Conceptualizing the Israeli Side in Al-Jazeera’s Metaphorical Discourse During *Al-Aqsa Flood*[[1]](#footnote-1)

# Abstract

# The present study aims at showing how the Israeli side is conceptualized in the metaphorical discourse of the Al-Jazeera channel, deemed a Hamas mouthpiece, from the beginning of the war on 7 October until 11 November 2023.[[2]](#footnote-2) The study uses as a theoretical framework Lakoff & Johnson’s (1980) concept of conceptual metaphor and highlights the source domains which the network uses in order to conceptualize certain target domains. The research questions are: What source domains appeared in the channel and how do these domains conceptualize various aspects on the Israeli side?

# An analysis of the source domains showed that Al-Jazeera conceptualizes the Israeli side as Nazi war criminals and atheists, who as such deserve to be punished, and whose military forces and military leadership are so weak that they can easily be defeated and whose chances of survival are nil. Al-Jazeera used this conceptualization to emotionally manipulate its audience and justify the need for this war. The network relies on the myth of the few against the many, a myth that is deeply ingrained in Jewish culture, in order to “prove” that Hamas will prevail in the war. Al-Jazeera also uses the events of the Holocaust and argues that the Palestinian people have become the victims of the former victims (the Jewish people) in the Holocaust.

# Keywords: conceptual metaphor; political discourse; Al-Aqsa Flood; Palestine, Israel

# 1. Introduction

In this paper I deal with metaphors as a rhetorical-manipulative tool in planned political discourse (Ochs, 1979) in the “Al-Aqsa Flood war”, as it is called by Al-Jazeera. The paper will focus on the metaphors used by the network and the way in which they contribute to the construction of meaning. Hamas began the attack on 7 October 2023 with a barrage of thousands of rockets aimed at Israel. Under cover of the rocket attack, Hamas fighters approached the border fence: Tractors tore down the military fence in dozens of places, whereupon Hamas fighters, equipped with firearms, hand grenades, explosives and more, attacked eight IDF posts and destroyed communications and observation equipment in order to disrupt IDF command and control abilities in the region. Members of Hamas also attacked towns and villages, where they massacred innocent civilians, burned down houses and took more than two-hundred hostages.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the way Al-Jazeera exploits metaphor as a rhetorical tool to conceptualize the Israeli side, using Lakoff & Johnson’s (1980) concept of conceptual metaphor.

# 2. Theoretical framework

## 2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a multidisciplinary approach that is used in discourse analysis. Focused on how social and political power is created and maintained through language, it seeks to expose discursive biases and manipulations that serve political interests and advance controversial ideological positions. It also highlights the methods or stratagems through which the discourse produces or maintains an unequal balance of power in a society (Livnat 2014, vol. 2: 361). CDA aims to expose the linguistic, cultural, and historical roots that support the practices – the modes of action – that preserve the balance of power (Hart 2010: 13–4; Livnat 2014, vol. 2: 361; Meyer 2001: 15; Reisigl and Wodak 2001: 32; Scott 2023: 1–2; Scott 2023: 1–2; van Dijk 2001: 352; Wodak 2001a: 10).

While analyzing texts and ‘linguistic events’ requires some analytical method, it is a principle of CDA that it is neither based on, nor prefers, a single theory or a uniform analytical method. Instead, CDA offers a kind of toolbox for the researcher, a list of linguistic and textual characteristics that can be examined when one wishes to analyze a text critically (Livnat 2014, vol. 2: 366; Wodak 2001b: 64).[[3]](#footnote-3)

**2.2 Conceptual metaphor in political discourse**

The phenomenon known as “metaphor” or “figurative language,” whereby people speak or think of one object or entity in terms of another, has long preoccupied humans. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, literary scholars have focused on creative figurative language expressed in literature and poetry. In the last three decades—largely influenced by the theory of conceptual metaphor (Lakoff 1993; Lakoff & Johnson 1980; 1999)—many scholars have focused on the study of metaphor in human cognition (Kupferberg 2016). Conceptual metaphor theory defines metaphors as structures stored in the human brain that influence the formation of figurative language in everyday discourse, literature, and poetry. According to this theory, the metaphors that appear in various types of discourse are evidence of cognitive structures within the human mind.

According to cognitive linguistics, metaphor is an essential core of human thought and creativity. Since the language of politics is characterized by metaphorical themes, metaphors are a powerful tool for uncovering the essence of political thought. Metaphorical expressions nourish our worldview and shape our thinking and, in turn, our actual behavior (3–6; Koller 2012: 25; Lakoff & Johnson 1980: Mio 1997: 117–126).

In parallel to the interest in conceptual metaphor that has arisen since the 1990s, numerous scholars have examined the role of various figurative language constructs applying discourse analysis of various texts, including natural interactive discourse and media discourse. These studies have made it possible to explore hidden aspects of language for the first time (Kupferberg & Green 2005; 2008; Weizman 2008).

This study follows Lakoff and Johnson (1980) in taking a conceptual approach to the study of metaphor. Their work sought to reveal the metaphorical nature of human thought through examining common metaphors, the use of which is habitual and agreed upon. Their findings demonstrate that the use of metaphorical language reflects how humans perceive reality. Metaphors frame our world, and without them we are unable to think (Livnat 2004, Part B: 368).

According to conceptual metaphor theory, metaphors are cognitive structures (that is, structures stored in the human brain) that allow humans to understand conceptual domains of greater complexity than those found in everyday experience, by considering them in terms of other, simpler, conceptual domains. The encounter between the two conceptual domains is a cognitive process in which humans understand the initial domain—the target domain—in terms of the second, or source domain. For example, the metaphor ‘life is a journey’ is a conceptual metaphor that has been studied in many languages. The target domain is ‘life’ and the source domain used to conceptualize it is that of ‘a journey’ (Kupferberg 2016: 20-21). While the target domain is accessed via the source domain, the reverse is not true. For example, when we say “life is a container” we conceptualize the concept of ‘life’ through the concept of the container, but we do not conceptualize the concept of the container through the concept of life. In cognitive semantics, the conceptualization of the target domain through the source domain is known as mapping and refers to the mapping of the target domain through the source domain. The term mapping implies that there is no single metaphorical connection between the two domains, but rather a system of connections or interrelationships between them (Livnat 2014, Part B: 121).[[4]](#footnote-4)

Lakoff (1991) also argues that metaphors not only reflect our view of reality but also influence it. In January 1991, in the wake of the First Gulf War, he analyzed the U.S. administration’s political discourse and showed how the Bush Administration used metaphors to justify going to war. In so doing, he demonstrated how metaphor analysis can be critical in exposing discourse manipulations and normally hidden ideologies (Baider & Kopytowska 2017; Livnat 2014, vol. 2: 368–369; Kopytowska 2010).

Conceptual metaphor theory emphasizes that metaphors are an encounter between the two domains, and explores the transition from the abstract to the tangible domain. It is not concerned with a single borrowing of a particular word from domain to domain, but rather with a significant interrelationship between the two domains that manifests itself through a series of metaphorical expressions. Such an interrelationship is not rooted in a coincidental similarity between two objects from different domains but in the conceptualization of one domain through the other (Livnat 2014, Part B: 120).

In a study of metaphor in Israeli political discourse, Dalia Gavriely-Nuri (2009: 169–193; 2011: 93) shows how metaphor is used to help to portray war as a normal part of life. Such war-normalizing metaphors aim to naturalize and legitimize the use of military power by creating a systematic analogy between war and objects that are far from the battlefield.[[5]](#footnote-5) For example, the metaphoric phrase “Golda’s Kitchen” was the popular nickname for the most intimate circle of Prime Minister Golda Meir’s advisers. This metaphor conceals a secretive and undemocratic decision-making process, even in security matters and other central issues. In essence, the ‘kitchen’ metaphor hides what was often, in fact, a ‘war room’ where Israel’s most urgent security matters were decided.

If we combine this with the lens of critical discourse analysis, we can see that the use of this particular metaphor helps to depict war as a normal, mundane, and unsurprising state, as expected and reasonable as medicine or business. In this way, the metaphor masks the true, terrible, and violent nature of war. Such patterns of discourse, repeated time and again (by politicians, military leaders, academics, journalists, and internet commentators), help the public become accustomed to this abnormal situation. Similarly, these metaphors help leaders convince the public of the rationality and necessity of war. (Livnat 2014, vol. 2: 369)

Tony Blair defended his decision to send British soldiers to the Second Gulf War in 2003, by using metaphors of progress—the successful attainment of goals (in the future)—as opposed to metaphors of regression, which reflect the failure to reach goals (in the past). These metaphors mirror the choices faced by the UK’s Labour Party and its leader, Blair, and thus establish the expected party policy: always go forward. Blair was willing to accept nothing but progress, and presented himself as a strong and reliable leader who would not be swayed by difficulty or criticism. The metaphoric description of a particular problem or situation reflects the speaker’s perceptions of it and establishes his or her preferred solution.

In this context, the rhetorical power of metaphors of movement, widely encountered in political discourse, is worth mentioning. One example is the metaphor (Charteris-Black 2005: 54–152; Musolff 2004: 30) that depicts the European common currency (the euro) as a train that must progress at the same speed and in the same direction with all its cars in order to avoid derailment.[[6]](#footnote-6) This metaphor reflects a specific perspective that urges European governments to adopt a uniform monetary policy and act in complete economic harmony in order to ensure the success of the European Monetary Union). Musolff presents examples of manipulative rhetorical baggage evoked by metaphors. The metaphors that he discusses express hostility toward the language of immigrants in Britain, such as the description of roads in British cities as streets in Bombay or Karachi (Musolff 2019: 257–266) and Coronation Street as having been relocated from Britain to Pakistan.

# 3. Methodology

# Data were collected from the day war broke out, 7 October 2023, until 11 November of the same year. Al-Jazeera is a television network based in Doha, the capital of Qatar, and broadcasts in Arabic and English. It is the most popular news channel in the Arab world and, as the mouthpiece of the Qatari regime, its reports and news broadcasts serve Qatari interests.[[7]](#footnote-7)

# The data from Al-Jazeera were translated into English by a native speaker of English, a professional translator and copyeditor. The data were collected by viewing the network’s main news broadcast for five hours every day.[[8]](#footnote-8) The metaphorical structures that were identified were of several kinds. Some metaphors consist of a single word, for example *iltifāf* (‘envelopment’), which depicts the various Palestinian resistance forces on different fronts (Hezbollah on Israel’s northern border, the Palestinians in Judea and Samaria and the Arabs in East Jerusalem) as beasts of prey that hunt in packs and outflank their victim, which has no chance of survival. Other metaphors consist of phrases, for example *sea of blood*, which describes the many innocent people killed in Gaza, for the purpose of creating a false sense of victory.

# The metaphorical structures were analyzed in three stages. In the first stage each metaphor structure was associated with source domains (Kupferberg, 2016); the second stage consisted of showing how these source domains conceptualize the Israeli side; the third stage consisted of deriving conclusions based on the study’s findings.

# 4. Findings

**4.1 Metaphorical discourse in the Al-Jazeera channel compared to Palestinian leaders of the later generation**

It is worth noting that the metaphorical discourse in Al-Jazeera channel is not fundamentally different from that employed by later generations of Palestinian leaders Previous work focusing on the use of metaphor in the political discourse of Arab politicians in Israel (Shakour & Mar’i 2020) showed that the source domains used by these political leaders are very similar to those employed by Al-Jazeera channel. Like Al-Jazeera channel, Arab politicians in Israel, in particular Arab members of the Knesset, Israel’s parliament, mostly use such metaphors as a vehicle to express pointed criticism of the Israeli government regarding its discriminatory policies toward the Arab population in Israel and toward the Palestinian people, as well as regarding Israel’s occupation of Palestinian territory.

A next-step study (Shakour 2024, in press) examined the use **of** *metaphorical language in the speeches of Yasser Arafat, former president of the Palestinian National Authority.*

It showed that Al-Jazeera channel relied on very similar source domains to those employed Arafat in his political discourse during what Hamas has called Operation Al-Aqsa Flood, which began with the deadly attacks on Israel on October 7, 2023, and during Israel’s Operation Iron Sword in Gaza. Similar to Arafat, Hamas leaders rely on metaphors that reference the Holocaust and the Apartheid regime in South Africa to convey a double message. Also echoing Arafat, Hamas’ leaders have used biblical metaphors to convey the message that the Palestinian people will eventually emerge victorious. In particular, Hamas has used the biblical story of the victory of the Israelite shepherd David against the heavily-armed Philistine warrior Goliath to express that God will always stand by the righteous even when they are fewer and weaker than their enemies. This metaphor also evokes the myth of the few versus the many, which is deeply-rooted in Jewish and Israeli culture. Its use shows how both Arafat, and now Hamas’ leaders, simultaneously employ, co-opt, and subvert a key emotive Jewish myth to convey the message that the Palestinians will ultimately win their struggle against Israel.

**Metaphorical language in the speeches of Yasser Arafat, former president of the Palestinian National Authority**

Further, the metaphorical discourse of Arafat, Arab Israeli politicians, and Hamas’ military and political leaders all rely to a significant extent on the Quran and Islamic imagery to infuse their political discourse with religious sanctity and convey the message to the public that their battle against Israel is just—and, crucially, that it is not just a Palestinian, but also a pan-Arab or pan-Islamic struggle. It is no coincidence that Hamas has named its most recent campaign “Operation Al-Aqsa Flood,” mobilizing a powerful and emotive Islamic religious metaphor and religious imagery to express the message that, just as God sent a flood to punish humanity for their apostasy, so Hamas’ war on Israel is a divine punishment in retribution for Israel’s desecration of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem.

These are the source domains from which Al-Jazeera’s metaphors were taken: *Nature and natural phenomena*, *animals*, *death*, *the Holocaust and genocide*, *holy writ*, *objects in use by humans*, *human beings and the human body*, *diseases and defects*. This is a preliminary study, based on data collected during a relatively short period (7 October – 11 November 2023). The study’s conclusions and summary should be treated accordingly.

## 4.1 Nature and natural phenomena

Metaphors borrowed from nature can be found in all cultures and religions, including, of course, in Jewish and Muslim sources. Thus, in the book of Deuteronomy (20:19) we read: “are the trees people” - both people and trees grow, and like trees, people can be cut down; furthermore, like trees, people are planted and produce seed and fruit. In the Quran (57:8) we read: “He is the One Who sends down clear revelations to His servant to bring you out of darkness and into light” – ignorance is depicted as darkness, while knowledge is compared to light.

1. “This day Gaza under a *lava of fire* says its historical words and proves the right of its people to a homeland, to soil and to respect” (Ismail Haniyeh, head of Hamas’ political bureau, 7 October 2023). The heavy bombardment of Gaza is compared to lava from a volcano, which destroys everything that stands in its way.

The target domain, Gaza’s situation under the IDF’s intensive shelling, is conceptualized through the source domain – *lava of fire*.

2. “We hear the shelling *pouring down* at the edge of the village of Ayta al-Shaab” (Al-Jazeera reporter, 15 October 2023). The Arabic verb *yanhamiru* (‘pour down’) usually refers to strong rain. The comparison to rain, whose drops cannot be counted, highlights the intensity of the shelling, whose projectiles also cannot be counted.

The target domain, the situation of the southern Lebanese village of Ayta al-Shaab when being shelled by the IDF, is conceptualized by means of the source domain of fierce rainfall.

3. “The Israeli enemy has been trying for five weeks now to *rinse*[[9]](#footnote-9) *away its shame and defeat* by shedding the blood of thousands of innocent women and children in order to create a picture of victory” (Spokesman of Hamas’ military arm, 11 November 2023). The Israeli enemy’s attempts to whitewash the shame of its defeat after the attack of 7 October are compared to the act of rinsing with water in order to remove dirt and filth.

The target domain, Israel’s steps to cover up it failure to stop Hamas’ surprise attack, is conceptualized through the source domain, rinsing with water.

4. “The enemy strives to create a false picture of victory, relying in this on a *sea of blood* of innocent civilians” (Spokesman of Hamas’ military wing, 4 November 2023). The sea is a metaphor for the many innocent lives lost in Gaza, used to create a false sense of victory. The image is painted in a deep red color, unbounded like the sea. This is an emotionally charged metaphor, indicating violence. Sea = water, and just as water is uncountable, so are the large numbers of dead victims.

The target domain, creating the IDF’s false picture of victory, is conceptualized by means of the source domain, the sea.

5. “Our pain will *explode in rage and fire*[[10]](#footnote-10) in the enemy’s face” (Spokesman of Hamas’ military wing, 4 November 2023). The reaction of Hamas fighters and Gaza residents to their pain and suffering will be powerful like a volcano. Just as lava is pushed out by tremendous pressure deep within the earth, so the people of Gaza will respond with extraordinary violence to the huge pressure placed upon them by the IDF’s intensive attacks.

The target domain, Gazans’ response to IDF attacks, is conceptualized through the source domain, a lava-spouting volcano.

6. “Go out and participate in the *Al-Aqsa Flood* that is now underway, in order to support the Al-Aqsa Mosque and its victory” (Spokesman of Hamas’ military wing, 7 October 2023). The many fronts which Hamas hopes will join the operation to protect the mosque are compared to a flood, an uncontrollable stream of water. All believing Muslims are expected to join Hamas in it war to protect Al-Aqsa and will overrun the region like a flood.

The target domain, many fronts joining Hamas in its war, is conceptualized through the source domain, the flood, in the hope that many more fronts will quickly join the war.

## 4.2 Animals

Animal metaphors have played key roles in many cultures. Thus, for example, in Persian “fox” and in English “owl” are metaphors used to describe a shrewd person, although their connotations differ: The former has a negative connotation and implies the use of one’s wits for dishonest purposes, while the latter connotes wisdom used for positive aims. Animal metaphors may describe bravery, for example “lion”, while others may be used to demean their object, for example,
chicken” (Rouhi & Mahand, 2011: 253).

Animal metaphors that appear in Al-Jazeera broadcasts serve mainly to highlight the power of Hamas fighters as compared to the helplessness of the Israeli forces. Hamas fighters are depicted as beasts of prey that “envelope” the Israeli security forces, like a pack of wild animals that surround their doomed prey.

7. “The IDF fears being *enveloped* by the Palestinian resistance and the many fronts” (Al-Jazeera journalist, 15 October 2023). The IDF is depicted as pray while the Palestinian resistance forces and the various fronts, such as Hezbollah in the north, the Palestinians in Judea and Samaria and the Arabs of East Jerusalem, are described as predators that hunt in packs and surround their helpless prey.

The target domain, many fronts that join Hamas in its war against Israel, is conceptualized through the source domain, predators that surround their prey.

8. “Israel is painted as a victim that *makes* human pity *flow*[[11]](#footnote-11)” (Al-Jazeera journalist, 15 October 2023). The metaphorical verb *tudirru* is associated mainly with cows the produce milk copiously. Israel’s great efforts to disseminate propaganda that presents it as the victim, in order to arouse pity and influence public opinion, is compared to an animal that produces much milk. Just as a suckling feels its mother’s love as it suckles, so Israel tries to influence public opinion and arouse pity.

The target domain, Israel’s constant attempt to arouse pity, is conceptualized by means of the source domain, an animal that produces great amounts of milk.

9. “Israel’s armed forces will become the *prey* of Hamas fighters” (Al-Jazeera journalist, 15 October 2023). Prey here is the source domain that conceptualizes the IDF’s weakness in comparison to Hamas fighters.

The target domain, the weakness of the IDF, is conceptualized through the source domain, prey.

10. “Our forces *hunt tanks* and destroy them” (Spokesman of Hamas’ military wing, 8 November 2023). While this action may be perceived as performed by humans, in the present context it is the animal-like Hamas predators who hunt. The tanks are their prey, here compared to animals that are hunted, while the hunters (Hamas forces) are compared to predators.

The target domain, the ability of Hamas fighters to defeat the IDF, is conceptualized through the source domain, hunting, an element of the animal world.

## 4.3 Death

The Al-Jazeera network makes considerable use of metaphors taken from the source domain of death. Such metaphors are mainly intended to expose the Israeli government’s plots to bury the Palestinian issue and to massacre innocent people in Gaza. For example, the order to evacuate hospitals in Gaza is perceived by Palestinians as equivalent to an execution, and at the same time Israeli soldiers are warned that entering Gaza would be like entering a cemetery.

11. “The World Health Organization demands that Israel stop immediately its orders to evacuate hospitals in Gaza. It views such orders as orders of *execution*” (Al-Jazeera news, 15 October 2023). The evacuation orders are orders to execute people, since they would certainly mean death for the patients.

The target domain, orders to evacuate hospitals in Gaza, is conceptualized through the source domain, execution. It is a double execution: Execution of Palestinians and also a death trap for IDF soldiers.

12. “The Palestinian issue has exhausted the international community, and now Israel is trying to *cover it with soil*” (Al-Jazeera journalist, 15 October 2023). The killing of innocents is an attempt at mass annihilation aimed at burying the Palestinian issue once and for all.

The target domain, killing innocent people in Gaza and attempting to make the Palestinian issue disappear, is conceptualized by means of the source domain, burial.

13. “Our fighters have always been a *cemetery* for the dreams of this enemy’s leaders” (Spokesman of Hamas’ military wing, 8 November 2023). The cemetery is a metaphor for dreams that cannot be realized.

The target domain, Hamas fighters’ ability to shatter the IDF’s dreams, is conceptualized through the source domain, the cemetery.

14. “Our fighters will turn the enemy’s armored troop carriers into *mobile graves*” (Spokesman of Hamas’ military wing, 8 November 2023). The armored troop carriers are compared to mobile graves in which IDF soldiers will be buried.

The target domain, the enemies armored troop carriers and armored forces, is conceptualized through the source domain, graves.

## 4.4 The Holocaust and genocide

The use which Al-Jazeera makes in its metaphorical discourse of metaphors associated with the Holocaust is aimed at accusing the IDF of massacring innocent people in Gaza, thus creating a comparison between this massacre and the horrors which the Nazis inflicted on the Jews during the Holocaust. The metaphors convey a double message: On the one hand, they identify with the Jewish people as a victim of genocide in the Holocaust, since the very mention of the Holocaust constitutes an admission that it happened; but on the other hand, they express sharp criticism of the Jewish state, which kills innocent people in Gaza. Al-Jazeera quotes the spokesman of Hamas’ military wing, who explicitly compares IDF soldiers to Nazis, in a tacit criticism of the double standard adopted by Israel: The victim has become the murderer. The implied expectation is that he who was a victim in the past should feel empathy towards the suffering of others, rather than turning the Palestinians into the present victims of the former victims.

15. “What is happening today in Gaza can be summed up as *genocide*” (Al-Jazeera journalist, 15 October 2023). The IDF attacks in Gaza and the thousands of casualties are described as genocide.

The target domain, killing of thousands of innocent civilians, is conceptualized by means of the source domain, genocide.

16. “The *Nazi* enemy’s war crimes will not erase our victory in this eternal battle” (Spokesman of Hamas’ milita ry wing, 11 November 2023). The war crimes committed by the IDF are compared to the crimes which the Nazis perpetrated on the Jews. Just as the Nazis did not succeed in annihilating the Jews, so the Israelis (here compared to Nazis) will not prevail in the eternal struggle against the Palestinians.

The target domain, describing the IDF’s war crimes in Gaza, is conceptualized by means of the source domain, the crimes that the Nazis committed against the Jews.

17. “The Israeli enemy is committing a massacre in Gaza, and what is happening there today is a *Holocaust*” (Spokesman of Hamas’ military wing, 8 November 2023). The IDF’s crimes in Gaza are compared to the Nazi crimes against the Jews.

The target domain, describing the IDF’s war crimes in Gaza, is conceptualized through the source domain, Nazi crimes against the Jews.

## 4.5 The Quran

When speakers wish to persuade, they may make use of literary, religious and folkloristic elements, such as popular songs, maxims, proverbs, holy scripture and myths. When holy writ is quoted, the ideas that are presented there are self-explanatory, and for the users (and perhaps also for the target audience) their truth is self-evident.

In Arab culture the Quran is considered a model for correct Arabic. Its style and language are considered inimitable and for the believers the truth of its verses needs no confirmation. The metaphorical discourse in the Al-Jazeera channel uses Quranic verses, well aware of their effect on Muslims throughout the world.

18. “Dozens of officers and soldiers are prisoners *held in our hand*” (Spokesman of Hamas’ military wing, 7 October 2023). The phrase *held in our hand* in this context is a metaphor for Hamas’ control of the war, and an allusion to the Quranic verse “Surely those who pledge allegiance to you are actually pledging allegiance to Allah. Allah’s hand is over theirs” (Q 48:10). The Prophet called on his companions to swear allegiance to him and stated that Allah’s hand would be over theirs, that is, Muhammad’s hand served as a proxy for Allah’s own hand during the pledge and its implementation. The meaning: Hamas fighters will win the war and their hand will prevail, thanks to divine justice and God’s blessing, for they fight to protect the Al-Aqsa mosque.

The target domain, Hamas’ control of the war, is conceptualized through the source domain, the Quranic verse that promises victory to the believers in and protectors of Islam and its holy sites.

19. “Come out to participate in the *Al-Aqsa Flood*, which is underway in order to support the Al-Aqsa mosque and its victory” (Spokesman of Hamas’ military wing, 7 October 2023). The metaphorical phrase *Al-Aqsa Flood* alludes to the story of Noah and the flood, which is mentioned in the Torah and the Quran. In Q 14-15 we read of God’s purpose in sending the flood: “Indeed, we sent Noah to his people, and he remained among them for a thousand years, less fifty. Then the Flood overtook them, while they persisted in wrongdoing. But we delivered him and those in the Ark, making it a sign for all people”. Noah was a pious man who tried to convince the people of his generation to abandon their idolatry and unbelief, but failed: Hamas’ attacks on Israeli towns on 7 October 2023 are compared to God’s flood; God punished the idolators of Noah’s times, while Hamas punished the infidels who desecrated the Al-Aqsa mosque. This metaphor imbues Hamas’ attack with sanctity.

The target domain, punishing Israel for desecrating Al-Aqsa, is conceptualized by means of the source domain, the flood which God sent to punish the unbelievers in Noah’s generation.

20. “I swear by God that the enemy is a weak *spider’s cobweb*” (Spokesman of Hamas’ military wing, 7 October 2023). The metaphorical phrase *spider’s cobweb* alludes to a Quranic verse, Q 29:41: “The parable of those who take protectors other than Allah is that of a spider spinning a shelter. And the flimsiest of all shelters is certainly that of a spider, if only they knew”. The phrase is a metaphor for the IDF’s great weakness.

The target domain, the IDF’s weakness in its war against Hamas, is conceptualized through the source domain, the phrase “spider’s cobweb”, which is based on the Quranic verse quoted above.

## 4.6 The Hebrew Bible

The spokesman of Hamas’ military wing uses a metaphor taken from an unimpeachable biblical source domain in order to express his certainty that the Palestinian people will win the war against Israel. The metaphor in example 21 refers to the Israelite David’s victory over the heavily armored Philistine fighter Goliath. David’s victory proves that the Palestinian people will prevail, because its cause is just, just as David’s was. It may be argued that this metaphor is conceptualized from the source domain of the few against the many, a concept that is deeply rooted within Israeli culture, with its dominant narrative that Israel has been victorious in its wars against its enemies despite numerical inferiority, because its cause is just.

21. “This war will be taught throughout the world and will be immortalized in history, just as *David’s victory over Goliath* has been immortalized” (Spokesman of Hamas’ military wing, 4 November 2023).

The target domain, the undermanned and underequipped Palestinians’ victory, is conceptualized through the source domain, David’s victory over Goliath.

## 4.7 Manmade objects

Metaphors derived from the source domain of manmade objects are relatively simple and are easily interpreted. Their use would seem to be aimed at conveying a message very clearly, so that it can be deciphered with a minimum of effort.

22. “Here is the *paper tiger*’s armored troop carrier[[12]](#footnote-12) that desecrates the Al-Aqsa mosque and humiliates our prisoners. It is about to fall and break apart” (Spokesman of Hamas’ military wing, 7 October 2023). On television one sees a troop carrier of the *namer* (“tiger”) type on fire after being attacked by Hamas fighters. Here it is compared to a something made of paper, which can easily be burned.

The target domain, the weakness of the IDF’s armored vehicles, is conceptualized through the source domain, paper on fire.

23. “The IDF’s leadership is *made of paper* and outdated” (Spokesman of Hamas’ military wing, 7 October 2023). The IDF’s leadership is breaking apart, like a piece of old paper which fragments at the lightest touch. Such a leadership is incapable of withstanding Hamas forces.

The target domain, the weakness of the IDF leadership, is conceptualized through the source domain, old paper.

24. “*Produce the anxiety and nightmare* from which the Israeli enemy flinches” (Spokesman of Hamas’ military wing, 7 October 2023). The anxiety and nightmare are here presented as a manufactured product. In other words, it is possible to manufacture terror for Israeli enemy just as one manufactures any other product.

The target domain, terrorizing Israel, is conceptualized by means of the source domain, a manufactured product, an artefact that is seared into the soul of Israelis.

## 4.8 Man and the human body

Metaphors based on the human body can play an important role in the development of a sense of national identity, harmony and conflict reduction. Examples of such metaphors are expressions associated with the state and the “body politic”, such as “head of state” and “heart of the country”. The metaphor of “body politic” is used in English and German in reference to the European Union as a federation of states (Mousolff, 2004: 83-114).

25. “The battle of the Al-Aqsa Flood was a *battle of minds*. In less than an hour 1,200 Palestinian fighters succeeded in defeating 10,000 Israeli soldiers on their soil and inside their military camps” (Al-Jazeera reporter for strategic affairs, 22 October 2023). It is the mind that gives orders to the body and leads it. Here Hamas’ war against Israel is called by the metaphorical phrase a *battle of minds*, in order to highlight the fact that Hamas is the party that leads this war. Hamas’ superior planning is proven by the fact that 1,200 Hamas fighters succeeded in surprising and defeating 10,000 IDF soldiers and took over 200 hostages, without the IDF having any inkling of the planned attack.

The target domain, the superiority of Hamas fighters over IDF troops as reflected in the planning of the surprise attack of 7 October, is conceptualized through the source domain, a battle of minds.

## 4.9 Diseases and deformities

Metaphors taken from the source domain of diseases and deformities present the enemy as insane and inhumane. Metaphors from the transcendent domain can also present the enemy as insane. For example, the metaphor “one cannot live next to a monster” presents Hamas as barbaric and inhumane, an organization that justifiably needs to be fought; in other words, the legitimacy of waging war against it is derived from its depiction as a monster.

26. “The Palestinians from inside Gaza say that the world *turns a blind eye* towards their killing, but it cannot kill the Palestinian issue” (Al-Jazeera journalist, 15 October 2023). The countries of the world that voluntarily refrain from seeing the horrors being committed in Gaza are compared to a blind person.

The target domain, countries turning a blind eye to the horrors being committed in Gaza, is conceptualized through the source domain, the blind.

27. “The massacre which the Israeli enemy is perpetrating against innocent people and the shelling of hospitals in Gaza reflect its *sadistic desires*” (Spokesman of Hamas’ military wing, 11 November 2023). The killing of the innocent and the shelling of hospitals is compared to the actions of a sadist, who obtains satisfaction from causing others to suffer.

The target domain, the massacre of innocent civilians in Gaza, is conceptualized by means of the source domain, sadism, a mental illness.

# 5. Summary and discussion

# The Al-Jazeera channel depicts the Israeli side as a Nazi war criminal, an infidel, a military weakling, easy prey for Hamas forces, and blind. The source domain of animals is used mainly to highlight the heroism of Hamas and its ability to hunt down IDF soldiers like a beast of prey.

The source domain of the Holocaust serves to accuse the IDF of massacring innocent people in Gaza, and to compare this with what the Nazis did to the Jews during the Holocaust. Al-Jazeera conveys a double message by using this source domain: Identification with the Jewish people as victims in the Holocaust, since the very mention of the latter implies recognition of it, and, on the other hand, sharp criticism of the massacre of innocents in Gaza.

In Al-Jazeera’s metaphorical discourse, nature, natural phenomena and manmade artifacts occur frequently. It would appear that metaphors based on these source domains make it easy to convey messages, since they are easily deciphered and the source domains from which they are conceptualized are readily identifiable.

Metaphors taken from the religious domain also appear frequently, especially quotes from the Quran. This is to be expected, since the Quran forms the basis of the ideology in whose name Hamas fights Israel, as demonstrated even in the name which was given to the attack, “The Al-Aqsa Flood”.

Al-Jazeera also makes use of the rhetoric of intimidation, reflected mainly in the insertion of the source domain of death, intended to deter the Israeli enemy and to raise the morale of Hamas fighters.

A most interesting metaphor used by Al-Jazeera is taken from the Bible: “This war will be taught throughout the world and will be immortalized in history, just as *David’s victory over Goliath* has been immortalized” (Spokesman of Hamas’ military wing, 4 November 2023). The metaphor refers to the Israelite David’s victory, with God’s help, over the heavily armored Philistine fighter Goliath. David’s victory proves that the Palestinian people will prevail, because its cause is just, just as David’s was. It may be argued that this metaphor is conceptualized from the source domain of the few against the many, a concept that is frequently used throughout the world to describe Israel’s wars against its enemies, in which it was victorious despite numerical inferiority, because of its military might.

One limitation of this study is the restricted time period in which data was collected, from the first day of the war, 7 October 2023, until 11 November of the same year. Another limitation is that the data is based on viewing, without recording. Future studies can rely on recordings and deal with data collected over a longer period. Furthermore, the discourse in news broadcasts is edited and differs from spontaneous discourse. An examination of metaphors in natural discourse will in all likelihood produce further conclusions and shed light on aspects that are absent in the present study.

The study’s theoretical contribution lies in the light it sheds on the use of various source domains in time of war in order to conceptualize various aspects of one side of the conflict, in this case the Israeli side. These source domains may frame the Israeli side in a certain manner, and so reveal various aspects of its communicative behavior, influence public opinion and justify the war against it.

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1. My decision to examine the metaphors used by this Arab network specifically was based on the fact that it was the first to report on the war and that it is the news network with the most viewers in the Arab world. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The metaphors mentioned in the paper do not reflect the author’s views. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See, for example, Koller (2012: 19–38), where she presents a working model for analyzing collective identity in discourse, which integrates a socio-cognitive approach as a major strand in CDA. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See also: Shakkour & Mari, 2020: 299-331; Shakkour & Qasim, 2021: 111-126 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See further in Lakoff (1991: 25–32). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This metaphor appeared in *The Independent* (UK) in January 1999. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. https://bit.ly/3wbQzXc. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. News broadcasts which included interviews. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Rinsing is an action that is usually performed using water, a natural resource. For this reason we placed the source domain of this metaphor within the category of “nature”. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The word “fire” in this context would appear to refer to lava from a volcano. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The Arabic verb *tudirru* literally means “make milk flow abundantly”. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The metaphor refers not only to the IDF’s *namer* (“tiger”) troop carrier, but to IDF forces in general, perceived as very weak by Hamas. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)