

FRAMING AFFECT

The role of Structures of Feeling in news media portrayals of pro-Palestinian protests on American Campuses

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned Alžbeta Michalová hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. To the best of my knowledge this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made. This thesis contains no material which has been accepted as part of the requirements of any other academic degree or non-degree program, in English or in any other language.

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ABSTRACT

In an effort to pave the way in conceptualizing the link between news media and reality, this thesis sets the first stone on this journey by uncovering the structures of feeling underpinning the polarization of the pro-Palestinian protests taking place on American campuses into conservative, liberal, and left-radical factions in news media. To be able to uncover the structures of feeling, I have built a robust analytical framework that merges Frame Analysis with Affect Theory. Enabling for both the structural outlook of a frame as well as the ephemeral fluidity and dynamism of emotions. Data were collected using critical affective ethnography and affective frame analysis as well as comparative analysis were used for interpretation. The analysis uncovered distinct emotional frameworks: The New York Times' measured paternalism, Fox News' fear and anger-driven approach, and Al-Jazeera's focus on community and collective struggle. By gaining a deeper understanding of these emotional structures, we can begin to examine and comprehend how events are emotionally framed in news media and shape our perception of the world. The work carried out in this thesis marks the first step towards a more profound grasp of the relationship between news media and reality.

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INTRODUCTION

Last year, I joined seemingly everyone in reading *All About Love: New Visions* by bell hooks. And it was one specific paragraph in this book that sparked a chain of imaginations and thoughts that in the end formed the research question of my thesis. This is the paragraph:

“Were we, collectively, to demand that our mass media portray images that reflect love’s reality, it would happen. This change would radically alter our culture. The mass media dwells on and perpetuates an ethic of domination and violence because our image makers have more intimate knowledge of these realities than they have of the realities of love. We all know what violence looks like. All scholarship in the field of cultural studies focusing on a critical analysis of the mass media, whether pro or con, indicates that images of violence, particularly those that involve action or gore, capture the attention of viewers more than still, peaceful images. The small groups of people who produce most of the images we see in this culture have heretofore shown no interest in learning how to represent images of love in ways that will capture and stir our cultural imagination and hold our attention... We are all affected by the images we consume and by the state of mind we are in when watching them.” (hooks 2001: 95-6)

bell hooks is in this instance talking about popular culture and only mentions news briefly. However, it was exactly the idea of exploring how the images we see in the news alter the reality around us that interested me the most. After COVID-19 and then the Russian war on Ukraine, many of us started feeling helpless while reading or watching the news. (e.g. Kellerman et al. 2022) It seems as if ever since the pandemic people have developed a specifically negative relationship with the news, and many have limited reading them or stopped altogether. This response is hardly surprising, the news we have been getting are often extremely negative and inflict a sense of hopelessness on the reader. After all, how could we as individuals have any impact on the big politics, climate change or wars taking place around us? Daily exposure to news can make us feel small, insignificant and useless. (e.g. Hoog and Verboon 2019) An

elementary condition for a healthy democracy is an informed and politically active public. The role of the media is to keep the public informed, so they can take part in democracy and help co-create it. However, if the trend is that more and more people are not reading news, we have a problem with democracy.

But, if the way news events are portrayed can make us feel hopeless, they must also be able to make us feel other emotions. If news can create people who are apathetic and cynical, they must also be able to create people who feel hopeful and strive for change. I think that the way we portray and frame events in media has a direct effect on how feel and then act about them. People consume a lot of media, and the media creates their ideas and perceptions about the world. These people then go on and live their lives based on how they think the world is. If public media would try to make people see the more positive, humane and communitarian side of the news (informed by a love ethic) it could have a real impact on how people perform their day-to-day lives and how it then shapes the world around us. In other words, the way a story is presented in news media does not only describe the world around us, it also actively creates it. In the challenging times that we live in, I believe this could be a groundbreaking realization.

But how exactly would a news media that is informed by a ‘love ethic’ look? News by their definition, tends to show the negative sides of our world. They are showing us the problems with our societies and politics and rarely show what is going well or incorporate room or guidance for action. (Lippmann 1922, von Wurmb-Seibel 2023)

It is important to note that I am not trying to eliminate negative news altogether and replace them with only seeing the positive. Easy fixes such as focusing on more positive news, seem to be improving the mood, but they are merely plasters on a wound, not an actual fix. Also, I understand the importance of being informed about the negative events taking place around us.

However, if we are too apathetic to do anything about them, or we start avoiding them altogether, then no improvement can really come from that.

It was around here when I realized that the research that would most interest me, asking how the language used in news media creates the world around us, was extremely broad and impossible to research. So, I decided to narrow down the research question. I decided to study the structures of feeling (Williams 1977) underpinning the polarisation of the protests taking place on American campuses into conservative, liberal, and left-radical factions in news media. In other words, what are the emotional structures that each of the media uses and what is different between them?

We have all been aware in the last months of the extreme emotional response (on all ideological sides) to the war in Gaza. As it would be too broad to research the whole conflict presentation in media, I decided to focus on a more niche but connected issue of the pro-Palestinian student protests taking place on campuses across the US. Through reading articles about the pro-Palestinian protests from three ideologically different news media, The New York Times, Fox News and Al-Jazeera, I am hoping to find clearer structures of feeling in more radical news media as they rely more on emotions. I believe that understanding the structures of feeling that are present in news media, and that inform the way the stories are written and read, is the first step in finding out how to change the way we write about politics to create better and more informed and active societies.

I have divided this thesis into three parts. In the first part, I will introduce the theoretical framework created by merging Frame Analysis with Affect Theory upon which I have built this work. In the second part, I present the methodology of the research. The method of data collection that I will use is critical affective ethnography, and the method of analysis is affective frame analysis. In the third part, I present the data collected from the three news media outlets

that I have studied; I will conduct a brief comparative analysis to highlight the differences between the structures of feeling used in each of them. In the discussion, I return to the research question to analyse if any relevant conclusions can be drawn from my research.

PART 1: ON AFFECT AND FRAMING: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE THEORIES BEHIND THIS THESIS

In the first part of my thesis, I introduce the theories upon which I built the conceptual framework used in my analysis. I have drawn mainly from two theoretical streams: Frame Analysis and Affect Theory. At first, I was greatly intrigued by frame analysis as I thought it was insightful to understand why and how frames help us make sense of events and how they influence our perception and reaction to them. This theory goes well with analyzing media and journalism as it is through framing a story in a specific narrative that news stories are created. However, something was missing from a typical frame analysis, and that was a more elaborate focus on emotions and affect, and their impact. I therefore chose to look more into Affect Theory and utilize it as a tool for widening the conceptual possibilities of frame analysis. Affect Theory allows for a broader sense of movement, flux and change in what is being analyzed. It pushes the conceptual understanding of the analyzed subject to the edge of what is possible to conceptualize through language, and importantly, it directly addresses the importance of feeling, affect and emotion in social processes that are constantly being created. In this first part, I will explore and define first Frame Analysis and then Affect Theory, introducing specifically the concept of ‘Structures of Feeling’ by Raymond Williams which I am going to use as a reference point throughout the analysis. I will then merge frame analysis with affect theory to create and describe the theoretical framework upon which my thesis rests.

In this thesis I will use the words emotion and affect as synonyms, although there is a vast literature on their supposed differences and exact meanings, those are not important for the topic of this study.

Meaning making through stories as a basic human ontology

Frame theory or frame analysis was first mentioned by Goffman (1974) who defined frames as “*schemata of interpretation*” (1974:21) that enable people to perceive, label and make sense of the world around them, both local and global. These frames are basically labels that humans use to help them categorize events, people, and things around them, connect the categories and give an order to these categories in their minds. This process is a basic human ontology. We need to give meaning to occurrences for them to make sense to us and to guide our ideas, language and actions.

Frame theory is a concept which has gained popularity across several disciplines. In public policy analysis, this approach has been popularized at first by Schön and Rein (e.g. Schön & Rein 1996). A neat definition of frames in public policy can be found in Fischer where he states that: “*public policies rest on frames that supply them with underlying structures of beliefs perceptions, and appreciation.*” (Fischer 2003:144). A contemporary scholar using and advocating the use of frame analysis is Dvora Yanow who uses interpretive methodologies to develop a deeper understanding of policies. (e.g. Yanow 1996) In her recent article on frame analysis, she, alongside Merlijn van Hulst, develops the idea of “policy analytic framing” (Yanow & Hulst 2014) a dynamic understanding of frames with an emphasis on the process of creation of frames and political awareness of the background. This perception considers the constant intersections of frames as well as the identities of the frame-makers. In 2012, CEU conducted an interesting project using framework analysis to analyse public policies. Tamas Dombos used a critical frame analysis to study gender equality policies in the European Union. He focused first on analysing the presence or absence and the differences between such policies across the European Union, then he assessed the quality of these policies. (Dombos 2012)

Frame analysis has also been popular in social movement studies and sociology in the last two decades. This trend can be seen in a paper by Benford and Snow (2000) where they focus on analyzing the application of frames in social movement theory. They summarize frame theory as one focused on understanding “*the production of mobilizing and countermobilizing ideas and meanings.*” (2000:613) Therefore, frame theory views each participant as a potential, active meaning-maker. Anyone can create the framework that makes a cause effective. These frames also help to mobilize potential actors and people involved in a social movement.

In the context of journalism, Frame Theory appears to be immensely valuable. Journalists provide readers with a frame of reference for interpreting reality, they do this through using stories and storytelling. Stories largely frame events; they provide structured frameworks that help us organize the world and its events. Stories simplify and give meaning to events by placing them in a recognizable narrative, making it easier for people to understand and relate to what is happening. At the same time, stories tap into values and emotions, powerful drivers of human beliefs and behavior. Stories allow for information to be passed on in a more impactful and more emotional way. By analyzing the stories told in media with a frame analysis lens, we can detect the frames used and understand their impact on people’s beliefs and subsequent actions.

In conclusion, framing is a technique utilized to comprehend how people interpret situations and events. It consists of a set of meanings that can be molded, altered, and transmitted across different contexts and over time. Politicians and media frequently use framing to create narratives around specific events, making them more understandable and situating them in a broader context. Framing acts as a form of storytelling, which is a natural human method for making sense of our surroundings. This approach is especially influential because people tend to respond only to what they believe, and their beliefs are shaped by what they find understandable.

‘The roots of Affect Theory are located at intersections.’

Affect theory brings movement and a sense of continuum into what is traditionally a dualistic and rigid understanding and conceptualizing of reality in social sciences. The focus on affect as a formative force of social, political, and economic reality is traditionally located in the mid-nineties when thinkers and academics, such as Brian Massumi and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick wrote their works on affect that became the basis of modern Affect Theory. However, the beginnings of Affect Theory can also be argued to have started with Spinoza’s *Ethics* (1677) in which he writes about affects as specific states of mind and body. Or with Durkheim’s work on religion (1975) where he analyses the collective affects that are present during rituals. Lauren Berlant argues that the foundations of affect theory are heavily influenced by Black and Latinx feminist writings (such as Angela Davis and Gloria Andalzúa) which were used by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her foundational book *Touching-Feeling*. (Berlant et al. 2022) In any case, several previous influences and inspirations have manifested in two books which I will briefly mention and subsequently, I will draw on these to make a clearer definition of Affect Theory.

Brian Massumi in his book *Parables for the Virtual* (2021) looks at the relationship between the body and the mind and locates the meaning of the body in its ability to move and to feel. In a way, the body is affected by the world but also by the mind and the body itself. It allows us to feel and affect the world around us and within us. The way things affect us is socially and culturally conditioned and can vary and change constantly. But in order to be able to import change into the prescribed set of culturally conditioned borders of where affect begins, we must use the abstract imagination of the mind. It is here when Massumi evokes Deleuze’s concept of the virtual; the real but abstract. Every material thing at any given moment in time has an unlimited number of potential other ways of being, these ways are not real in this world, but

they could be real, this is what is meant by real but abstract. For Massumi, the bridging of the gap between the material and the abstract – or the body and mind – is the essence of affect theory.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in her book *Touching Feeling*, (2002) largely departs from the concept of performative utterances established by J.L. Austin (1979) who claims that language is not merely a tool for describing the world around us but is a tool for creating it. Performative utterances, a concept also used by Judith Butler who used it in their gender performativity theory, (1988) claims that some words directly create or alter reality. In media and news, language can directly affect people's actions and identities. In her book, Sedgwick tries to understand various emotions, such as shame, paranoia, or sexuality to show their potential strength in creating and affecting the world around us. The effort to bridge the abstract and the physical into one continuum that is constantly in flux is symptomatic of the approach during the affective turn.

“Depressed? It might be political.”

Affect Theory is inevitably connected to the political, it provides space for a wider analysis of the connections between the private and public, in fact, it tries to go beyond such dichotomy altogether and argues for a continuous perception. Lauren Berlant phrased this well in an interview (2022) where she said that the question guiding her work in Affect Theory for decades has been: *“How does a political structure become subjectivized?”* (2022:362) We can keep this in mind as the basic question of Affect Theory as it embodies the aim to bridge the gap between the political and the private.

But why should the analytical gap between the political and the private be erased? A simple answer would be that thinking there is a gap is a logical fallacy. This argument is supported by

Punamaki (1988) who in her work on political violence and mental health talks about the ‘*collective dimension of the human psyche*’.

This idea of collective mental health as directly influenced by the political situation is evoked by Lykes and Mersky (2006) who describe the need to heal trauma caused by political violence on a communal and structural level rather than on the level of individuals. They argue that:

“In each context, it is not only the individual that is traumatized but the social setting wherein social and cultural institutions are ruptured. Thus, the trauma of war—whether an individual's or a community's—must be read and responded to within its social, cultural, political meanings over time, rather than located and addressed exclusively or even primarily within affected individuals.” (2006:10)

In other words, academics dealing with political violence and transitional justice conclude that there is no mental health of individuals that would be disconnected from the well-being of the community they live in. The political and the private are in this sense the same.

To go back to affect theorists, it was Lauren Berlant who with her colleagues came up with the slogan: ‘Depressed? It might be political.’ With which they marched in the streets of Chicago in the early 2000’s. This slogan perfectly encapsulates the need to see the political and the private/emotional as one: a fundamental structural concept in affect theory.

Sara Ahmed, in her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2015) also elaborated more on this topic of bridging the social/public with the private/emotional. The main thesis of her book is that emotions are deeply embedded in cultural, social and political processes and they can create and influence power structures and political and social identities. Ahmed in this book comes up with the notion of affective economies, by which she aims to highlight the importance of emotions in creating social bonds and boundaries by being constantly circulated between people

through signs that show and contain the emotions. Sara Ahmed made a nuanced link between emotions, politics and discourse. Already, in the introduction to her book, she evokes examples of the language news media used during the increased migration of refugees to the UK. Sentences and metaphors such as a “wave of migrants” or “fortress Europe” were often evoked. Using this emotionally loaded language had a direct impact on how the issue was perceived by the public and thus how policy makers tended to approach it. The notion of the interconnectedness of emotions with the public sphere and specifically with politics is an important aspect to keep in mind during an analysis of the language used in politics.

Messy is normal, neat is simplified.

Another elementary idea in affect theory is that affects are always plural, constantly being regrouped and reorganized. Sometimes, feelings, emotions, and affect cannot be rationalized, they seem to change at their own will and people can hold contradictory emotions at the same time. Sometimes emotions escape any rational structure, framework, and meaning altogether. These facts are entirely natural, and affect theory provides ample room for analysis of these apparent contradictions and constant fluctuations. Lauren Berlant summarized this well in her quote:

“People are loosely connected to themselves, and they have lots of different positions and desires that don’t all line up into a programme. And that isn’t the failure of people, it’s like the ontology of people.” (Berlant et al. 2022:362)

Berlant claims that trying to always be reasonable goes against human nature. And so, being reasonable should not always be the desired end and at all costs. Instead, we should incorporate emotions and the irrationality that they often bring as a natural human fact. Providing enough space for irrationality is why affect theory offers a more nuanced and realistic analysis of the

events in this world. Making space for emotions is an inevitable conceptual step if we want to not only understand the reduced and simplified version of our world that fits into academic descriptions, but a more varied and diverse world that is inevitably shaped by emotions and irrationality alongside the rational.

Raymond Williams and Structures of Feeling.

As the final text in this theoretical part of my thesis, I focus on Raymond Williams and his idea of the ‘Structures of Feeling.’ I hope that introducing his framework as the guiding tool in my analysis will help structuralize everything from the theory that I have explored above. Both frame and affect theories offer complex and subtle ways of understanding data and conducting analysis using their respective perspectives. Williams provides a structured and specific form of framework that can be categorized as belonging to affect theory but gives it a more structured framework. Explaining his approach gives me the final footing to then construct my own way of analysis, which will be done by merging frame and affect theories to provide a structured and nuanced understanding of specific stories in news media.

Although Raymond Williams’s theory was first articulated to improve the understanding of theatre, it proved to be a useful tool not only in culture but also in social and political theory. This framework elaborates on the importance of lived experiences, not only after they are conceptualized, labelled and analyzed, but even and especially before such rationalization and academic structuration takes place. He calls this the “*true social present*” (Williams 1977:132) meaning it is happening right now in the world around us. Williams argues that at any point in time, there are structures of feeling, which are always changing but are simultaneously understood, co-created and read by the people living in that time and space. These structures of feelings relate and contrast meanings and values that are present and important at the given

time. They allow the ‘audience’ to understand the meaning of what is being said by placing every word or other signal into its current context. At the same time, they guide the creation and framing of stories, whether in everyday social life, art, politics, or news media.

Framing affect

As presented above, I aim to use affect theory jointly with frame analysis theory to form a more nuanced and complex theoretical lens that can help me locate the emotions and meaning-making devices used in language across three different news media.

As I have shown above, the importance of locating the frames used to make sense of the world and events around us is an incredibly useful tool in analyzing journalistic articles. The world we live in is increasingly complex and complicated and as part of their job journalists simplify it so that it makes sense to us, the average readers. At the same time, the frames do not only label the world and events, but they also create them. By providing a narrative and links between various events, journalists always choose what to highlight and what to omit. The links and stories we see in the news media are then subconsciously and consciously repeated and recreated by people who come across them. These frames therefore create the world around us.

At the same time, what is especially important to notice is the role of emotions in this process. Keeping in mind the power of emotions to create and influence politics and social life, it would be a mistake to not keep an eye out for them throughout the journalistic texts. Emotions are omnipresent; they hide in plain sight. They are what keeps the motion of change going. Understanding the power of emotions in creating our social and political reality is essential if we want to conduct a useful analysis. Taking the analytical and practical approach of frame analysis combined with affect theory, which allows for a wider and deeper understanding of the journalistic texts is a way of incorporating the nuance, flexibility, and irrationality that creates

the world around us and the reality we inhabit. Merging these two theories provides a nuanced and stable analytical framework for analyzing news media articles.

PART 2: MERGING A METHODOLOGY

In this second part of my thesis, I introduce the methodology of my research. I will be using qualitative methods that allow me to gain a deeper understanding of a specific social phenomenon to answer my research question, which is: What structures of feeling underpin the polarization of the protests taking place on American campuses into conservative, liberal, and left-radical factions in news media? First, I will introduce critical affective ethnography as the method of data collection, and I will argue why it is the most suitable method for my purposes. Then, I will introduce affective framework analysis as an analysis method that I will use to make sense of the data collected. I will then introduce the three news media outlets that I chose to analyze and argue why I chose these. Finally, I will briefly describe my positionality and the limitations of my research methodology.

Method of data collection: Critical Affective Ethnography

It is a natural choice to look towards an anthropological method when analyzing such fleeting things as structures of feeling. Anthropology has long been concerned with feelings and emotions and their connection to social structures. It is also one of the few sciences, which allows for a more ‘feeling approach’ rather than a purely thinking one. Durkheim in his book, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* in 1912 was one of the first academics to appreciate the importance of affect in social structures. Anthropology is therefore the most suitable discipline in which we can try to find tools for analysis which take emotions and affect into account.

Professor of Anthropology and Law, Marie-Bénédicte Dembour characterized ethnography as such: *“The anthropological method is extremely basic. It can be summarized in three words:*

observe, note, think.” (2019: 247). I find this to be a most elegant description that encapsulates what anthropologists do without wasting any words. Coincidentally, ethnography is also a method that I am most familiar with. In this specific research and thesis, I would like to focus on a few specific aspects of ethnography. Following Silvia Gherardi (2023) and her work on space and organizational practices in which she developed and used ‘affective ethnography’ as a method, I also want to accentuate the significant role of fluidity, subjectivity and constant change both in time and space.

At the same time, I want to emphasize the importance of power relations that are ever-present in the background of the articles I will be reading. In other words, they are “*the conditions which make a particular pronouncement ‘thinkable’*” (Dembour, 2015: 22). For me, this is especially interesting to keep in mind while conducting an analysis of text because I am interested in how these texts not only reproduce and reflect but also help create power relations. A critical approach allows me to reflect on who is being represented, heard, and given agency and to understand the positionality and relationality of the actors and journalists vis-à-vis one another. So, in this thesis, I will be using what I term **critical affective ethnography** as the method of choice for data collection. A form of ethnography that highlights the importance of and focus on the fluid and fluctuating as well as the power relations that make such assumptions, claims or statements possible.

Method of analysis: Affective Frame Analysis

For data analysis, I will follow a Frame analysis with a twist: something I name Affective frame analysis. I will take the main guidelines of frame analysis, but instead of ultimately looking for frames I will be looking for structures of feeling. I will also modify the guidelines when needed.

I will conduct affective frame analysis for each of the three news outlets separately and as the final stage of analysis I will compare the findings against each other in a comparative analysis which will help me highlight any differences and specifics of structures of feeling used.

According to Hackett and Strickland (2019) frame analysis should follow five stages:

1. Familiarization
2. Identifying Themes
3. Indexing
4. Charting and Summarizing
5. Interpretation/Mapping

Frame analysis usually assumes a larger quantity of data than what is attainable for me during this study. I will therefore not need to strictly follow steps three and four, which would have me indexing, charting and summarizing a large number of data points. Other than that, I will follow these five steps starting with familiarization when I will get to know all the data gathered from the reading of news articles. I will then identify the themes present, focusing on an affective reading of the texts. It would be undesirable to try and predict the categories of analysis before the research begins as the analysis itself is based on fluidity. Locking oneself within theoretical categories and labels before the research would even begin would go against the basics of the theoretical background of the thesis. I will therefore use an abductive approach, one that is natural to both ethnography and frame analysis and let the categories of analysis emerge throughout the process of research. I will then draw up a simple categorization of found data that will still rely and draw upon my subjective affective reading and apprehension of the words and metaphors used. After locating and labelling any categories or information that might emerge from the reading of journalistic texts, I will then think and see if there can be any

overarching argument made about the language and frames used in the articles. Finally, through comparative analysis, I will see if there are any significant differences in the structures of feelings used between the three news media that I chose to study.

Choosing the object of study

I chose to study the specific event of the pro-Palestinian campus protests taking place recently across several university campuses in the US. I chose it because it is an emotionally loaded event that has sparked controversy across the political spectrum. The idea is that because it is so emotionally loaded, I should be better able to locate any structures of feeling.

I have chosen three news media to analyze, each one represents a specific group on the political spectrum. To be able to make the structures of feeling that I hope to find in each media as clearly defined as possible, I have opted for radical-left, radical-right and centrist/liberal news outlets. Hoping to find the most significant differences between them. To narrow down the research pool, I chose to only study articles written in English in well-known newspapers. From these characteristics, three newspapers emerged:

- Far-right: Fox News
- Liberal: NYT
- Left-wing radical: Al-Jazeera

It is important to keep in mind that I am not looking for objective sources to study, but for clearly opinionated and emotionally loaded sources, which Fox News and Al-Jazeera

undoubtedly are. The New York Times will serve as a kind of zero point, helping to define a gentler or quieter emotional structure.

From these three sources, only the New York Times can be argued to be mostly objective and an example of a centrist newspaper. Al-Jazeera is partly funded by the government of Qatar, which has a clear interest in supporting Palestinians as opposed to Israelis. On the other hand, Fox News has a connection to the Republican party which is strongly pro-Israeli. I therefore expect to find a very emotionally loaded language in both Fox News and Al-Jazeera with their structures of feeling hopefully being more clearly identifiable. I am excited to also find out how a more moderate newspaper, in this case, the NYT navigates the structures of feeling in a tense situation like the campus protests. I will be reading ten articles from each of the three media. I chose the most read ones that appeared after searching ‘campus protests’ on each media’s website.

Positionality statement – locating myself

Since I am conducting research that relies on my emotions and impressions of a text, it is necessary to briefly state my positionality. I am a white woman that grew up in Slovakia, a country with little to non-existent Palestinian or Jewish-Israeli minority. Growing up, I had little knowledge or direct connection with the events taking place in the Middle East. On the other hand, protests and demonstrations were and still are a significant tool of political resistance in Slovakia, and I have grown up participating in them. Having the ability to present one’s political opinion in public is a value that I see as a privilege. During high school, I went to Greece and Serbia to volunteer in refugee camps where I gained a few good friends from Palestine, Syria and Iraq making the conflicts going on in that region more personalized. After moving to London to study Social Anthropology at the London School of Economics, I became better

acquainted with the Middle East as a political region and with student activism and protests. Many of my dearest friends were and still are very active in protesting issues relating mainly to social inequalities and climate crisis but more recently also the war in Palestine. I have friends studying at Harvard directly taking part in the campus protests as well as several friends and acquaintances taking part in protests and occupation at LSE. I have been following the news from Gaza since the Hamas attacks that happened on the 7th of October. I value the freedom of speech and protection of various human rights and so I have been supportive of the campus protests. I read mainly leftist news media and have never read anything from Fox news. However, I also identify strongly as an anthropologist and value myself as someone who can go with an open mind into an unknown space. And so, even though I have my opinions about the ongoing campus protests I am not going to research who is right or wrong, I am merely looking for the underlying structures of feeling that each newspaper uses, for this purpose I think my positionality should not be an obstacle.

Limitations

Having a personal understanding and appreciation for words, emotions, affects and the structures of feeling that (among other things) help create meaning is not a difficult task in itself. But putting the processes of their functioning into the language of a scientific research method is much more challenging. In this research, I am trying to locate and analyze “*elements that are ephemeral and elusive – like affect, aesthetics, atmosphere, intensity, moods.*” Gherardi (2023:1) These ‘ephemeral elements’ are felt and experienced by all, but they often prove to be difficult to put into words. This evasiveness of what is researched poses a limitation to my research while also making the research and analysis exciting. A big limitation is posed by the lack of time and therefore a smaller number of data points that can be collected. I can read fewer articles in this limited time and therefore any sweeping conclusions would be out of place.

Instead, this research can only offer theoretical connections and a deep dive into one specific case study presented and the comparison between three media outlets.

PART 3: AFFECTIVE ETHNOGRAPHY

I will first introduce the results of the research separately for each of the newspapers. This consist of describing how the process of research went and introducing what data I found. In the discussion I will analyze the found data against each other.

NEW YORK TIMES: subtle emotion through a sense of justice

The New York Times tries to maintain the basic guidelines of journalism: giving space to ‘both sides of the conflict’ and its main aim seems to be informing the public about the events they find important. The structures of feeling in their news articles are therefore quite subtle. In opinion pieces, they are easier to locate. It is interesting how they can bring together opposing opinions and value systems and somehow give them all attention.

The trope of the student, as often understood in popular culture, is utilized here. It is a young person who is only getting to learn about the world, his misapprehensions should therefore be excused. He is also a strongly opinionated person with strong moral values which might change with age. A drop of naiveté in the student is taken as a natural factor that he will eventually grow out of.

This trope is strengthened by the NYT pointing the reader’s attention towards the mishandling of the situation by the police and university administration, underlined by vaguely emotional

sentences such as: “disciplinary proceedings against students and employees involved in the protests have barred some from campus and others from university housing.”¹

The image of a student losing housing is calling for an emotional response, but only because it is based on the trope of a helpless student. A walkout of unionized staff: “has threatened to complicate coursework and spring finals for the 20,000 students enrolled there”² correspondingly points to the students being somewhat defenseless against the events taking place around them. In a more opinionated piece, the author fiercely criticized the student protestors but even this critique comes off as justified by their youth, and unawareness and as an “adventure in decolonization.”³

In an article on the recent hearing on campus antisemitism, the NYT gave a lot of space to a Democrat who accused the university presidents of mishandling of a situation when: “more than 200 pro-Palestinian demonstrators were arrested — but only after a violent attack on their encampment by pro-Israel counter-protesters, none of whom have yet been publicly identified or apprehended.”⁴ The injustice of the situation is highlighted.

Another topic that generated strong emotions was campus divisions, with the New York Times placing the two opposing groups in a clear and traditional conflict narrative. The language used is mildly expressive.

Finally, the topic of student walkouts during graduation ceremonies is underlined with touching and sentimental reporting. A student at Harvard has been quoted as saying: “These are my peers and friends, and I can’t in good conscience celebrate when their families are in pain,” she said.

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/23/us/campus-protest-strike-ucla-uc-davis.html>

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/23/us/campus-protest-strike-ucla-uc-davis.htm>

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/08/opinion/campus-protests-gaza.html>

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/23/us/college-antisemitism-hearing-protests.html>

*“This is beyond politics — it’s about civil rights and civil disobedience. We’re not intending to be disruptive or violent. But it’s making a statement, as a community, as the class of 2024.”*⁵

The NYT maintains a somewhat balanced emotional distribution but plays on the well-known narrative of a two-sided clear conflict where one of the sides is presented as helpless naïve students.

FOX NEWS: fear and anger

It is very clear that Fox News relies heavily on stirring anger in their readers through installing a deep sense of fear. This fear stems from uncovering various secret conspiracy theories that are allegedly in the background of the protests. One of them is the supposed involvement of protesters with foreign groups that have "*anti-American and anti-Jewish agendas*."⁶ Fox News describes the pro-Palestinian (which they always refer to as “anti-Israel”) protests as a “*Trojan Horse to surreptitiously advance a destructive, authoritarian ideology that seeks to sow chaos in the U.S. and Europe under the guise of ‘social justice’ and ‘anti-colonialism.’*”⁷

The students are not so innocent anymore, they are portrayed as lazy, stupid and relying on money of taxpayers. “*The average college student spends less than three hours per day either in class or studying.*”⁸ And the results of their studies are not significant. What do they do the rest of the day? They “*gather to chant genocidal slogans.*”⁹

⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/23/us/harvard-graduation-protests-antisemitism.html>

⁶ <https://www.foxnews.com/us/chinese-communist-party-linked-anti-israel-campus-protests-well-funded-non-organic-group-says>

⁷ <https://www.foxnews.com/us/chinese-communist-party-linked-anti-israel-campus-protests-well-funded-non-organic-group-says>

⁸ <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/spoiled-children-have-seized-colleges>

⁹ <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/spoiled-children-have-seized-colleges>

*“These are spoiled and entitled kids cosplaying at being revolutionaries while expecting hard-working taxpayers to foot the bill.”*¹⁰ This quote opens another big topic which is the idea that these students are destroying the higher education system which the taxpayer is paying for: a clear reason for any American taxpayer to be outraged. The article ends by stating: *“If some students have daddy-issues that they need to work out, they should do so with a therapist and at their own expense, rather than by destroying our system of higher education.”*¹¹

Universities are paradoxically portrayed both as something the taxpayer pays for and so should be protected, but also a place of “left orthodoxy” and intellectual stagnation: *“We also need to disrupt the intellectually lazy echo chambers that most “institutions of higher education” have become.”*¹² The institutions are seen as corrupt and university administration as generally weak except the few that were able to stand up for themselves (in the context of hearings in Congress): *“Thankfully, with clear guidance, some leaders have stood up to this obnoxious behavior.”*¹³ The words “clear guidance” are also interesting as they point toward the necessity of someone to guide the administration because by themselves, they would not be capable of any strong action against the protests. Finally, to portray the chaos caused on campuses by the protests Fox News uses sentences such as: *“self-aggrandizing students are turning college commencements into circuses”* and *“The inmates are running the asylum.”*¹⁴ To show that the whole affair is caused by crazy students who don’t know what to do with themselves combined with weak administration.

Generally, Fox News is easy to read as the articles are usually very short and contain only the most scandalous events that are described using an emotionally loaded language and strong

¹⁰ <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/spoiled-children-have-seized-colleges>

¹¹ <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/spoiled-children-have-seized-colleges>

¹² <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/make-college-commencements-boring-again>

¹³ <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/make-college-commencements-boring-again>

¹⁴ <https://www.foxnews.com/live-news/april-29-campus-protest-antiemitism-israel-us-columbi>

metaphors. The articles are very good at stirring emotion in the reader. The emotional framework is full of hidden conspiracies, moral supremacy of the right over the left who is shown as brain washed.

AL-JAZEERA: united in a common struggle

Al-Jazeera constructs its structures of feeling by relying on an emotional portrayal of individual students who are taking part in the protests, or people from Gaza who have been affected by the war with Israel. They create a sense of common fight against injustice that anyone can and should join. They build this structure through two main tools. First, in every article and at any possible time they repeat the numbers of dead and the context of the suffering of Palestinians. Such as: *“Israel’s military offensive has killed more than 34,000 people and its blockade has caused starvation.”*¹⁵

Second, they subtly build an emotional image of a supportive and friendly community of people who join the protests, and an image of a global fight against injustice by often making lists of all universities involved in the protests.

Al-Jazeera describes the protests as: *“the unstoppable moral force of youth-led protests against Israel’s genocidal war in Gaza runs into the immovable object of the American power elite’s support for it.”*¹⁶ And after criticizing the mainstream media of portraying the protests as soiled with antisemitic narratives and chants and being hostile to Jewish students they counter by arguing that in fact the protests are: *“calm, harmonious, often joyous gatherings of many faiths,*

¹⁵ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/26/are-us-campus-protests-against-israels-war-on-gaza-going-global>

¹⁶ <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/5/6/watching-the-watchdogs-how-us-media-messed-up-campus-protests-coverage>

*aiming for a common goal of equal justice for all.”*¹⁷ Thus, creating an emotion of a welcoming and friendly gathering of misunderstood students that have had to face many unjust obstacles in their fight for justice. *“The protesting students received threats and were subjected to doxing, the posting of their personal information on the internet without their consent. ... such students received no protection from their institutions.”*¹⁸ Al-Jazeera puts the current campus protests in the context of historical student protests in the US that also faced large backlash during their time but were fighting for the morally right thing, such as the sit-ins at Greensboro or anti-apartheid protests.¹⁹

Al-Jazeera relies heavily on the use of personal stories and personifying the protests as well as the war in Gaza. Using personal names, age and other identification: *““I feel those students in America are our voice,” said Zahra Al-Kurd, 19, a Palestinian medical student in Cairo.”*²⁰ And giving a voice to the protestors: *“They call us terrorists, they call us violent, but the only tool we actually have are our voices.”*²¹

Comparative Analysis

To get a more nuanced understanding of the structures of feeling in each of the three newspapers, I will conduct a brief comparative analysis in which I will discuss the main differences and similarities between the three outlets. Let’s start by summarizing each newspaper’s structure of feeling in a more coherent way. This makes them easier to compare.

¹⁷ <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/5/6/watching-the-watchdogs-how-us-media-messed-up-campus-protests-coverage>

¹⁸ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/29/mapping-pro-palestine-campus-protests-around-the-world>

¹⁹ <https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2024/4/29/the-power-and-risks-of-campus-protests>

²⁰ <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2024/5/6/us-student-protests-of-israeli-genocide-offer-hope-to-students-from-gaza>

²¹ <https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2024/4/29/the-power-and-risks-of-campus-protests>

The New York Times: Tries to maintain the most emotionally balanced reporting, but ultimately sides with the students. These are portrayed as being naïve but with pure intentions. They are participating in the tradition of student protests, which are understood as a rite of passage. The emotional structure then is one of giving space for naïve children to learn a lesson in democracy.

Fox News: Uses fear of dangerous and foreign groups' conspiracies against the United States combined with a sense of contempt for misleading, stupid and lazy students who have nothing better to do with their time so they '*cosplay a revolution*' to stir up anger in their readers. The common narrative of universities as spaces of leftist propaganda is also employed to highlight the trope of a manipulable student.

Al-Jazeera: Relies on a sense of community and belonging built around a struggle against a specific injustice. By using specific people's stories, and always providing the name and age of the respondent they personalize the struggle. By constantly reminding the reader of the civilian deaths in Gaza, they keep justifying the cause. By providing lists of participating universities and historically similar protests, they contextualize the protests as a part of a global and just cause.

We can see that every newspaper uses a different structure of feeling. As expected, the NYT uses the least emotionally polarizing language and tries to stay objective and balanced without stirring up any specifically strong emotions, they use a familial structure of feeling, one that parents tend to use for their children. On the other hand, Fox News and Al-Jazeera, both try to stir up emotion but in strikingly different ways. Fox News, bets on fear and anger while Al-Jazeera while also using a dose of anger by reminding us of the atrocities taking place in Gaza, relies more heavily on the feeling of a community and a joint fight against injustice. Al-Jazeera feels more proactive while Fox News's hate and anger feel like emotions that sit still and accumulate at the bottom of the reader's heart.

Discussion

Towards the end of my thesis, I want to return to the research question:

What structures of feeling underpin the polarization of the protests taking place on American campuses into conservative, liberal, and left-radical factions in news media?

In other words, what are the emotional structures that each of the media uses and what is different between them? After conducting an affective ethnography, I have identified the underpinning structures of feeling present in each of the three newspapers that have been presented above.

In this exercise, the NYT serves well as the point zero from which we can see the oscillation of more radical political ideologies that serve as contrasting agents. Each of the two more politically radical newspapers; Fox News and Al-Jazeera, use structures of feeling that have the potential to attain an emotional response in their readers and even propel them into some kind of political action.

By framing the news stories with a constant narrative and by including emotional language or metaphors, the readers feel a sense of belonging to one political camp and could be gradually less likely to be open to receiving information or worldviews from the opposing side. As I have mentioned above, people tend to respond only to what they believe, and their beliefs are shaped by what they find understandable. This is all strengthened by employing the structures of feeling, which shift the meaning-making from a purely logical and intellectual venture into an emotional one. Humans are innately emotional, and emotions often trump intelligence even in cases in which we don't realize it. Basing the sharing of news events on a structure of feeling is therefore a massively efficient way of framing it and providing a meaning for the event. By understanding these underpinning structures of feeling, we can better understand how they

shape the way readers of the news media perceive and understand the world around them and how they subsequently choose to react to it. We can see that the readership of each outlet has a different perception of the world and the events that take place in it. Based on this perception, they then behave and co-create it in an intellectual and metaphysical cycle.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have uncovered the structures of feeling that are present in three specific news media. I have done this by a comprehensive integration of Frame Analysis and Affect Theory by which I have constructed a nuanced analytical framework for examining news media.

Frame Analysis alone offers a structured method for researching news media by understanding how interpretive schemata shape public perceptions of the world around us and the political events within it. However, it lacks the heightened focus on emotions that I find is absolutely necessary if we want to finetune our analysis. Incorporating Affect Theory into Frame Analysis enriches the analysis by considering the fluidity and dynamism of emotions in social processes, challenging dualistic frameworks and emphasizing the role of emotions in shaping identities and power structures. The merger of these theories is further refined through Raymond Williams' concept of 'Structures of Feeling,' emphasizing lived experiences and collective emotions in specific contexts. This approach captures the complexity of meaning-making in journalism, revealing how frames and emotions interact to shape public perception and discourse.

I have then introduced a qualitative methodology to uncover the structures of feeling underpinning the polarization of protests on American campuses, as depicted in news media. Employing critical affective ethnography for data collection and affective frame analysis for interpretation, I aimed to reveal the emotional narratives within Fox News, The New York Times, and Al-Jazeera. I chose an emotional issue in three media with different political backgrounds to get clearer results. Critical affective ethnography enabled a nuanced exploration of emotions and power relations, capturing the ephemeral nature crucial for understanding

media narratives. Affective frame analysis provided a structured yet flexible approach, identifying emotional structures within each outlet.

The subsequent comparative analysis highlighted distinct emotional frameworks: The New York Times' balanced paternalism, Fox News' fear and anger-driven narrative, and Al-Jazeera's emphasis on community and shared struggle.

Each outlet cultivates a sense of belonging, reinforcing political affiliations and deepening polarization. Understanding these emotional underpinnings offers insights into media influence on public perception and political discourse. By revealing emotional architectures, we better navigate and critically engage with the media, and through the analysis we can better understand how the outlets use structures of feeling to frame and fuel their narrative. Arguably, the readership of each media is sociologically different and views the world with a completely different lens. They also tend to behave differently towards and in the world around them. Through this, we can see the power that the structures of feeling have on our social and political reality.

By better understanding these structures of feeling, we can begin to explore and understand how events are affectively framed in news media and create the world around us. I believe that the work done in this thesis is the first step towards a deeper understanding of the relationship between news media and reality.

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