanz, 19/10/2023).

It is an interesting projection to blame Palestinians for being irrational and emotional, while the German discourse is extremely emotional and polarizing. Denying the key role that the Israeli occupation plays in the current crisis is completely detached from the reality on the ground, described both in academic literature and reports of NGOs that illustrate how dire the situation in Gaza had been for decades (e.g. Chomsky & Pappé, 2010; Pappé, 2017b; Finkelstein, 2014, 2018). Her statement showcases the problem of absolute knowledge claims that both Foucault and Said emphasized, though. Knowledge only matters as far as it reaffirms the common sense of the in-group. Eigendorf further claims:

This has changed now [uprisings in the West Bank occur now], after this attack on the hospital in Gaza, where it now has been revealed that it was a misguided missile from Islamic Jihad and not Israel, which is behind it (Markus Lanz, 19/10/2023).

Until this day, it has not been proven what happened. Both Associated Press and Human Rights Watch argued in late November 2023, that it was likely a misguided rocket by Islamic Jihad, but that further investigation is needed (Biesecker, 2023; Human *Rights Watch*, 2023). Forensic Architecture, a research agency of the Goldsmiths University in London, applied a 3D trajectory analysis of the footage of the blast and concluded that it was likely an Israeli missile (Forensic Architecture, 2024). This spread of disinformation in favor of Israel and the demonizing language applied to Palestinians and Hamas also highly contests the findings of the only peer-reviewed study that was conducted on anti-Israeli bias in German media (Neureiter, 2016). In both instances, journalists produced knowledge to reinforce the Orientalist belief system of the viewer. Hence, the findings rather confirm the literature that emphasized the complicity of the media in manufacturing consent to justify dominance over the Orient (Said, 1981; Herman & Chomsky, 1988; DiMaggio, 2015; Gendzier, 2016).

Additionally, the participants repeatedly emphasize to not distinguish between Palestinians and Hamas because both are antisemitic. As SPD politician Michael Roth expresses:

They cannot even acknowledge the awful crime that was committed. And this is why it is hard for me to believe that many Palestinians just want to live in peace. I believe, and this is the sad thing, they grew up with Israel hatred and antisemitism, are shaped by it. And I do not have enough fantasy to imagine turning this generation into human beings that are willing to approach [Israelis] with respect and to reconcile in this small region (Markus Lanz, 11/10/23).

Roth's framing once more reveals how important it is to see the construction of the Orient as inherently related to the Occident. The discourse of antisemitism in the Orient only becomes potent through projection of the Occident's antisemitic past onto the Orient.

While Palestinians are portrayed as part of a broader antisemitic Arab mob, Hamas is seen as part of a much bigger threat of global Jihad and antisemitism which at its core sees Iran as the one who is pulling the strings. When talking about a potential Israeli ground invasion, Natalie Amiri, a German Iranian journalist argues:

[The ground invasion] will create a lot of pictures of bleeding children. And these pictures are new material for Hamas propaganda, this is precisely their calculation, the same goes for the Islamic republic of Iran by the way.

German Israeli Historian Michael Wolffsohn³ then adds:

Iran, until now, applied a devilishly masterful strategy by moving its puppets. [...] We also know that Iran helped to shut down Israeli electronics [on Oct. 7th] and that it mobilized Hezbollah (Anne Will, 15/10/23).

We do not know if Iran helped to shut down Israeli electronics. Rather, it looks like Iran was as surprised by the attack as the rest of the world (Landay & Spetalnick, 2023). Al-Jazeera released a comprehensive reconstruction of the October 7th events, in which it showed footage of simple drones that took out radar sensors along the border.⁴ Nonetheless, Wolffsohn and Amiri construct a big conspiracy

³ Wolffsohn is portrayed in Germany as a cold, analytical historian, who is above political bias, despite having served in the IDF himself. However, he frequently writes articles for the *BILD*, Germany's foremost right-wing newspaper, which is known for its sensationalist and inflammatory reporting. While defending Aiwanger (Wolffsohn, 2023), the Bavarian vice prime minister who carried antisemitic leaflets when he went to school, in a piece called "Intifada und Nahostkriege in Deutschland und Europa" Wolffsohn smears Palestinians as violent terrorists who not only threaten Israel but also Germany (Wolffsohn, 2017).

⁴ See Al-Jazeera Investigations: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_0atzea-mPY&ab_channel=AlJazeeraEnglish (Accessed 23/03/24). Timestamp: 12:47.

here by immediately involving Iran, who even calculated the photos of bleeding children as part of their antisemitic propaganda. The rhetoric that Amiri applies bears eerie similarities with Nazi rhetoric, as Reich Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels stated in 1941:

One suddenly has the impression that the Berlin Jewish population consists only of little babies whose childish helplessness might move us, or else fragile old ladies. The Jews send out the pitiable (Greenwald, 2014).

In a similar vein, Netanyahu stated in 2014, responding to the international critique of Israel's war in Gaza:

They want to pile up as many civilian dead as they can. They use telegenically dead Palestinians for their cause (ibid.).

This rhetoric reduces Palestinian children to no more than objects of propaganda, thus having an extremely dehumanizing effect. While 40 supposedly beheaded Israeli babies let one lose faith in humanity, bleeding Palestinian children are a necessary sacrifice for the fight against evil, for which only Hamas and Iran are responsible.

To sum up, the Orient is constructed as a barbaric region, in which Hamas is the personified evil. By dehumanizing Hamas, the symbolic elites also blur the lines towards Palestinians and Arabs in general. Palestinians are inescapable victims at best and complicit in the attacks at worst, reaffirming the findings of Wang (2017). Furthermore, Hamas is part of a broader geopolitical context of terror states and organizations which are led by Iran. While this portrayal of the Orient already revealed a lot about the implicit self-perception of the Occident, the following section pays closer attention to the explicit portrayal of the Occident in contrast to the Orient.

5.1.3 The Occident

In the apocalyptic discourse outlined above, Israel inhabits the role of the righteous hero who is existentially threatened by a "bestial" enemy. In order to endure, Israel

has to show strength. This is exactly the narrative that is expressed by Ahmad Mansour⁵:

This [Oct 7th] will change our understanding of multiculturalism. [...] The Middle East works differently, there is a different mentality. If Israel shows signs of weakness, if it is not able to reach its expressed goals, to destroy Gaza, it will be eaten (Markus Lanz, 11/10/23).

Here, one can also already notice how Israel is perceived as being a part of the Occident. Israel is on the front lines in the battle against the barbarian enemy. In a way, Mansour manages to bridge the gap between manifest and latent Orientalism. In his speech acts, the latent Orientalism that is oftentimes difficult to detect manifests itself directly in his expression about the otherness and savagery of the Orient.

This is exactly what Israel is not. In the Hegemonic discourse, Israel is depicted by emphasizing its moral virtue as being the only democratic country in a region of despotism. As vice chancellor Robert Habeck, a member of the Green party, notes:

I mean, Israel, and this is what makes this state so special, is the only democracy in the region [...] And for me, it is clear that Israel has to decide for itself how it will restore its security, and Germany must support it (Markus Lanz, 01/11/23).

Israel's security is the priority since it supposedly faces an existential threat. As historian Khalidi (2013) argues: "it takes precedence over virtually everything else" (p. X). On the other hand, the security concerns of the Palestinians are not considered at all, despite living under a military occupation and being stripped of the most basic human rights (ibid.). They are rather perceived as part of the existential threat that Israel faces. Similarly, the discourse about Israel's security completely excludes the security concerns of the countries who are greatly destabilized by Israeli policy, such as Lebanon (e.g. Khalidi, 2014). Hence, as Said argues, the Orient only exists as far as it concerns Western interests.

⁵ Being of Palestinian origin, he was raised in Israel. For over a decade, he has been viewed in the German public as an accomplished expert on Islam. However, he made a name for himself by spreading extremely anti-Muslim talking points. In a Haaretz interview, when asked if he agrees with Yaron London, who said that all Arabs are savages, he stated: "I'd tell him some Arabs are savages and some aren't [...] Let's define 'savage.' I think mainstream Arabs have huge problems with democracy and everything connected to human rights. There are problems of violence that are related to culture" (Rozovsky, 2019). He is an influential figure in German policy initiatives towards Islamism and towards integration initiatives in general, while working for right-wing think tanks such as the *Conrad-Adenauer-Stiftung* (Bridge Initiative Team, 2020).

The emphasis on supporting Israel's security establishes it as part of the Occident. This is amplified through the German emphasis on Israel's security as *raison d'état*, a concept that Angela Merkel established in her Knesset speech of 2008. Habeck, among many other guests, reaffirms this commitment:

The security of Israel is one of the principles of this republic, as one would say a necessary condition for a democracy is the right of freedom of speech, free press, right to vote, this is how it is meant. *Raison d'état* means that the security of Israel is part of the democratic identity of this republic (Markus Lanz, 01/11/2023).

Leaving aside the irony of emphasizing the rights of freedom of speech and press while Germany is cracking down on Palestinian voices and protests (Marsh, 2023; DW, 2024), here it becomes clear how deeply rooted German support and solidarity for Israel is. Israel's security is equated with Germany's security.

Furthermore, the German discourse reveals a very critical attitude towards the EU. While German politicians (leaving aside far-right nationalists) have continuously emphasized the importance of European integration and multilateralism (Gasparth & Oppermann, 2021), many guests express frustration about the EU's position on the conflict. FDP politician Strack-Zimmermann complains:

It would have been a great chance for the Europeans, especially because it is repeated time and again, we stand with Israel, not only Germany, and it is almost tragic in such a moment, that the German president of the EU commission Mrs. von der Leyen – who undoubtedly is close to Israel since she was German defense minister – argued with the president of the European Council Michel, what the right path is. It would have been the chance for Europe to get involved in the conflict in a positive way (Markus Lanz, 19/10/23).

Germany is a country that significantly influences European policy. Being an influential European actor, it is no wonder that the emphasis of a European identity is held high by German politicians. However, as Said argues, neither Orient nor Occident are given entities. The discourse on the EU reveals the fragility of a dominant Occident. The disagreement within the EU is perceived as a missed opportunity to further strengthen the domination of the Orient.

Consequently, the Hegemony of the Orientalist discourse must be reinforced. This happens by emphasizing the relationship towards the US. The US is perceived

as the role model for the Occident. They embody the virtues that are lacking in Europe. As SPD politician Roth states:

I really want to show the big difference between US politicians and European politicians. The USA is the oldest, longest, and most loyal ally of Israel. The Israeli security is essentially reliant on continuous US support. [...] The EU is completely irrelevant in this conflict because it is divided. [...] I would recommend the German policy, and I think the government does that very well, very wise, together with the USA to keep up the dialog with Israel's neighbors (Markus Lanz, 14/11/2023).

The US constitutes the virtuous, faithful ally to Israel. This is no surprise given the long history of US military aid towards Israel (Masters & Merrow, 2024). The US is furthermore applauded for its current geopolitical influence and military might.

As Sucharewicz argues:

His [Biden's] signal, his message towards Iran was one syllable, that probably was more effective than 20 presidential speeches, and this syllable was 'don't! Just don't!' And when this 'just don't' would be reaffirmed from Germany, and all of Europe [...] it will have a direct impact (Markus Lanz, 10/10/23).

Both quotes illustrate how the Occident, most forcefully through the US, aims to dominate the Orient. Firstly, the framing of 'Israel's neighbor' reduces the existence of states of the region as only important as far as their relationship with Israel is concerned. An existence outside this relationship is denied. This is further expressed in the statement 'just don't'. Iran and Hezbollah are simply commanded to stay out of the conflict. Their demands and grievances are invalidated, and they are simply instructed to not act on their own accord, like a grounded child.

To conclude, in the Hegemonic discourse of the debate shows Israel is portrayed as the righteous, innocent victim that is clearly a part of what Said calls the Occident. In Germany, Israel is understood as being part of the German *raison d'etat*. That means that Israel's security is an essential tenet of the German state. The EU is viewed critically because of the lack of consent within its member states, thus lessening the power of the Orientalist discourse. In contrast, the US is portrayed as a clear leader of the Occident with a long history of support for Israel and the military might to influence geopolitics in the MENA region and thus to enforce dominance over the Orient.

5.2. Knowledge and the Ideological Foundations of the Orientalist Discourse in Germany

While the previous sections illustrated how the Orientalist discourse is constructed in the debate shows, the following two sections aim to explore the ideological roots that make this discourse possible. Except for Sanz Sabido (2015) none of the studies on media representation of the Israel-Palestine conflict seriously took into consideration the historical context or, as Foucault framed it, the genealogy that created this discourse in the first place. The Orientalist discourse that I portrayed did not start on October 7th. It is Hegemonic because it makes sense in the context of existing knowledge and ideology of those who participate in the discourse. As has been shown in the theoretical framework of this study, knowledge and ideology are inherently interlinked. They constitute what Gramsci called common sense. Knowledge and ideology reproduce one another and potentially create a powerful discourse, in this case the German discourse about the Orient. The following two sections aim to explore this process.

5.2.1 Zionist Narratives and the History of the Conflict

In the context of Palestine, dominance over the Orient is deeply linked to Zionist ideology. What the West knows about Palestine is fundamentally shaped by Zionist narratives. This is reflected in the guest selection of both shows. There were only two guests of Palestinian origins invited, while Zionist and Israeli guests and arguments were omnipresent. The data analysis shows that Zionism plays an integral part in the creation of knowledge about the Israel-Palestine conflict. I illustrate that by analyzing how the history of the Israel-Palestine conflict is constructed in the German discourse.

Zionism here is regarded as a nationalist ideology. Despite the religious as well as socialist aura of romanticism that surrounds Zionism, it has always been viewed by the builders of the state of Israel as an ideology that discursively underpins the necessity to build a Jewish nation in the land of Palestine. This has been demonstrated by the Israeli scholar Zeev Sternhell (1998), who explores the roots of Zionism in his book *The Founding Myths of Israel*.

The period prior to 1948 is represented in the German discourse only once, presented by the German diplomat Andreas Reinecke. It is worth showing the whole extract. After arguing that there are two narratives, one starting with the destruction of the second Jewish temple in 60 CE, he highlights the second narrative:

One can say the Jewish settlement started, the Aliyah of Jews from Europe, by the way in the age of antisemitism, of growing antisemitism in the second half of the 19th century in Russia, in Germany, in France, Dreyfus affair, pogroms, the first Jews arrived there, when in the age of nation-state building also Theodor Herzl, the first to shape the ideology of Zionism in his book 'Der Judenstaat', who by the way wanted a democratic Jewish state for all groups [Lanz interrupts] that evolved the first settlers bought land. It was bad overpriced land from Arab landowners in Damascus, and they settled with Kibbutzim, a socialist orientation. That increased during WWI. Then the first pogroms started, Hebron 1929, this increased, pogroms of Arabs against Jews in Hebron, then the Third Reich, more immigrants, in the 40s they [Jewish population] became bigger, Britain was the mandate power, told by the League of Nations to administer the area after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, tried to mediate between the new Jewish immigrants, Israel did not exist then, and the Palestinians. This failed and after WWII they asked the United Nations for help and said: "Solve the problem". And back in the day there were two models, one joint state and the other was a partition plan, which was accepted by the UN [...] (Markus Lanz, 14/11/23).

This distorted and superficial knowledge production is the entire context that the audience gets to know. The indigenous Palestinians only exist in as far as they interact with the Zionist settlers. They are merely obstacles, and responsible for the "Arab" pogroms, again drawing on the Orientalist trope of a homogenous Arab mass. The existence of an indigenous culture and a nationalist movement that by 1929 was already disillusioned with the Zionist project because of the expropriation of Palestinian land, increasing labor discrimination in the emerging economy and the Zionists' expressed goal to build a Jewish nation in the Palestinian homeland finds no mention (Lockman 2012; Khalidi, 2020; Allen, 2021).

This would contradict the mystical aura surrounding the Zionist pioneers, who managed to create the state out of an empty land. By producing knowledge about this important chapter in the history of the conflict this way, Reinecke reinforces one of the key tenets of Zionism, expressed in the popular slogan 'A land without a people for a people without a land'. Knowledge about Palestinian culture is

completely sidelined. The denial of Palestinian existence has been expressed by Israeli officials and Western elites ever since the inception of the state of Israel. Take Golda Meir, former Israeli prime minister, who stated in 1969 “there were no such thing as a Palestinian people... they did not exist” (Khalidi, 2020, p. 105). This claim has further been enforced by the works of pseudo academics, such as Joan Peters. In her infamous book *From Time Immemorial* (1984), she argues against a Palestinian claim to the land because they are not indigenous (Said, 1988; Finkelstein 1988). Zionist ideology thus has produced a body of knowledge about the Palestinians or their absence that is still present in the German Orientalist discourse.

The denial of Palestinian existence also becomes visible in the discourse around the events of 1948. After Reinecke summarized the pre-state history, Markus Lanz directs the conversation towards the mass expulsion of the Palestinians and shows photos of the fleeing Palestinians in 1948. Reinecke immediately rejects this narrative by reacting to the photos:

Well, of course this was the flight or the expulsion of the initial Palestinian population, but to be honest I only want to engage in this debate to a certain limit. I can understand it [the debate] because we obviously have the opposite pictures of the Israelis, who, nearly starved, came out of the concentration camps in Germany to Israel, and we are not completely innocent in this case, to put it casually (Markus Lanz, 14/11/23).

Palestinian suffering immediately must be relativized by referring to the Holocaust, thus making both parties equally the victims. Maybe it would be a reasonable comparison if Palestinians were responsible for the pictures of starved Jews. However, Germany has been responsible for these pictures. The Palestinians did have nothing to do with it, despite conspiracies uttered by Netanyahu, who claimed that the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem convinced Hitler to exterminate the Jews (Beaumont, 2015). They faced a threat by an entity that was in Palestine long before the Holocaust. Reinecke continues by pointing out the supposed uncertainty about what happened in 1948:

Here we see pictures of Arabs and Palestinians who left their country, some fled, some were expelled it differs from case to case, here we actually have two narratives, and both are legitimate (Markus Lanz, 14/11/23).

The portrayed ambiguity about the Palestinians leaving on their own will very much reflect on what was already shown in the literature review in the context of the US, regarding the discrepancy of academic and popular knowledge (Massad, 2005; Gendzier, 2016). It was the Israeli historian Benny Morris (1987), who evaporated these arguments by systematically mapping the intentional expulsion of the Palestinian population to establish a state with a Jewish majority, after Israel declassified the military documents of 1948. Forced transfer was state policy, an idea that all major Zionist pioneers have embraced, from Theodor Herzl to David Ben-Gurion and Zeev Jabotinsky. In the words of Ben-Gurion, writing to his son in response to the partition recommendation by the Peel commission in 1938:

We must expel Arabs and take their places... and if we have to use force - not to dispossess the Arabs of the Negev and Transjordan, but to guarantee our own right to settle in those places - then we have force at our disposal (Morris, 1987, p. 25).

The letter furthermore showcases Ben-Gurion's discontent with the British partition plan, emphasizing:

[A] Jewish state in part [of Palestine] is not an end, but a beginning.... [...] Establishing a [small] state... will serve as a very potent lever in our historical efforts to redeem the whole country (Morris, 2001, p. 138).

According to Morris, both Chaim Weizmann and David Ben-Gurion saw the proposal by the Peel commission "as a stepping stone to further expansion and the eventual takeover of the whole" (ibid.). However, knowledge is not necessarily important in its relation to presented evidence, but rather to the extent that it matches the common sense of the community. Zionism impacted the knowledge production of the conflict for a long time in Germany, hence arguments like Benny Morris's are completely absent in both debate shows.

Zionist ideology becomes further apparent in the discourse surrounding the Six-Day-War of 1967. Historian Michael Wolffsohn, who himself served in the IDF and was stationed in the newly occupied West Bank in 1967, captures this sentiment well:

Wolffsohn: There was, after the Six-Day War in 1967 [a feeling of] tremendous liberation from the Jewish Israeli point of view, because one feared the second Holocaust, the destruction of the Jewish state, which, thank God, did not happen.

Lanz: ... And which [Israel] was attacked right after its foundation...

Wolffsohn: Correct, and right before the Six-Day War the destruction seemed close at hand again, if not of the Jewish people, certainly of the Jewish state. The result is well known, Israel won, and I was one of the first occupiers, and we roamed through Ramallah, whistling Israeli songs. [...] On the one hand the big relief, no, the state has not been destroyed, on the other hand, the suffering. It was the big question to solve this dilemma, and there were many opportunities that I do not want to dive into now. But they existed [...] and it is the tragedy of the Palestinian people that its leadership did not take them (Markus Lanz, 31/10/23).

Firstly, viewing the situation prior to the war as a threat of the dimensions of the Holocaust is questionable at best. Nonetheless, the claim of the inevitability of the 1967 war is deeply ingrained into Zionism and hence, into the German discourse. Both Tom Segev (2005) and Avi Shlaim (2012), renowned Israeli historians, contested this notion by quoting US president Lyndon B. Johnson who told Israeli Foreign minister Abba Eban that it was the unanimous view of US military experts that Egypt will not attack Israel, and if it would, the Israelis “would whip the hell out of them” (Segev, p. 265; Shlaim, p. 34). Again, one traces a big discrepancy between Orientalist common sense and critical academic knowledge production (Massad, 2005; Gendzier, 2016).

This narrative of existential threat serves the goal to defuse the issue of the subsequent occupation and to paint the picture of Israel’s drive for peaceful coexistence with the Palestinians. Researcher Guido Steinberg⁶ claims:

Israel was never a colonizer [...] it is an antisemitic narrative, that many people in the Arab states, people on the left, believe, because Israel never voluntarily took on this role, it is just a state that wants to exist. There are people, Jewish people, who of course need a refuge.

Lanz then reinforces this narrative by stating:

In this context, the dimensions are very interesting. So, this tiny country Israel of not even 9 million people, surrounded by approximately 500 million Arabs (Markus Lanz, 31/10/23).

⁶ Guido Steinberg is a researcher of the government funded research institute *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP)*. See his research profile: <https://www.swp-berlin.org/wissenschaftler-in/guido-steinberg>. In his articles, he consistently argues for Islamic fundamentalism being the root cause of problems within the MENA region as well as between the West and the MENA region. Colonial history or continuous interference mainly by the US are sidenotes at best.

Steinberg, who is described by the hosts as an expert on the conflict, does not even problematize the occupation. In line with Wolffsohn, Steinberg views the occupation as a logical consequence of Arab aggression, which Israel could have possibly avoided. However, if one believes the assumption that Egypt constituted an existential threat to Israel, it still does not answer the question of why it was deemed necessary to occupy a territory that was more than three times its initial size. Despite Wolffsohn's vague claims of Israeli offers to settle the conflict, it seemed like the only kind of settlement Israel was interested in at the time were the ones established on the ground of the occupied territories – as was the case in the Golan heights only one month after the war, and in the West Bank in September 1967 (Raz, 2015). In fact, the Israeli cabinet meetings of June 1967 ended with a resolution to exclude the West Bank and Gaza from future peace talks (Pappe, 2011). This attitude is in line with the tenor of former defense minister Moshe Dayan, who proclaimed on the third day of war: “We returned to our most holy places; we have returned and we shall never leave them” (Raz, 2015, p. 3).

These statements reveal how deeply intertwined Orientalist knowledge production and Zionist ideology are. Both Wolffsohn and Steinberg, accomplished researchers on the MENA region, produce a body of manifest Orientalist knowledge. Because latent Orientalism led Lanz to internalize that Arabs are a scary monolith, he reinforces the knowledge provided by Wolffsohn and Steinberg. However, Steinberg and Wolffsohn themselves are deeply influenced by a discourse that has existed for decades, as can be seen in statements by Ben-Gurion, Meir and Dayan. The authority that both researchers enjoy illustrates Foucault's notion of the power of discourse. The genealogy of the Zionist Orientalist discourse created their career options in the first place, which they now reinforce as authoritative figures on the conflict. They create what Gramsci called common sense.

The Hegemony of Zionist ideology also becomes apparent in the German discourse about Gaza after 2005. It is again Michael Wolffsohn who claims:

There were so many political opportunities for the Gaza Strip, and I think we should focus on that. All we see right now, including the Palestinian victims we see, and legitimately feeling compassionate about, has a cause. And without holding a history lecture, it can be traced back to 2007. Israel completely pulled out of the Gaza Strip. There is not a single

Jewish settler in the Gaza Strip. There existed programs that aimed, already in 1993 in the context of the Oslo accords [...], to transform the Gaza Strip into the Singapore or the Hongkong of the Middle East. The investors stood in line (Anne Will, 15/10/23).

This framing is extremely cynical and misleading. It is hard to believe that it is unintentional when it comes from someone who has profound knowledge on the matter. Especially, when he states right afterward:

You can do it [defeat Hamas] more elegantly, for example by completely cutting off the Gaza Strip's supply of water, no medical supplies, no food and so forth (ibid.).

His reflection on Gaza after 2005 completely ignores the reality that Israel never loosened its total blockade on Gaza, which lead most international organizations to still consider Gaza as occupied (e.g. *Human Rights Watch*, 2006; *Amnesty International*, 2010). He also fails to highlight that the blockade was used intentionally to pressure Hamas by controlling Gazans' access to food. In the words of former Israeli government advisor Dov Weissglass: "The idea is to put the Palestinians on a diet, but not to make them die of hunger" (*BBC*, 2012). Nor does he acknowledge Israel's violations of ceasefires with Hamas and its systematic bombing campaigns, dubbed as "mowing the grass" (Benn, 2024).

What is emphasized repeatedly, is Hamas' responsibility for the situation in Gaza, because of its apparent disposition to antisemitism and violence, thus legitimizing any means necessary to defeat them. Here one can trace another connection of Orientalism and Zionism in its form of post 9/11 Islamophobia. This Orientalist knowledge manifests itself in the German discourse through former member of the German intelligence service Gerhard Conrad:

The use of human shields can be derived from Islamist or Jihadi principles. The holy war, for the liberation of the holy soil, as you know, this explains the connection to Al-Aqsa, [...] to liberate it from non-Muslims. On top of that you have the crusades alliteration [sic] and the old references to the era of Muhammad, the victory of the Jews of Khaybar...

Anne Will then pushes back a little bit by emphasizing that "now we are debating the present", Conrad however insists:

No, no, no, no, Khaybar, that is very important, this attitude, you know? This is exactly the dilemma, and not only with Hamas. This attitude is, as it is said, God with us, namely, the obligation of Muslims as individual duty to fight the Jihad, and this also goes for women, children and the elderly, who then sacrifice their lives for the Jihad. And this is

how it is sold by Hamas. And against this it is impossible to reason with common sense and appeals (Anne Will, 15/10/23).

Firstly, the human shield narrative is contestable. Amnesty International reports on former conflicts between Israel and Hamas show no indication that Hamas had been using human shields (e.g. *Amnesty International*, 2009; 2014). But even if Hamas is using its population as human shields, it would not justify indiscriminate use of force in order to destroy Hamas.

More importantly though, narrowing down the violence in the Israel-Palestine conflict to ancient Islamic stories is oversimplifying at least. However, it is precisely the kind of Orientalist discourse that detaches the current atrocities of October 7th from any material conditions in Gaza or the historical context of the conflict and finds the cause in Islamic radicalism. Again, it works because it grows out of a long trajectory of latent Orientalism. For a long time, this latent Orientalism has been reinforced by Zionist ideology. It was none other than Benjamin Netanyahu, who states in his essay collection *Terrorism: How the West can win* from 1987:

The root cause of terrorism lies not in grievances but in a disposition toward unbridled violence. This can be traced to a world view which asserts that certain ideological and religious goals justify, indeed demand, the shedding of all moral inhibitions (cited in Said, 1987, p. 199).

Needless to say, that those who inherit a disposition to violence are not Jewish settlers but Arab Muslims. It is needless to say because the mind that has internalized the Orientalist discourse knows that Netanyahu is right when he states that the Arabs have “a disposition toward unbridled violence”. Thus, his statement well expresses the power that that Zionist discourse on Israel-Palestine inherits because it draws on the Orientalist knowledge that the West started to produce centuries ago in order to dominate it. Zionism thus, as Hall (1982) states, warranted itself in “and selectively reproduced the common stock of knowledge in society” (ibid., p. 73).

To sum up, Zionist ideology is prevalent and uncontested in German public discourse. By drawing on Orientalist tropes, it greatly influenced the knowledge production about the history of the conflict. It is expressed in the neglect of an indigenous culture prior to 1948, in the portrayal of 1948 as events in which both Israelis and Palestinians were the victims, as well as in the emphasis on Israel’s

peaceful nature surrounded by a mighty, homogenous enemy. Furthermore, Zionist narratives of the Islamic threat take on a symbiosis with Orientalist perceptions of terrorism who are so dominant in Western discourse, especially since 9/11.

5.2.2 German Exceptionalism

It has been explored by now that the symbolic elites in Germany create a Hegemonic discourse about the events that were unfolding after October 7th that shows clear patterns of latent Orientalism when it is talked about Israel/Palestine. This discourse is based on knowledge that is highly affected by Zionist ideology. This section explores why Zionism enjoys literally uncontested Hegemony in the German discourse. It investigates the unique German ideology that I characterize as German Exceptionalism. A statement that perfectly captures this ideology is voiced by Michael Roth:

We cannot hide behind empty phrases now. Germany, against the background of its history, gave a promise. For us, the right for Israel to exist within secure borders, in freedom is a *raison d'état* (Markus Lanz, 11/10/23).

Firstly, Roth clearly expresses a strong nationalistic worldview. Both Germany's and Israel's characteristics as a nation are stressed. Secondly, he expresses a clear sense of righteousness for giving this promise to Israel. Because "we (the German people)" gave that promise, "we" are the virtuous people. Thirdly, this evokes a sense of pride. Because "we" gave this promise we can feel good again about being German. As will be shown, this ideology has a lineage back to Germany's dark past and drives a Hegemonic discourse that is by no means as virtuous as Roth wants to sell it.

It is no surprise that Germany's relationship with Israel is deeply influenced by its legacy of the Holocaust. However, this legacy of and responsibility for the Holocaust is framed in an incredibly nationalistic way. Salvation can only be attained by unapologetically supporting the nation-state of Israel. Vice chancellor Robert Habeck expresses this as follows:

If it is the position of the Israeli government [to bomb Gaza], who is the political representative of Israel, or the majority of the Jews, we will support that (Markus Lanz 01/11/23).

This discourse, however, leads to a very troubling consequence. It completely blurs the lines between Judaism and Zionism. In the German discourse, Jewish people and Israelis are often conflated. In a sense, Habeck's comment can be regarded as antisemitic. Besides it being factually wrong, it assumes a homogenous Jewish people and indicates that all the Jewish people are connected to the actions of the Israeli state. To understand why this discourse became so powerful, it is necessary to understand its genealogy, as Foucault argues.

In 1952 the Federal Republic of Germany signed a reparations agreement with the state of Israel. This must be understood in the context of two important and interconnected factors that drove Germany after WWII. At this time, nationalist, imperial ideology was profoundly ingrained in the mindset of the German people and politicians alike (Friedrichsmeyer et al., 1998). It was the era of nations and empires. A great nation constitutes a great culture and, in reverse, if one constitutes a people without a culture one is destined to be dominated and ruled as subaltern to Western civilization (Braach-Maksvytis, 2011). In that regard, as was also the case after WWI, German discourse presented the loss of WWII mainly as a humiliation for the great nation it was destined to be. This was well expressed by then-chancellor Conrad Adenauer, when introducing the reparations agreement to the German parliament in 1953:

The name of our fatherland must regain the esteem appropriate to the historic accomplishment of the German people in culture and economic matters (ibid., p. 299).

Rather than expressing sincere guilt and regret for the crimes committed by the German people during WWII, Adenauer seems to have been more concerned with Germany's standing in the international community. Approaching Israel served this goal. Of course, if one believes in the division of humanity into great nations and those who are dominated by them, it is plausible to support the project that claims to establish the Jewish nation. Hence, it also becomes more understandable why Zionism has such a dominant impact in the German discourse. Zionism feeds on the imagination of nationalists. Equally, it becomes apparent why there was no sympathy for Palestinians. After all, their existence is barely acknowledged, certainly they do not constitute a nation.

In line with that, German society in 1952 was deeply permeated with Nazis. When the Allied Military Government transferred the authority to trial Nazi criminals to the German courts, the number of convictions steeply declined from 5006 under the Allies, to “809 in 1950, 123 in 1953, and only 44 in 1954” (Clark, 1999, p. 122). Committed Nazis could be found in all spheres of German society, including the courts and in Adenauer’s inner circle. Hans Globke, the head of the German Chancellery, worked on the drafts of the infamous Nuremberg Laws, just to take one example (Lommatzsch, 2003). In such an environment, it is hard to assume a heartfelt guilt about the crimes that were committed. Adenauer himself said in an interview after his time in office in 1965:

We had done to the Jews so much injustice, committed such crimes against them, that somehow these had to be expiated or repaired, if we were at all to regain our standing under the nations of the earth. Furthermore, the power of the Jews even today, especially in America, should not be underestimated (Adenauer 1965).⁷

While again emphasizing the importance of Germany’s standing as a great nation, his framing of “the power of the Jews”, certainly in the German language, resembles antisemitic conspiracies of a world Jewry that secretly dominates the world. What he basically expresses is: “If we are not nice to Israel, we will suffer under the power of the Jews.” Hence, antisemitic nationalism merged with the knowledge about the atrocities committed by the Nazis. By promoting Zionism, one’s own national identity could be restored. Hence, Zionism and German Exceptionalism constitute what Gramsci (1971) framed as “historically organic ideologies” (ibid. p. 376). They stand in a symbiotic relationship.

However, critical reflection about this trajectory is completely absent in the German discourse. German Exceptionalism formed a Hegemonic discourse by constructing a sense of righteousness and moral superiority. Righteousness by assuming to do the right thing in unapologetically supporting Israel, and moral superiority

⁷ The whole interview is available with English subtitles on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=90EVIH4KZsc&ab_channel=LeoDietrich (Accessed: 13/14/2024).

It captures the mindset of the time very well, especially the over emphasis of the Germans as a nation and Adenauer’s concern with the effect the Holocaust had on the German nation rather than the Jewish people.

by assuming the Arab world has yet to learn the lesson that “we” have internalized so admirably. This narrative is well expressed by Markus Lanz:

When you listen to Omid Nouripour, head of the Green party, who grew up in Tehran, he says ‘every morning the death of Israel was sworn, this was my upbringing, I never learned anything about the Holocaust or history [in general], and it was this country [Germany] that showed me, there is another dimension to it, and this is what we should talk about’, and that is why he said we have to talk about imported antisemitism (Markus Lanz, 31/10/23).

To claim that Germany is the moral nation that needs to teach the antisemites from the Orient about antisemitism, while right-wing antisemitism and Holocaust denial are huge problems within German society, is incredibly arrogant and ignorant (e.g. *BBC*, 2020). However, it perfectly illustrates the powerful dynamics between Nationalism and Orientalism, which fundamentally shaped what is nowadays perceived as common sense in the German discourse.

The latent Orientalism that is so embedded in the German discourse really comes to the surface when Melanie Amann, a journalist for *Der Spiegel*, talks about the issue of “imported antisemitism” in German schools:

In principle, it’s Muslim, mostly boys and girls of Arab origin, who tell them [the teacher]: ‘You have no idea. You just listen to Western media; there the conflict is totally misrepresented. We have family down there; they tell us how it really is.’ How do you break through this? Because you have the credibility of Auntie, Uncle, Grandma, Grandpa, so at what point do you teach the facts? The teachers get interrupted by horror stories about Israel, about killed babies. Instead, now it was Hamas who killed babies. [...] When it comes to the Middle East conflict we are lacking a modern pedagogic concept, it lacks a targeted address, because it aims at children from German families, who already come from a different [non-Muslim] background, where the parents ideally already exemplify certain values about this topic, and those are not exemplified to these [migrant] children (Markus Lanz, 17/10/23).

Guido Steinberg reinforces this perceived problem by claiming:

And if you have to deal with families in which anti-Israel attitudes and [anti] Jewish hatred, also Islamism and conservative Islam dominate, you won’t get rid of it in school. [...] I know a lot of those young Palestinians and Syrians, it is a tough nut to crack, that has not been cracked before (ibid.).

One might wonder what the facts and the values are that need to be taught on the Israel-Palestine conflict. Again, the knowledge about the conflict, in the case of Germany, is mainly produced by Zionist as well as German nationalist ideology. Hence, “our” values are those who are in line with Zionist history making. The Arabs in Germany apparently still have to learn this lesson. Steinberg then reinforces Orientalist tropes of the backwardness of Islam. While Germany is redeemed of its past, it is the Muslim migrants who now constitute a new threat to Germany’s enlightened values.

This sense of moral superiority is not only expressed towards the Orient, but also whenever the UN stance on the conflict is debated. Giovanni di Lorenzo, Editor-in-Chief of the prestigious newspaper *Die Zeit*, states:

Of course, it is good that the United Nations exists, but for me the UN has not been a moral authority for a long time (Markus Lanz, 01/11/23).

Furthermore, SPD General Secretary Kühnert argues:

I believe from an Israeli perspective on the UN [...] there exists a certain fatigue, because one needs to know that for years most resolutions of the general assembly are directed against Israel, while North Korea and other despots of the world are not mentioned at all (Anne Will, 15/10/23).

Apparently, Germany – the country that committed the Holocaust in the first place and thus fundamentally necessitated the establishment of a supra national organization to prevent this from happening again – is a more virtuous authority on human rights than the UN. After all, most countries have not committed a genocide against the Jewish people, so how would they know better? However, it does speak for the power of discourse that the resolutions against Israel are rather perceived as a sign of anti-Jewish bigotry than of evidence for Israel’s violations of international law. Furthermore, it is ironic that Kühnert mentions Israel in the same breath as North Korea (which is not even a member state of the UN), setting the bar for democratic compliance with international law relatively low.

Michael Wolffsohn explains the UN’s supposed anti-Israel bias the following way:

In short, the UN added fuel to the fire, instead of being a forum for world peace, and at the top of this movement of continuity of the UN is Mr. Guterres, who comes from

Portugal, and Portugal for 500 years was judenrein [cleansed of Jews], to formulate it in the language of the Nazis (Markus Lanz, 31/10/23).

Guido Steinberg then states:

The UN, since 2015, adopted 150 resolutions against Israel, while only 68 against all other nations in the world. So, it is crystal clear how polarized the world is by now and what a problem we have (ibid.).

Calling the Secretary-General of the UN an antisemite because he comes from Portugal, while using Nazi vocabulary to score this point, is remarkable, as is the lack of scrutiny of such a statement by the other guests. Instead of criticizing at least the framing of Wolffsohn's statement, Steinberg just reinforces this narrative. His statement captures the sense of arrogance and moral superiority by assuming everyone else is polarized, only "we" are not. Furthermore, calling Guterres an antisemite for being Portuguese very much resembles the nationalistic discourse that led to the horrors of the Holocaust in the first place.

To sum up, Germany's relationship with Israel and the Zionist tenor in German public discourse derives from a unique German belief system that is highly influenced by its past. What is framed as a historic responsibility towards the state of Israel has deep roots in the Holocaust and the subsequent process of rebuilding the German nation. German society was deeply permeated by Nazi criminals, and German thinking was inherently nationalistic. Zionism thus was a salient ideology in an environment in which nations enjoyed an ontological certainty. Assuming that German rapprochement towards Israel was a sincere reflection of remorse is highly problematic, yet it is the dominant representation. However, this rapprochement laid the foundation for the belief system that I call German Exceptionalism. It is expressed in a sense of moral superiority which is projected at the Arab world in general and Palestinians in particular. Furthermore, it leads Germany's symbolic elites to sharply criticize the UN, accusing it of antisemitism. Paired with Zionism, it creates a Hegemonic discourse in Germany's civil society.

6. Conclusion

The first research question aimed at understanding how Orientalism helps to make sense of the discourse formation of the Israel-Palestine conflict that took place in

Germany after the events of October 7th. I applied Philip Smith's concept of War Narratives because it offers a promising framework to understand language in the context of war. The results clearly show that the participants in the debate shows portray the events of October 7th as an apocalyptic scenario. The Hamas attack is portrayed as constituting an existential threat to Israel and as another episode of endless Jewish suffering by repeatedly referring to the Holocaust. In doing so, the participants engage in extreme moral polarization to legitimize a brutal retaliation campaign. By drawing on Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, I aimed to illustrate why this moral polarization is achieved. Israel and Hamas constitute the opposites in this polarization. The analysis clearly indicated that latent forms of Orientalism are deeply ingrained in the German discourse. Only because of those latent structures was it possible for the extreme manifestations of Orientalism to become so Hegemonic in the German discourse. Hamas was equated with pure, barbaric evil, following a backwards religion. This demonization extends to the Palestinians in general. They are perceived as part of a homogenous Arab mass that is too emotional to understand the conflict. Simultaneously, it is emphasized that one should not differentiate them too much from Hamas because antisemitism is deeply ingrained in Muslim society in general. Israel on the other hand is portrayed as the righteous hero who is facing the apocalypse. It is part of the Occident, being on the forefront in the battle against the backwardness of the Orient. While the EU is criticized for weakening the discourse about the Orient, the US is seen as the role model to strengthen the Orientalist discourse in order to dominate the Orient.

The second research question aimed at exploring what Foucault calls the genealogy of the discursive representation of the conflict. However, in line with Gramsci, Hall, and Laclau and Mouffe, I emphasized the importance of ideology in discourse formation that helps to explain how knowledge about the Israel-Palestine conflict is produced. By analyzing the body of knowledge that teaches the viewer about the history of the Israel-Palestine conflict, I found that Zionism highly influences this body of knowledge. As a nationalist ideology, it produces knowledge about the history of the conflict that serves to legitimize the nation. This knowledge is clearly Hegemonic in the German discourse. Palestinians only exist in as much

as they interact with or contest the Zionist project. Israel on the other hand is portrayed as having always wanted to live in peace but is surrounded by a homogenous Arab threat.

The third research question aimed to understand why Zionism becomes uncontested in the German discourse. I explored the ideological foundation of what constitutes the common sense in German civil society, as Gramsci calls it. The discourse reveals that Germany understands its role in the conflict as deeply rooted in the legacy of the Holocaust. However, this is expressed in an extremely nationalistic way, viewing Israel as the representative of the Jewish people, and hence making support for Israel its *raison d'état*. By exploring the roots of this relationship, the study shows that aspirations of becoming a great nation again were the main motives that started the reparations process with Israel. This nationalism is still prevalent in the current discourse. Germany's support for Israel now is portrayed as the nation having come to terms with its dark past, and thus, reinitiating a newfound national pride and moral superiority. This is expressed by lecturing the Orient but also the UN about how antisemitic they are. Hence, Zionism and the German ideological discourse that I call German Exceptionalism create a powerful symbiosis, influenced by the legacy of the Holocaust and nationalism.

Hopefully, this research adds to a better understanding of the impact that the concept of Orientalism still has on the Israel-Palestine conflict, but also for the MENA region in general. It enriches the literature on media representation of the Israel-Palestine conflict in two ways. Firstly, many studies only focus on media bias in certain newspapers, based on the reporting on current events. While this is a valid approach, it oftentimes falls short of considering the historical and ideological context that drives the media bias in the first place. Drawing on Foucault's concept of genealogy, I aimed at offering an approach that might inspire future research about the MENA region. Secondly, the emphasis on debate shows as an arena in which civil society exchanges arguments and thus reproduces discourse, in my opinion offering a very promising object of analysis. If one seeks to find out more about the general discourse on a certain topic, these formats, more so than single media

outlets, provide a platform in which a much more comprehensive consent or dissent is constructed.

There are several limitations to this study that might inspire further research. Firstly, analyzing the history of knowledge production on a specific discourse is promising but also a complex field. While I linked the current discourse to the historical discourse in the post-war period, I limited myself to the statements of then-chancellor Adenauer. While he was an influential thought leader of his time, this leaves out the impact that other political factions, academia, and media have on the discourse. The discourse of the post-war period in Israel and Germany is highly significant, as it is the period in which the nation-states of Germany and Israel that we know today emerged. A more comprehensive study would be needed to better detect more nuances in the discourse of that time. Secondly, despite their big audience, public broadcasting might not have the same monopoly on shaping discourse that it had a few decades ago. In particular, younger generations consume media differently through social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram and X. Analyzing knowledge production on such platforms seems promising for the future.

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III. Appendix

The appendix includes a list of guests and a codebook. Both lists are extracted from NVivo. In both tables, *Files* refers to the number of appearances in the debate shows. *References* in III.I refers to the number of statements that each participant voiced in all the episodes. In III.II, it refers to the number of times each code was applied in all the episodes.

III.I List of Guests

Name	Files	References	Nationality	Classification	Profession
Abdul Chahin	1	9	German-Palestinian	Public Personalities	Poetry Slammer
Ahmad Mansour	1	36	German-Israeli	Experts	Psychologist
Andreas Reinicke	2	32	German	Experts	Diplomat
Anna Staroselski	1	5	German	Public Personalities	Speaker of <i>Werteinitiative</i>
Annalena Baerbock	1	11	German	Politicians	Foreign Minister, <i>Green Party</i>
Anne Will	3	130	German	Journalists	Host
Araye Sharuz Shalicar	2	15	German-Israeli	Israeli State Officials	Speaker of the IDF
Carl Bildt	1	3	Swedish	Politicians	Former Swedish Prime Minister
Carlo Masala	1	23	German	Experts	Political Science Professor
Carsten Linnemann	1	27	German	Politicians	General Secretary, <i>CDU</i>
Deborah Feldman	2	21	German-American	Public Personalities	Author
Elmar Theveßen	1	5	German	Journalists	D.C. Correspondent, <i>ZDF</i>
Eva Quadbeck	1	6	German	Journalists	Editor-in-Chief, <i>RND</i>
Florence Gaub	3	43	German-French	Experts	Head of Research Division <i>EUISS</i>
Gerhard Conrad	2	36	German	Experts	Former Employee, <i>BND</i>
Gilda Sahebi	1	38	German	Journalists	Freelance Journalist
Gili Roman	1	6	Israeli	Public Personalities	Family of the Hostages
Giovanni di Lorenzo	1	20	German-Italian	Journalists	Editor-in-Chief, <i>Die Zeit</i>
Golineh Atai	1	8	German	Journalists	Head of the Cairo Studio, <i>ZDF</i>
Guido Steinberg	2	31	German	Experts	Researcher, <i>SWP</i>
Hasnain Kazim	1	20	German	Public Personalities	Author
Hoda Salah	1	17	German-Egyptian	Experts	Researcher, <i>Kiel University</i>

Jenny Havemann	1	14	German-Israeli	Public Personalities	Entrepreneur
Johannes Vogel	1	24	German	Politicians	Member of Parliament, <i>FDP</i>
Kai Wegner	1	24	German	Politicians	Mayor of Berlin, <i>CDU</i>
Katrin Eigendorf	1	5	German	Journalists	Correspondent, <i>ZDF</i>
Kevin Kühnert	2	37	German	Politicians	General Secretary, <i>SPD</i>
Khola Maryam Hübsch	1	75	German	Journalists	Freelance Journalist
Kristin Helberg	1	28	German	Journalists	Freelance Journalist
Margot Friedländer	1	5	German	Public Personalities	Holocaust Survivor
Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann	1	60	German	Politicians	Chair of the Defense Committee, <i>FDP</i>
Markus Lanz	9	622	German-Italian	Journalists	Host
Melanie Amann	1	25	German	Journalists	Journalist, <i>Der Spiegel</i>
Melody Sucharewicz	1	17	German-Israeli	Israeli State Officials	Former Foreign Affairs Advisor
Michael Bewerunge	1	11	German	Journalists	Head of Tel Aviv Studio, <i>ZDF</i>
Michael Roth	2	39	German	Politicians	Member of Parliament, <i>SPD</i>
Michael Wolffsohn	2	38	German-Israeli	Experts	Historian
Natalie Amiri	1	5	German-Iranian	Journalists	Vice Head of Tel Aviv Studio, <i>ARD</i>
Norbert Röttgen	1	17	German	Politicians	Member of Parliament, <i>CDU</i>
Omid Nouripour	1	16	German-Iranian	Politicians	Co-Leader, <i>Green Party</i>
Rieke Havertz	1	15	German	Journalists	Journalist, <i>Die Zeit</i>
Robert Habeck	1	20	German	Politicians	Vice Chancellor, <i>Green Party</i>
Roderich Kiesewetter	1	16	German	Politicians	Member of Parliament, <i>CDU</i>
Ron Prosor	1	12	Israeli	Israeli State Officials	Israel's Ambassador to Germany
Serap Güler	1	28	German	Politicians	Member of Parliament, <i>CDU</i>
Sophia Maier	1	17	German	Journalists	Correspondent, <i>RTL</i>
Sönke Neitzel	1	16	German	Experts	Historian
Uwe Dziuballa	1	14	German	Public Personalities	Chef
Yassin Musharbash	1	12	German	Journalists	Correspondent, <i>Die Zeit</i>
Yazan Abo Rahmie	1	19	Palestinian	Public Personalities	Palestinian Refugee

III.II Codebook

Name	Description	Files	References
Ideology	Main theme that traces the ideological roots in the German discourse on the Israel-Palestine conflict.	12	326
German Exceptionalism	Collects the utterances that construct ideology that I call German Exceptionalism.	12	219
Authoritarianism	References in support of a crackdown on so called Western values (e.g. freedom of speech, freedom to protest etc.).	5	33
Grandeur	Expressions of national greatness.	7	27
Holocaust	References to the Holocaust.	8	22
International System	References to the international system (e.g. Institutions, Organizations).	8	25
International Law	Utterances about the application of international law.	6	11
United Nations	References to the UN.	5	12
Moral Superiority	Utterances that showcase a sense of moral superiority towards other groups.	10	89
Zionism	Utterances that illustrate the presence of the nationalist ideology called Zionism in the German discourse on the Israel-Palestine conflict.	9	99
History of the Conflict	References that aim at explaining the history of the Israel-Palestine conflict.	8	31
Zionist Myths	References to founding myths of the state of Israel.	8	36
Knowledge	Main theme that traces the produced knowledge about the conflict after October 7 th .	11	252

Name	Description	Files	References
Disinformation	Referring to information, that were either already debunked or taking something for granted that has not been confirmed yet.	11	44
Manifest Orientalism	Expressions Orientalist manifestations according to Said's definition.	10	116
Colonialism	References to other people and regions in an authoritative and superior way.	7	26
Islamophobia	Utterances that portray Muslim or Islam in a bad light.	10	55
Racism	Negative portrayals of a group of people based on their ethnicity.	7	35
Propaganda	References to Israeli Hasbara.	11	90
Latent Orientalism	Main theme that traces the latent Orientalist imaginations of the Israel-Palestine conflict in the German discourse.	11	614
The Apocalypse	References that aim to construct an apocalyptic scenario after what happened on October 7 th .	11	92
Discontinuity	References that emphasize the historical break that the events of October 7 th constitute.	9	20
Existential Threat	Utterances that portray the events of October 7 th as existential threat to Israel.	4	13
Security	Utterances that emphasize the importance of Israel's security.	7	20
Worthy vs. Unworthy Victims	References that illustrate differences in the value of Israeli vs. Palestinian life.	10	39
The Occident	References that constitute what Said defined as the Occident.	11	263

Name	Description	Files	References
EU	References to the EU.	8	13
Germany	References to the state of Germany.	10	114
Raison d'etat	References to the German policy towards Israel, framed by Angela Merkel in 2008.	8	30
The Problem in Germany	References that emphasize the problem of Islamism in Germany after the events of October 7 th .	9	63
Israel	References to the state of Israel.	11	108
US	References to the United States.	8	25
The Orient	References that constitute what Said defined as the Orient.	11	213
Arab Population	References to the citizens of an Arab state, as opposed to the regimes.	6	18
Arab States	This includes the Arab states that are not regarded as responsible for October 7 th .	8	24
Hamas	characterizations of Hamas	11	50
Hezbollah	References to Hezbollah.	8	19
Iran	References to the state of Iran.	7	22
Palestine	References to the Palestinian people and the Palestinian land.	11	72