3. Theory – Explaining the selection of strategies of external communication

The introductions of shaming and branding in the conceptualization chapter (chapter 2) show that both have the potential to be powerful strategies of external communication. This makes both of them attractive communication strategies for conflict parties. In having two possibly attractive communication strategies, the following questions arise:

1. Which of the two strategies do conflict parties choose for their external communication?
2. What shapes the selection of the strategies of external communication of conflict parties?

To answer these interlinked research questions theoretically, this chapter first summarizes the theoretical expectations that can be derived from established theories on positive and negative communication (section 3.1.). After discussing, why the expectations that can be derived from the established theories are problematic for predicting the selection of strategies of external communication during asymmetric conflicts, a new theoretical argument is introduced (sections 3.2. through to 3.5.2.): The asymmetric conflict structure, or more specifically the asymmetric distribution of power capabilities, influences the selection of the conflict parties' external communication strategies. Those conflict parties which are more powerful choose branding, those which are less powerful choose shaming. Finally, potential alternative explanations are discussed (section 3.5.3.).

3.1 Theoretical expectations of established theories

So far comprehensive research discussing the two research questions formulated above has not yet considered the scope of violent conflicts. However, some theories with a different or more general scope, that also deal with communication, have

formulated some expectations for the use of shaming and branding (respectively related concepts):

3.1.1 Expectations of the literature on blaming and credit claiming – The negativity bias

The literature on blaming and credit claiming proposes the assumption of a "negativity bias". Psychological studies and experiences from daily life have been used by those scholars to demonstrate that humans tend to pay more attention to negative than to positive communication (Hood 2011: 9ff.; Weaver 1986: 373). An equivalent tendency has also been observed for the selection of news by the press. Negative stories are selected more frequently by the press as news to report about, as they tend to be seen as more "newsworthy" (e.g. Soroka 2012; Altheide 1997; Harrington 1989; Patterson 1994; Moy & Pfau 2000; Shoemaker et al. 1987: 348; Soroka 2006;[1] Hood 2011: 10f.). Following the logic of the negativity bias, it should be expected that shaming can attract more attention than branding. Therefore, shaming should be the more attractive strategy of external communication for all conflict parties and it should be expected that they will predominantly select shaming as their strategy of external communication.

3.1.2 Expectations of marketing research – The positivity of marketing culture

In contrast, however, it is apparent that other fields are dominated by positive communication rather than by negative communication. Marketing, for example, tends to be dominated by positive communication, predominantly using advertisements to focus on one's own product in a positive light, negative advertisements are much rarer. These observations fit to findings from marketing research. Marketing researchers have shown in comprehensive empirical studies that advertisements evoking positive, pleasant feelings of the consumer are more successful in building up a more favorable brand attitude toward the advertised product (i.e., a stronger and more positive perception of the product) (Pham et al. 2013: 383). Similarly, in the private use of social media platforms positive content (like e.g. funny memes, pictures of food, traveling and pets) tends to be prevalent (Hu et al. 2014).[2]

1 Soroka (2012 & 2006) and Harrington (1989: 37) show, using the example of economic news, that negative messages are much more likely to be selected by newsmakers than positive ones. Similarly, Patterson (1994: e.g. 7, 204) and Moy & Pfau (2000: 113) point out the dominant role of negativity in political news. Altheide (1997) points out a focus of media on fear and problems.

2 Cf. also e.g. a study of the content marketing agency FRACTL (FRACTL 2016) and articles on marketing blogs such as Jaredic 02.09.2014 and Kissmetrics 2014.

Whilst social media platforms such as Facebook or Instagram can be also used for bullying or sharing negative political advertisement, the private use of these platforms is still mostly used for positive self-representation. From the point of view of the observations and findings listed in this paragraph, it should be expected that branding should be the most attractive strategy of external communication for all conflict parties and all conflict parties are most likely to adopt branding as their strategy of external communication.

3.2 The conflict structure as explanation for the selection of strategies of external communication

3.2.1 The limitations of the established theories

As shown in the previous sections, the theoretical expectations for predicting the selection of strategies of external communication of the established theories are conflictive: While authors from the field of blaming and credit claiming assume a negativity bias and, therefore, a predominance of shaming should be expected, authors from marketing research expect a prevalence of positivity and, therefore, a predominance of branding in the external communication of conflict parties is to be expected. Indeed, I argue that none of the established theories can adequately predict and explain which strategies of external communication conflict parties select during armed (asymmetric) conflicts.

Instead, I argue, the structure of the conflict needs to be considered as the key element of the explanation when trying to predict which strategies of external communication conflict parties choose for their external communication and when explaining what shapes the selection of these communication strategies during (asymmetric) conflicts.[3] The structure of the conflict fundamentally influences the selection of strategies of external communication during armed conflicts, as it

3 Violent conflicts are highly complex social phenomena. Besides the constellation of power relations constituted by the asymmetric distribution of capabilities also other factors such as culture and ideologies, geography and the history of the conflict can influence the behavior conflict parties (Pfanner 2005: 151). In general, the complexity of the conflict leaves the actors a margin of appreciation and interpretation (cf. the idea of the relative autonomy of representations of Bourdieu introduced before and also the thoughts of Katzenstein & Seybert 2018 on complexity; Gallo & Marzano 2009: 1). Still, the asymmetric power constellation of asymmetric conflicts has been pointed out by scholars to have a particularly strong influence on shaping the behavior of conflict parties in this type of conflict and a series of typical behaviors of underdogs and topdogs have been identified in the corresponding literature. In this study from these behaviors those are described that have an impact on the selection of strategies of external communication by the conflict parties. The corresponding accounts can be understood as ideal-typical descriptions of characteristics of the behavior of conflict

shapes both the interests of the conflict parties and their opportunities to use particular strategies of external communication successfully (i.e., that the conveyed message related to the communication strategy is accepted by the audience as credible and that, therefore, the external communication of the communicating conflict party acquires the potential to shift the perception of the target audience in favor of the communicating conflict party and ideally going so far as to even trigger reactions of the target audience in favor of the communicating conflict party). Strategically thinking actors can be expected to select their strategies of external communication based on these interests and opportunities. On the one hand, the expectable success of external communication is influenced by the "opportunities to convince" of the conflict parties, i.e., by how they and their position in the conflict are perceived by the audiences. On the other hand, success is also influenced by the conflict parties' "opportunities to present", i.e., their ability to present particular pictures and stories.

3.2.2 Asymmetric conflicts

In particular for the external communication of conflict parties involved in asymmetric conflicts, I expect a selection of strategies of external communication varying strongly from what has been predicted by all of the established theories presented earlier. I expect that due to the asymmetric conflict structure and the interests and opportunities shaped by this structure the selection will vary across the different conflict parties: I expect the external communication of powerful actors to be dominated by branding and the external communication of less powerful actors to be dominated by shaming.

In the following sections, I briefly define asymmetric conflicts and introduce the relevant literatures for theorizing the influence of the asymmetric conflict structure on the selection of strategies of external communication of the conflict parties (section 3.2.2.1.). Then the independent variable of this study, the (asymmetric) distribution of power capabilities representing the conflict structure, is introduced and conceptualized (section 3.2.2.2.). Finally, a first brief outline of the three pathways connecting the independent variable (the structure of the conflict) and the dependent variable (the selection of strategies of external communication) is presented (section 3.2.2.3.).

3.2.2.1 Defining asymmetric conflicts and state of the research

An ***"asymmetric conflict"*** can be characterized as a violent, armed conflict in which very unequal opponents are opposing each other: A far more powerful *"topdog"* is

parties in asymmetric conflicts that are shared across different asymmetric conflicts at least partially.

confronted by one or more far less powerful *"underdog(s)"*. Since World War II this type of conflict structure has become the predominant type of conflict structure (Daase 1999: 12).[4] For this reason, this study also focuses on theorizing and analyzing the selection of strategies of external communication for this type of conflict.

The asymmetric distribution of power *capabilities* amongst the different conflict parties in asymmetric conflicts shapes the different interests of the different types of conflict parties and thus creates different opportunities for their external communication. It, therefore, determines which communication strategies are promising and which are then selected by the strategically thinking conflict parties for this reason. Bringing together two strands of literature helps to identify and describe the interests and opportunities that are typical for asymmetric conflicts and how they emerge and influence the selection of strategies of external communication: The classical (mostly rationalist) research on asymmetric conflicts and literature about how audiences tend to perceive conflicts and events that are related to the conflict and the conflict parties (in a not necessarily purely "rational" way).

Being the most common type of conflict, asymmetric conflicts have attracted the attention of various scholars that have been trying to understand the dynamics of this type of conflict. The ***literature on asymmetric conflicts*** has identified the strongly asymmetric distribution of power capabilities as a key characteristic of the asymmetric conflict structure. Assuming that the conflict parties are acting strategically, the literature shows how this variable shapes the *interests* of the conflict parties. Furthermore, the literature shows how the unequal distribution makes the conflict parties select different military, economic and political strategies to adapt as well as they can to the conditions constituted by the conflict structure. That the actions of the conflict parties and their observable consequences vary, in turn, matters for the selection of strategies of external communication, as this creates different *opportunities to present* pictures and stories for the different actors.

Besides the strategic actions and considerations of the conflict parties how the audience of the external communication tends to perceive conflicts and conflict-related events also matters for which *opportunities* the conflict parties have *to convince* their audience with their external communication. Unlike the conflict parties, which are dedicated to the conflict and their external communication professionally, the reactions of the audience can be expected to be not necessarily shaped by

4 In the perception of the Western world this shift might have been overshadowed partially by the Cold War between the two blocs led by the superpowers USA and Soviet Union (even despite the guerilla wars in Korea 1950-1953, Vietnam 1955-1975 and Afghanistan 1979-1989), but after the end of the Cold War and especially after the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq this change in the environment of the international system has been widely recognized in the West (Cf. also Daase 1999: 12).

strategic considerations but by preexisting conceptions, preferences and habits. To describe these opportunities, I, therefore, draw additionally on ***literature from cognitive research*** describing how audiences tend to react to competitive asymmetric constellations. Furthermore, communication and marketing research can also offer insights into what kinds of subjects of pictures and stories tend to be perceived as particularly harmful or attractive.

3.2.2.2 The asymmetric distribution of power capabilities in asymmetric conflicts

The most basic feature of the structure of asymmetric conflicts (and at the same time the most predominant characteristic), as the literature on asymmetric conflicts points out, is that in asymmetric conflicts resources, abilities and potentials ("capabilities") are distributed extremely unequally among the different conflict parties. The distribution of capabilities shapes the interests and opportunities of the different conflict parties and, for this reason, influences the selection of strategies of external communication of the conflict parties. Therefore, the following section describes the ideal-typical distribution of capabilities in asymmetric conflicts, as it has been described by scholars studying asymmetric conflicts: In total, scholars studying asymmetric conflicts have emphasized three different forms of capabilities to be particularly relevant for determining the power relations among the actors and, therefore, the conflict setting: Military capabilities, economic & financial capabilities and social/institutional capabilities.

Military capabilities: The most commonly used feature to characterize the structure of asymmetric conflicts is the distribution of military capabilities, i.e., resources, abilities and potentials (Stepanova 2008: 14f.) to use physical force (Villumsen Berling 2015: 49) in order to exert power over other actors. According to this understanding, asymmetric conflicts can be defined as conflicts that are fought between actors with uneven military resources, abilities and potentials: One "topdog", that is by far superior in terms of its capacities for conventional warfare, is fighting against one (or more) "underdog(s)", that is/are by far inferior in regards to its/their capacities for conventional warfare. In a conventional[5] combat setting having many more troops and sophisticated military equipment with high firepower, i.e., a lot of military capabilities, gives the topdog a clear advantage. The underdog, in contrast, has hardly any chance of not suffering a crushing defeat (cf. e.g. Geiß 2006: 762; Daase 1999: 96). The conventional military strength gives the strong actor a clear advantage in a conventional combat setting, and often is measured in terms of "manpower", i.e., the military personal that is

5 Conventional warfare, thereby, refers to combat in an open, direct confrontation between the forces of the conflict parties, a form of warfare that was typical for the end of the 18th century and partially for the 19th and 20th century (Bernard 2015: 960; Daase 1999: 12).

available for an actor (Arreguín-Toft 2001: 96; Paul 1994: 22). Some authors also include the general population size, as a rough indicator for measuring the potential for recruitments (Arreguín-Toft 2001: 96; Paul 1994: 22). Furthermore, some authors stress the importance of the availability of military equipment (Paul 1994: 22; Stepanova 2008: 18). Besides quantitative indicators the quality of the military personnel and equipment are stressed by some authors as being important for assessing the military strength of an actor (Paul 1994: 22; Stepanova 2008: 18f.). Some authors stress the importance of military technological know-how (Paul 1994: 22; Stepanova 2008: 15,18; Sudhir 2008: 59; Arasli 2011: 5), administrative and coordinative abilities (Paul 1994: 22) and training and combat skills of the troops, for example. All of these qualities give actors the ability to operate successfully in a conventional combat setting. Some authors, furthermore, point out that to have an impact on the other actors, weapons and troops do not even have to be actively used. Sometimes when the presence of the weapons and troops is noticed by an opponent actor, the observing actor is likely to adapt its behavior based on the prior assessment and experience of what potential to affect it these weapons and troops could, or would, have (Villumsen Berling 2015: 49).

Economic & financial capabilities: While most scholars studying asymmetric warfare agree that the distribution of military capabilities is a central feature for understanding the particular structure of asymmetric conflicts, many scholars emphasize that it is not the only important form of capabilities shaping the structure of asymmetric conflicts. A series of scholars, for example, stress that the distribution of economic & financial capabilities also matters (Paul 1994: 22, 36, 41; Stepanova 2008: 14, 18; Ayalon et al. 2014: 4f.[6]). On the one hand, economic & financial capabilities are necessary for funding, expanding and maintaining a comprehensive military apparatus (Treverton & Jones 2005: 5; cf. also Stepanova 2008: 18). On the other hand, however, economic & financial capabilities can also serve as a source of power on its own within international economic relationships.[7] Like military capabilities in asymmetric conflicts typically also economic & financial capabilities are distributed extremely unequally: Topdogs typically have more economic & financial capabilities than underdogs, this is due to them usually having control over larger territories and populations (i.e., larger markets in which they can generate tax profits), as well as better international trade relations and

6 Mack describes economic resources as a crucial type of resources, too. Besides funding the military, they allow also funding projects profiting the civilian public such as welfare programs. Mack, however, also sees a vulnerability of the topdogs: They need to be careful that their economic and political resources are not all consumed by the costs of the conflict (Mack 1975: 185).

7 Especially trade opportunities and market size can be considered as a source of power (cf. e.g. Meunier & Nicolaïdis 2005, using the example of the European Union as "trade power").

tax systems (cf. also Paul 1994: 22, 36, 41; Stepanova 2008: 14, 18; Ayalon et al. 2014: 4f.).

Social/institutional capabilities: Besides the role of military and economic power ratios (categories often also labeled as "hard power"), other, more comprehensive approaches additionally emphasize organizational differences amongst the conflict parties (Wassermann 2015: 19; Arasli 2011: 5) such as the varying social relationships (Gallo & Marzano 2009: 2), the socialization of the individual actors involved in conflicts and their unequal status in the international community (Daase 1999: 92ff.; Arasli 2011: 5). These inequalities offer potentials and constraints for the conflict parties, similar to having more or less military or economic & financial capabilities. During this study, the term social/institutional capabilities is used to refer to these potentials and constraints. Again, within asymmetric conflict the distribution of social/institutional capabilities also tends to be strongly unequal: Topdogs are (at least ideal-typically) states, while underdogs are *non-state actors* or at least "*not yet states*" (Ayalon et al. 2014: 5). On the one hand, this means that the governance structures differ. Topdogs as states are typically organized in a more cohesive way than underdogs as non-state actors, or at least as not yet fully developed states. They typically have a more advanced political apparatus and bureaucracy (Daase 1999: 216ff. quoting also Mitchel 1991: 33) and the ability to exert the monopoly on violence comparatively well (Daase 1999: 228ff.). On the other hand, topdogs as states are full members of the international community (Daase 1999: 77-79; Ayalon et al. 2014: 5f.), whilst underdogs, in contrast, have not, or at least not yet, been granted the status of being recognized as a state. The social status matters particularly for the conflict parties, as it is connected to a series of privileges and obligations. As full members of the international community states enjoy some privileges within the international community, the protection of the sovereignty of each state as one of the core principles of the international law, for example, is an especially beneficial privilege and one which the other actors do not enjoy (Daase 1999: 55f.; Patapan 2015: 14). The higher degree of formal recognition, moreover, can make it easier to get access to certain diplomatic arenas such as International Organizations or maintaining official diplomatic relations.

Conclusion – Unmissable and significant disparity: Altogether the ideal-typical asymmetric conflict structure can be described as a structure with a significant and transversal inequality concerning the distribution of capabilities (cf. overview in table 3).

Table 3: Characteristics of an asymmetric conflict structure – Distribution of capabilities

		"Topdog"	"Underdog"
Hard power	**Military capabilities**	Superior • *High manpower* • *High-tech equipment*	Inferior • *Limited personnel* • *Simple equipment*
	Financial / economic capabilities	Superior • *High budget* • *Strong economy* • *Various trade relations*	Inferior • *Low budget* • *Small economy* • *Few (regular) trade relations*
Status & governance structures	**Social / institutional capabilities**	Superior ("State") • *Recognized statehood* ➔ *As state full member of the international community* ➔ *Full sovereignty* ➔ *Good access to diplomatic arenas* • *Cohesive organization, fully developed state structures*	Inferior ("non-state actor" / "not yet state") • *No or incomplete recognition* ➔ *Not a full member of the international community* ➔ *No full sovereignty* ➔ *Limited access to diplomatic arenas* • *Less cohesive form of organization, possibly developing state structures*

3.2.2.3 Overview: Opportunities, interests and pathways explaining the selection of strategies of external communication during asymmetric conflicts

The unequal distribution of capabilities characterizing the structure of asymmetric conflicts shapes different interests for different types of conflict parties and creates different opportunities for their external communication. It, therefore, determines which communication strategies are promising and, for this reason, are ultimately selected by the strategically thinking conflict parties. Evaluating the impact of the interests, the opportunities to convince and the opportunities to present of the conflict parties separately, in total three pathways can be described that explain how the distribution of capabilities influences the selection of strategies of external communication of conflict parties during asymmetric conflicts:

On the one hand, the distribution of capabilities has an impact on what the different conflict parties perceive as their strategic *interests*. The divergent interests, in turn, influence the selection of strategies of external communication:

1) The divergent interests shaped by the unequal distribution of capabilities can be expected to influence the selection of strategies of external communication of strategically thinking actors, as the interests determine what the individual goals

of the conflict parties are. The powerful conflict parties, for whom the status quo offers (economic & financial, military or social/institutional) benefits that give them relative or absolute advantages, can be expected from a strategic perspective to be eager to keep their benefits. They plan their external communication in a way that serves them and secures these privileges. In contrast, the less powerful conflict parties, that do not enjoy these benefits but that suffer from disadvantages, can use external communication as a tool to fulfill their desire to overcome the status quo with these disadvantages. Being the communication strategies meeting these divergent demands the best, the powerful actors can be expected to select branding and the less powerful actors shaming as their external communication strategy. In this study, this type of pathway is going to be called "*prioritization pathway*".

On the other hand, the distribution of capabilities creates different opportunities for the different conflict parties' external communication. In order to maximize the success of their external communication, the strategically thinking conflict parties can be expected to adapt their strategies of external communication according to these opportunities:

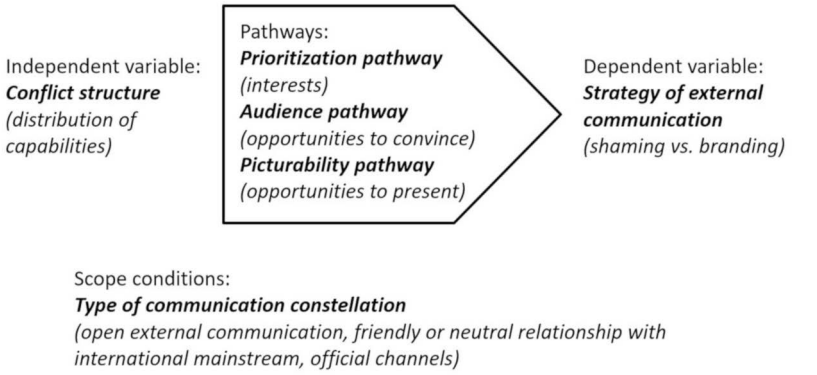
2) On the one hand, the distribution of capabilities creates varying opportunities to convince for the different the conflict parties. How they and their position within the conflict are perceived by the target audience due to their position in the conflict influences the conditions for successful communication directly: Cognition research has shown that third-party observers of an unequal competition tend to sympathize with the underdog. The bias of this cognitive effect is a disadvantage for the more powerful conflict party that makes referring to the conflict, as is typical for shaming, attractive for the underdog but decreases the attractiveness of referring to the conflict for its more powerful opponent. In this study, this pathway is going to be called "*audience pathway*".

3) On the other hand, the distribution of capabilities creates varying opportunities to present for the different conflict parties, i.e., which particular types of stories the communicating conflict parties can use credibly for branding or shaming. First of all, these opportunities differ for the different conflict parties, as the asymmetric distribution of capabilities makes them choose different military and political strategies with visibly varying consequences. This tends to provide more pictures and stories that are particularly promising for shaming to the underdogs. In contrast, the higher economic & financial capabilities make it easier for the topdogs to fund prestigious projects and to present their economic attractiveness. Moreover, the higher social/institutional capabilities make it easier for topdogs to show off their good international relations as well as their strategic importance. The topdogs, therefore, tend to have more promising pictures and stories for branding. In this study, this pathway is going to be called "*picturability pathway*".

The following section 3.3. introduces the prioritization pathway in detail. Section 3.4., then, introduces the audience pathway and the picturability pathway

in detail: The sub-sections 3.4.1. and 3.4.2. explain which opportunities to convince and present the different conflict parties have due to the asymmetric conflict structure. Sub-section 3.4.3., conclusively, discusses how conflict parties involved in asymmetric conflicts can be expected to adapt their strategy of external communication according to the opportunities the conflict structure offers them.

Figure 1: Overview of the theoretical model



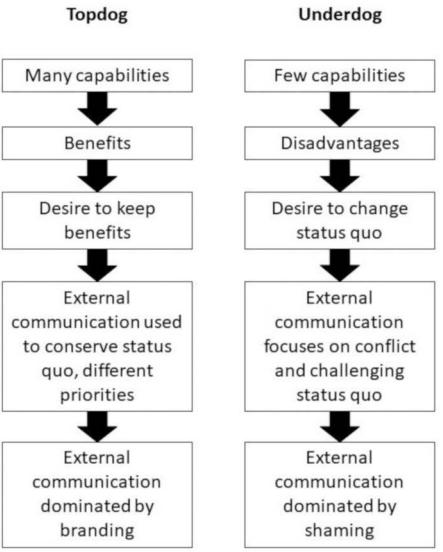
3.3 Interests

The literature on asymmetric conflicts not only describes the strongly unequal distribution of capabilities that characterizes the conflict structure of asymmetric conflicts (cf. section 3.2.2.2), it also shows that this strongly unequal distribution has a strong impact on what the different conflict parties perceive as their strategic *interests*. For the selection of strategies of external communication during asymmetric conflicts this is important, as the resulting divergent interests, in turn, influence the selection of strategies of external communication. In this study, this pathway is going to be called "*prioritization pathway*".

The next sections summarize, whilst drawing on the existing literature on asymmetric conflicts, which divergent interests are shaped by the unequal distribution of capabilities characterizing asymmetric conflicts (a visual overview of the prioritization pathway can be found in figure 2):

1. The significantly unequal distribution of capabilities creates divergent benefits and disadvantages for the dif-ferent conflict parties. Underdogs, having few

Figure 2: The prioritization pathway



capabilities, suffer from disadvantages, while topdogs, hav-ing many capabilities, profit from benefits.

2. The benefits and disadvantages, in turn, shape divergent interests of the conflict parties. Suffering from dis-advantages, underdogs have a strong interest in challenging the status quo and the negative implications of the conflict are considered to be the most urgent issue. Topdogs, profiting from benefits, in contrast, are comparatively satisfied with the status quo and have a strong desire to keep their benefits.
3. These interests, in turn, influence also the external communication. It is adapted to the interests of the conflict parties. The external communication of underdogs securitizes the conflict, focuses on challenging the status quo and the conflict and uses references to the conflict as a point of vantage against their topdog opponents. The external communication of topdogs, in contrast, normalizes the conflict, focusing on different priorities in order to take care of its benefits and avoiding abundant references to the conflict, which are a sore point – as referring to the conflict too often might create an impression of instability that might undermine the top-dogs' efforts to promote their other priorities.

4. "Shaming" (cf. section 2.2.1.) has all the characteristics needed to fulfill the demands underdogs have for their external communication, as they are listed in the last paragraph. "Branding" (cf. section 2.2.2.), in contrast, has all the characteristics needed to fulfill the demands topdogs have for their external communication, as they are listed in the last paragraph. Underdogs, consequently, select a shaming-dominated strategy of ex-ternal communication, whereas topdogs choose a branding-dominated strategy of external communication.

After discussing how the distribution of capabilities in general shapes the interests of the conflict parties and this way the selection of strategies of external communication (section 3.3.1.), the impact of the distribution of economic & financial capabilities (section 3.3.2.) and social/institutional capabilities (section 3.3.3.) on the interests of the conflict parties and on the selection of strategies of external communication is discussed in the following sections in detail.

3.3.1 General pattern – Interests resulting from the distribution of capabilities

Benefits & disadvantages resulting from the distribution of capabilities

While underdogs transversally only have a few capabilities, topdogs have many. This unequal distribution of capabilities offers divergent benefits and imposes divergent disadvantages on the conflict parties:

Having transversally significantly fewer capabilities, underdogs suffer from disadvantages: A consequence of having fewer military capabilities means that they enjoy lesser territorial and governmental control than the topdogs.[8] A consequence of having fewer economic & financial capabilities equates to enjoying less wealth than the topdogs (cf. also Mack 1975: 195).[9] And having less social/institutional capabilities means a lack of recognition for them as well (Ayalon et al. 2014: 5; cf. also Daase 1999: 220ff.).

Having transversally significantly more capabilities, for topdogs, in contrast, the conflict structure offers a series of benefits: A consequence of having more military capabilities is that they are able to acquire more political power and control (cf. also de la Calle & Sánchez-Cuenca 2015: 797). Having more economic & financial capabilities and, therefore, a stronger economy, topdogs also typically enjoy more wealth (cf. also Mack 1975: 195). And having more social/institutional capabilities

8 The nexus between military power and territorial control has been explored more in detail by de la Calle and Sánchez-Cuenca (2015: esp. 797).

9 Even though some non-state actors like terror organizations have been able to accumulate notable possessions, too (Forbes 24.01.2018), the total economic revenue even of small states still tends to be bigger (World Bank 2018d; OECD 2018a).

gives them a high social status in the international community (Ayalon et al. 2014: 5; cf. also Daase 1999: 220ff.).

(Dis)satisfaction with the status quo

Being confronted with severe disadvantages, underdogs are highly dissatisfied and deem the conflict and challenging the status quo as the single most important priority. Enjoying benefits, topdogs in contrast are comparatively satisfied and want not only to focus on the conflict but also to defend their benefits:

Disadvantages such as less territorial and political control, relative poverty and a lack of recognition are likely reasons for the less powerful conflict parties of the asymmetric conflict to be dissatisfied with the status quo. This dissatisfaction can be expected to fuel the desire of the underdogs to take over full political and military control over the territory claimed by them, to enjoy (at least) the same level of wealth as their opponents and to be (in secessionist or anti-occupation conflicts) recognized as a state or (in civil wars) official government and, therefore, shape the strong interest to initiate a challenge against the status quo (on the interests concerning the status quo cf. also Ordóñez 2017: 53; Paul 1994: 129; Geller 2000: 89[10]; Daase 1999: 94). Furthermore, typically in conflicts with an asymmetric conflict structure the conflict tends to be more visible for the populations affiliated to the underdog than for those affiliated with the topdog (cf. also section 3.4.2.3.). Suffering from the disadvantages, therefore, the population can be expected to pressurize their leadership to make the conflict and the demand to overcome the deficits of the status quo to the single number one priority of the underdog, even if they have not already decided to pursue this goal for the power-political reasons mentioned before.[11]

Having more territorial and political control, more wealth and more recognition, on the one hand, the status quo is much more pleasant for topdogs than for underdogs. On the other hand, this, however, also means that the topdogs have much more to lose than their underdog opponents (on the interests concerning

10 Geller, however, focuses only on (unequal) state actors (Geller 2000).

11 This theoretical claim fits well to the observations of social psychologists examining the interactions and communicative behavior of the participants of encounters involving participants from both sides of an asymmetric conflict: When examining encounters of teachers from both sides of the conflict, Ifat Maoz e.g. observed that the two sides showed interest in different topics. The topdog side was dominant when the discussions were focusing on educational, not conflict-related topics, while the underdog side in this case tended to be more passive. In contrast, when focusing on the conflict, the underdog side became dominant (Maoz 2000: 266ff.). Another study of Maoz shows that in general encounters using a "confrontational" approach, where typically the discussion focuses on the conflict, participants from the underdog side are more dominant than in encounters using a coexistence approach, which focuses less on the conflict (Maoz 2011: 118ff.).

the status quo cf. also Gallo & Marzano 2009: 6; Wirtz 2012: 9; Daase 1999: 94). Profiting from the aforementioned benefits resulting from possessing many capabilities, topdogs have an interest in defending and maintaining (or, if possible, even expanding) these benefits.[12] Unlike for underdogs for the topdogs, therefore, the conflict is not the only topic that matters, but only one topic out of many different topics mattering for them.[13]

The selection of external communication strategies based on the conflict parties' interests

From a strategic point of view, it can be expected that the conflict parties adapt their strategies of external communication in a way that serves their divergent interests as conflict parties that as was described in the previous section:

First of all, it can be expected that the conflict parties *focus on their priorities*.[14] As underdogs deem the conflict and challenging the status quo as the single number one priority, it can be expected that their external communication is also dominated by this topic. Topdogs, in contrast, have more topics than only the conflict as a priority. Therefore, it can be expected that they have the ambition to present also issues beyond the conflict in their external communication.

Furthermore, it can be expected that the conflict parties try to *avoid sore points* harming their interests in their external communication.[15] As it is going to be shown more in detail in the sections 3.3.2. and 3.3.3., for example, referring too often to the conflict can be risky for topdogs, as this can contribute to creating an impression of instability and loss of control that can harm their interests. Therefore, from a strategic point of view, it is wise for topdogs to avoid referring to such

12 Indeed, the fear of losses has also been identified in the conflict resolution literature as an (also psychological) driving force within the motivations of conflict parties (Powell & Maoz 2014: 230 referring also to Bland & Powell 2014).

13 For the populations affiliated with the topdogs typically the conflict is less visible. Therefore, also the topdogs can expect lower domestic pressure to focus exclusively on this topic. Indeed, Halabi and Sonnenschein argue that it is often even uncomfortable for the populations on the topdog side to think and discuss about the conflict, as doing so might raise issues resulting from the position of dominance challenging their positive self-image (Halabi & Sonnenschein 2004: 380).

14 The assumption that strategically thinking actors focus on their priorities is not only common sense but also resembled in the idea that "priority management" is the key to efficiency which is presented also by scholars from the field of business and economics (cf. e.g. Govoreanu et al. 2010, quoting also the rule of thumb commonly known as the "Pareto principle" that in many contexts about 80 percent of the outcome can be ascribed to 20 percent of the causes).

15 The assumption that strategically thinking actors should avoid weak points is not only common sense but also reflected in strategic planning techniques that are frequently used in business and management. Identifying one's own weaknesses, for instance, is a central part of the so-called SWOT analysis. Getting to know one's weaknesses is perceived to be necessary to avoid threats (cf. e.g. Weng & Liu 2018: 275; Pelz 2020).

sore points by avoiding corresponding references as much as possible. Underdogs, in contrast, can exploit the sore points of their topdog opponents as points of vantage freely, considering that they have little to lose and using the points of vantage might help them with challenging the status quo by harming the image of their opponents.

Moreover, a strong negative framing can also overshadow actual positive achievements of the topdog (e.g. diplomatic success, prestigious projects, economic success). In contrast, a focus on positive communication can help *fostering and stabilizing existing relationships* or even help to build up new relationships. Indeed, topdogs need to consider this in order to maintain flourishing business relationships it might even not be enough to merely refrain from harmful negative associations, but it might be even necessary to foster these relationships by using external communication actively for promotion (cf. section 2.2.2.).

In general, topdogs can be expected to have an interest in creating a perception of *normalization* with their external communication, as this allows them shifting the attention away from potentially harmful sore points and toward their strengths and, thereby, avoiding external pressure and safeguarding their economic ties and social status and the related privileges.[16] For underdogs, in contrast, continuously *emphasizing* a permanent *crisis* and the *singularity* of this crisis is a good opportunity to trigger pressure against their opponents and thus harm their economic wealth and status in the international community (analogous to the logic of "securitization"[17]).

Branding and shaming as strategies for conserving and challenging

The characteristics described in the last section that the conflict parties consider when adapting their external communication according to their interests which are shaped by the asymmetric conflict structure are characteristics that are best provided by those strategies of external communication that have been defined in chapter 2 as "branding" or "shaming":

Pictures and stories of the conflict are attractive for shaming (cf. section 2.2.1.). Shaming allows the underdogs, therefore, to easily focus on their single most important topic. With using shaming underdogs can feature (alleged) misdeeds of

16 The communicative practice of drawing away the attention from negative issues by staging more positive issues has pejoratively also been labeled as "white-washing" (Weiss 2016: 698), respectively, "green-washing", if the positive issues are related to sustainability or environmental protection (Shani 2018: 633), or "pink-washing", if related to LGQBT-friendly actions (Weiss 2016: 698; cf. also Ellison 2013).

17 According to the eponymous literature, "securitization" can be understood as a process in which the urgency and necessity to intervene with extraordinary measures is justified by referring to an extraordinarily harmful ("existential") threat (Taureck 2006: 54f.; cf. also Buzan et al. 1998; Wæver 1995).

their topdog opponents and this way question the status quo, encouraging interventions by appealing to the moral and normative responsibility of the international community and illustrating the severity and uniqueness of the conflict. Shaming, allowing to feature the conflict and misdeeds of the opponent, is also the ideal strategy to exploit the vulnerability of the topdogs, as topdogs rely greatly on avoiding an impression of instability and not complying with international norms and values as points of vantage.

Branding, i.e., positive self-depiction, in contrast, allows the topdogs to feature and promote their strengths and achievements and this way to foster their economic relations and social/institutional status (cf. section 2.2.2.). As branding does not require any reference to the conflict and typically also does not use such corresponding references, it, furthermore, helps sidelining and normalizing the conflict, shifting away the attention from stigmata, events and practices that show the topdogs in a negative light and could be used to challenge the status quo. Considering that for maintaining flourishing business relationships it might not even be enough to refrain from harmful negative associations, it might even be necessary to foster these relationships by using external communication actively for promotion – it might be harmful to topdogs to use shaming, but it can even be harmful to them not to use branding.

As shaming is consequently the ideal strategy for underdogs and branding is the ideal strategy for the topdogs from the point of view of their interests, it can be expected that they select the corresponding strategies and that the external communication of underdogs, therefore, is dominated by shaming and the communication of topdogs by branding.

3.3.2 Economic & financial interests

Looking specifically at the economic & financial dimension, as mentioned, it can be expected that having more economic & financial capabilities and, therefore, a stronger economy and more comprehensive trade and investment relationships lets topdogs profit from more wealth. This is a benefit neither the political leadership nor the populations of the topdogs want to lose. Having something to lose, however, makes the topdogs also vulnerable. Consequently, they will consider this also in their external communication and prioritize promoting their economic strengths and avoid any references that might have the potential to harm their economic relations. Underdogs, in contrast, have not to take care of avoiding references that have the potential to harm economic relations, as they have no benefits they can lose. Quite the opposite, underdogs can use references that have the potential to harm economic relations in their external communication to harm their topdog opponents.

Especially, the impression of instability has been pointed out by scholars to have the potential to harm economic relations and wealth. Messages creating the perception of instability have the potential to discomfit (potential) economic partners, clients and investors abroad (Cliff 2012; cf. also Amodio & Di Maio 2018; Eckstein & Tsiddon 2004).[18] Instability is typically perceived as a risk for foreign investments and economic cooperation (cf. e.g. Tabassam et al.: 327). The perception of instability, therefore, might deter potential partners from setting up new cooperation projects and/or investments or even discourage them from maintaining existing ones. This conventional wisdom that *instability harms economic cooperation* is shaped by the knowledge from previous crisis situations and crisis situations in other places and is also reaffirmed by a multitude of economic studies examining the relationship between political stability and economic growth (e.g. Alesina et al. 1996; Veiga & Aisen 2011[19]). In particular, the uncertainty regarding the social and political context caused by instability is described by these studies as harmful to the economy (e.g. Tabassam et al. 2016: 327; Asteriou & Price 2000: 4). Especially for some lucrative but sensitive branches such as tourism the perception of a state to be unstable and unable to provide security are particularly detrimental (Sönmez 1998; Avraham & Ketter 2008).

Having comparatively little to lose, underdogs, in contrast, do not have to care much about possible negative implications of an impression of instability. Quite the opposite, this is a good point of vantage for them, as it can help to harm their topdog opponents. They can use shaming to create the impression and to damage the image of their topdog opponents. This, in course, can urge the international community or at least individual states or parts of the civil society to impose sanctions, boycotts or divestment on the topdog opponents that might harm them economically (Kriesberg 2009: 6).[20] Having a lot to lose, in contrast, the topdogs are faced with harmful implications of an impression of instability and these are a severe sore point. Referring too often to the conflict themselves, therefore, for them is highly risky, as this might foster an impression of instability.

18 Cf. Cliff 2012 on both stability and instability as a potential political resource.

19 Different studies deal with different forms of instability: Some studies deal with the propensity of government collapse or other significant changes of government constellations or forms (e.g. Alesina et al. 1996). Other studies include also the role of violence and social unrest as a source of instability (e.g. Tabassam et al.: 326; Asteriou & Price 2000: 6). Okafor (2017: 208), for example, examined also the influence of terrorism. Some of the studies also provide justifications for the causal direction and not only observe correlations (e.g. Asteriou & Price 2000: 8ff.).

20 However, it needs to be also acknowledged that how, under which conditions and to which extent different measures such as boycotting, divestment and sanctions work is still an ongoing discussion among political activists as well as in academia.

As such references are typical for shaming, it can be expected that topdogs avoid a frequent use of shaming and that they instead use branding, which additionally offers the advantage that it allows them to promote their strengths. For underdogs, being able to use the impression of instability as a point of vantage against their opponents, means that shaming is a very promising strategy and they, therefore, can be expected to use it frequently.

3.3.3 Social/institutional interests

Looking specifically at the social/institutional dimension, as mentioned, it is to be expected that having more social/institutional capabilities gives the topdogs a higher social status in the international community. Unlike the underdogs, topdogs are acknowledged as states and are full members of the international community. This high status entails certain obligations and expectations, but also some attractive privileges, such as the principle of sovereignty of each full member of the international community, valuable strategic, diplomatic and political international relations and cooperation and the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs.[21] Last but not least, from the high social/institutional status also comparatively strong justifications for supporting topdogs can be drawn. Often, indeed, it is not only the underdogs who receive significant amounts of foreign support, the topdogs do as well. To maintain their support, however, the foreign supporters typically need to justify their support (especially domestically, if they are democratic states). Whilst the support for underdogs can be justified comparatively easily due to their victimhood image, this is not as easily justified for topdogs, as they are wealthier and militarily more powerful (cf. also section 3.4.1.). If topdogs can prove to be functioning states, supporting them can be justified by framing the topdogs as legitimate members of the international community and strategically important, stable partners. Again (as previously mentioned during the consideration of the benefits in the economic & financial dimension), it is in the interest of the topdogs not to lose these benefits. Having something to lose, again, however, makes the topdogs also vulnerable.

The high social/institutional status of topdogs, however, is, indeed, vulnerable: On the one hand, the high social/institutional status of a topdog can be undermined by raising doubts about whether the topdog complies with international norms (Daase 1999: 236ff.), as this questions if the topdog is an actor with shared values.[22] On the other hand, the high social/institutional status of topdogs can

21 Cf. Article 2.4 of the Charter of the United Nations (United Nations 1945).

22 Scholars examining asymmetric conflicts have pointed out that for topdogs, as they are states, the expectations are typically higher than for underdogs. As they are the primary legal subjects of the international law and full members of the international community, for many international norms and contracts states are the primary addressees. The status of statehood,

be undermined by the impression of instability and the inability of the topdog to exert the monopoly on violence as one of the core features of states (Daase 1999: 228ff.),[23] as both the non-compliance with international norms and the instability would question the ability of the topdogs to be reliable, stable partners as well. Especially pictures related to conflict have the potential to be corresponding pitfalls. Referring to the conflict can easily become a lose-lose option for topdogs: Neither pictures portraying a topdog as perpetrator nor as victim really fit to the expectations toward the role of a state (Ayalon et al. 2014: 4; Daase 1999: 236ff.; Gallo & Marzano 2009: 3) or as a reliable, stable partner. The former shows the unwillingness of the actor to comply with the norms of the international community. The latter risks the actor being perceived as weak and unstable.[24]

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therefore, also is linked with particular obligations and expectations and as main creators of the international legal order states are also monitored by parts of the international public whether they comply with their own norms or not (Ayalon et al. 2014: 4; Daase 1999: 236ff.).

23 States are expected to be able to exert their monopoly on violence and provide security. Indeed, upholding the monopoly on violence and providing security have been described often as one of the key features and a core function of functioning states and are features that are from a security political perspective necessary to be a valuable partner (cf. also Daase 1999: 228ff.).

24 While for an underdog the perception of weakness primarily is a potential source of empathy, for a topdog in its role as state this perception is far more problematic, as it raises doubts about its ability to exert control and provide security, which is expected from a state (Daase 1999: 222ff.), as well as about the credibility of its military power (this phenomenon has also been labeled as "Mogadishu effect":[57] In 1993 a US operation to arrest the Somali warlord Aidid failed badly. The US special forces team incurred severe losses and the pictures of a mutilated soldier being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu disseminated quickly around the world, resulting in a quick withdrawal of the US troops. The images and related reactions severely harmed the military credibility and the trust in the ability of the USA to enforce its security policies, both domestically as well as internationally. Referring to these events, the corresponding cognitive/psychological effect has been named also "Mogadishu effect", cf. Münkler 2005: 26). Moreover, staging violence of the opponent in the form of a permanent and abundant use of shaming can create an impression of a lack of control and the loss of the ability to exert the monopoly on violence. The impression of a lack of control and the loss of the ability to exert the loss of the monopoly on violence can even contribute to shaping a perception of the topdog state as a "failed state" and, therefore, a security risk out of control. In the worst case (from the perspective of the topdog), this impression, in turn, could be even used by third-party states as justification for intervening into the conflict against the will of the topdog (Langford 1999: 61, 62 – Langford summarizes problems arising from failed states and debates even about the need of trusteeship-like measures to restore stability in failed states, pointing out that internal failure is often linked to a broader danger to international security). Pictures and stories of weakness and instability thereby can be used by third-party actors for justifying corresponding extraordinary measures such as interventions, as these pictures and stories are often also related to reference objects that are typically accepted as reference objects for securitization (Buzan et al. 1998; Wæver 1995), such as humanitarian interests and the international security. Using a narrative of victimhood, powerlessness or

As such references to the conflict are typical for shaming, it can be expected that topdogs avoid the frequent use of shaming, preferring the use of branding instead, which additionally offers the advantage that it allows them to present themselves as reliable, stable partners with shared values. For underdogs, being able to use the impression of instability and accusations of alleged non-compliance with international norms as a point of vantage against their opponents, in contrast, shaming is a very promising strategy and they, therefore, can be expected to use it frequently.

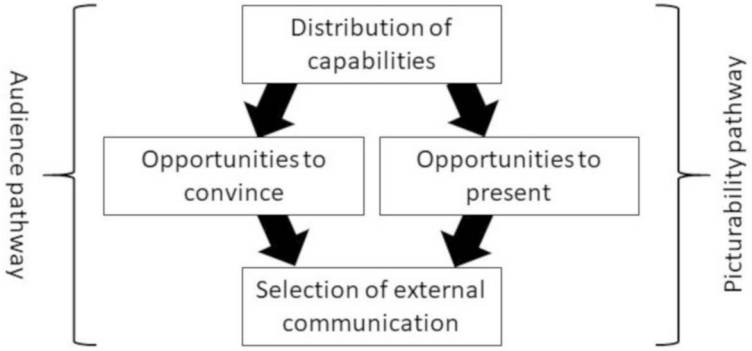
3.4 Opportunities

The strongly and transversally unequal distribution of capabilities that characterizes the conflict structure of asymmetric conflict does not only shape divergent interests but also divergent *opportunities* for the conflict parties to use branding and shaming credibly: The unequal distribution shapes divergent *opportunities to convince* with shaming, and respectively, branding (*audience pathway*) as well as divergent *opportunities to present* for the use of shaming, and respectively, branding (*picturability pathway*). The divergent opportunities, in turn, influence which strategies of external communication the conflict parties can use successfully (cf. overview in figure 3).

Step by step the following sections theorize the different elements of the resulting pathways. Section 3.4.1. discusses how the distribution of capabilities influences which opportunities to convince conflict parties in asymmetric conflicts have. Section 3.4.2. discusses how the distribution of capabilities influences which opportunities to present conflict parties in asymmetric conflicts have. This, therefore, shows that it can be expected from a theoretical perspective that the asymmetric conflict structure provides better opportunities to convince and present for the use of shaming for the underdogs and better opportunities to convince and present for the use of branding for the topdogs. Section 3.4.3., finally, discusses how the resulting opportunities shape the selection of strategies of external communication, arguing that the conflict parties can be expected to act strategically and that they, consequently, predominantly select those strategies of external communication for

even of a lack of control would, moreover, conflict with notions such as sovereignty and the principle of non-interference and create a sore point that can be attacked by referring to (at least partially) competing notions such as the idea of a "Responsibility to Protect" (R2P) (cf. Acharya 2013 – Acharya shows that R2P is a discourse with increasing relevance allowing it to circumvent the norms of sovereignty and non-interference) or the fight against international terrorism to protect the security, as the inability of the topdog can be used as an argument for external interventions. In order to cast no doubts about the applicability of the norm of sovereignty and to avoid damaging or even contributing to deconstruct the idea, therefore, topdogs need to avoid respective narratives.

Figure 3: The elements of the audience pathway (Distribution of capabilities → opportunities to convince → selection of external communication) and the picturability pathway (Distribution of capabilities → opportunities to present → selection of external communication)



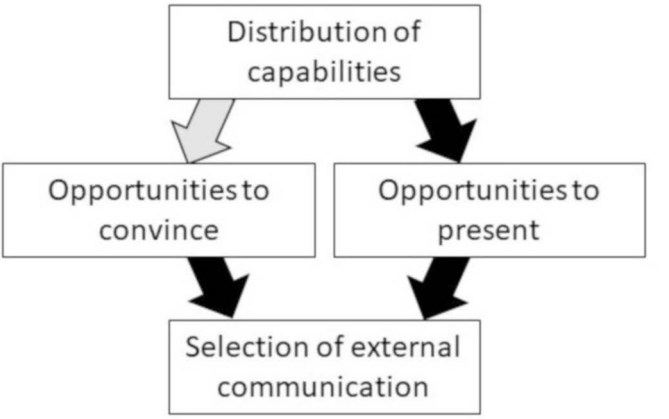
which they have the best opportunities: Topdogs, having better opportunities for branding, select predominantly branding; underdogs, having better opportunities for shaming, predominantly select shaming.

3.4.1 Opportunities to convince

The following section discusses how the asymmetric distribution of capabilities shapes divergent opportunities to convince for the different conflict parties in asymmetric conflicts (cf. overview in figure 4):

As discussed in section 3.2.2.2. asymmetric conflicts are characterized by a transversally and significantly unequal distribution of capabilities amongst the involved conflict parties. The disparity in the ideal-typical structure of asymmetric conflicts is so strong and omnipresent that it can be merely denied by the conflict parties or hidden from audiences abroad and typically the conflict parties do not even try to do so. The perception of the very unequal distribution has a strong impact on the *opportunities to convince* the conflict parties. It triggers an underdog/topdog effect shaping divergent opportunities to convince for the different conflict parties: As scholars from cognition psychology also argue, it is due to this effect that third-party observers of an unequal competition tend to sympathize with the underdog. Consequently, the actor in the less powerful "underdog position" (which is partially labeled "David position", referring to the well-known biblical story of

Figure 4: Overview – Step of the audience pathway discussed in section 3.4.1. (highlighted in light grey)



David versus Goliath[25]) can more easily win over the sympathy of audiences abroad by referring to the conflict than the actor in the more powerful "topdog position" (which partially is also labeled as "Goliath position"). As shaming always refers to the opponent and thereby to the conflict as a competitive setting in which the two opponents are compared, the corresponding bias of the underdog/topdog effect makes shaming very attractive for the underdog and rather unattractive for the topdog.

Drawing on literature from conflict research and cognition psychology, section 3.4.1.1. discusses more in detail the advantages of the underdog / David position, section 3.4.1.2. considers the disadvantages of the topdog / Goliath position and section 3.4.1.3., ultimately evaluates the underdog/topdog effect as general perception bias.

3.4.1.1 The underdog / David position as a strategic asset for the underdog's external communication

The conflict parties that have far less military, and other forms of, capabilities are typically perceived as "underdogs". While their inferiority and relative military weakness is a disadvantage on the battlefield, the corresponding perception

25 In the story David, the youngest son of a family of shepherds, armed only with a slingshot and supposed to have no chance at all, confronts Goliath, a giant and strong warrior, supposed to be invincible, and defeats his opponent (1 Samuel 17).

of being the weaker actor can be used as an asset in the communicative struggle for international empathy:

The underdog position of being the weaker actor makes it easier for them to portray themselves (or even more so, their own civil population) credibly as victims (and doing so portraying their superior opponents as perpetrators). This image of victimhood can be used to arouse international compassion and sympathy (Beck & Werron 2017: 14; Münkler 2015: 157ff.[26]). The effect of being perceived as underdog and victim can be further increased by pictures visualizing this role. Especially collateral damage and military (or also political) measures affecting the civil population (allegedly) caused by the enemy create strong images that can be used by underdogs to visualize their victimhood. Especially the staging of pictures of suffering, innocent, vulnerable civilians, including especially the "presentation of refugees, crying women and desperately resisting children" (Münkler 2005: 90), gives shaming messages of underdogs a personal touch and makes it easy for audiences to feel with these individual fates, making this messages the surest way to arouse international compassion for the "David" in a "David vs. Goliath" constellation.[27]

Being perceived as weak, chanceless and a victim makes shaming also more likely to be successful: Shaming is perceived to be more credible, if it is used by the weak actor which can more easily present itself as a victim and helpless. This asset, resulting from the asymmetric perception of the conflict parties and their strength, makes shaming a particularly attractive strategy of external communication for underdogs:

On the one hand, shaming is an efficient and, therefore, attractive strategy for underdogs to convert a military defeat into reputational gains, especially if civilian structures and collateral damage are involved (Münkler 2015: 157ff. [28]). The aroused compassion and sympathy then ultimately benefit the underdogs, as they help mobilizing international aid and support. Using the example of an attack on a refugee camp used by an underdog for military purposes, Münkler argues: "The more effective a military attack is on a refugee camp, the more negative are the political consequences for the attacker. And, although the victim of the attack suffers organizational and military losses, he wins additional political legitimacy in the eyes of world opinion; as soon as he manages to convert this gain to support from neighboring countries and international organizations, he is usually able to make good the losses" (Münkler 2005: 90 f.).

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26 German edition: Münkler 2015: 157ff.; English edition: Münkler 2005: 90 f.

27 The role of pictures from the conflict and which actor can use them is going to be discussed more in detail in the sub-section introducing the "picturability pathway" following later (section 3.4.2.3.).

28 German edition: Münkler 2015: 157ff.; English edition: Münkler 2005: 90 f.

On the other hand, besides the self-portrayal as a victim, shaming allows underdogs depicting their topdog enemies as perpetrators or even to dehumanize them.[29] Unlike their enemies, they as "weak underdog" can credibly use some strong terms describing negative opponent actions such as "suppression" and "occupation", as these terms are typically linked with actions of a more powerful actor against a less powerful actor and not vice versa.[30] This way the shaming additionally gives underdogs the opportunity to damage the image of their enemies abroad and this way to possibly mobilize international pressure against their topdog opponents. [31]

The tendency of shaming being a particularly credible strategy for underdogs and a strong rhetorical weapon against topdogs is further supported by the logic used by the international media: "It is no accident that almost everywhere belligerents have come to regard these cameras [of the international media] as especially effective weapons […] The media no longer serve a war-reporting function: they have involuntarily become a participant in war, as a direct result of the asymmetrical structure that makes the new wars a confrontation between soldiers and civilians and not between soldiers and soldiers. Media-generated world opinion thus a resource of war, behind which and in which the combatants on the weaker side seek cover and protection. The political-military importance of the cameras increases in proportion to the asymmetrization of armed conflicts. The traditional neutrality of war reporting was evidently bound up with the symmetry of war, whereas the growth of asymmetrical David-and-Goliath patterns has led to forms of observation that involve taking sides and lending support" (Münkler 2005: 90).

3.4.1.2 The topdog / Goliath position as a strategic sore point for the topdog's external communication

Whilst the use of conflict-related shaming is very attractive for underdogs, in contrast, the efficient use of conflict-related messages seems to be much more complicated for topdogs: Yarchi, Samuel-Azran and Bar-David have observed that for topdogs public diplomacy is particularly challenging because of their "Goliath" position in the asymmetric power relation. While the military weakness becomes an asset for underdogs in the struggle for the support of audiences abroad, their own military strength becomes a sore point for topdogs in the same struggle. Being perceived as Goliath pushes an actor in a defensive position, i.e., in an unattractive position for external communication (Yarchi et al. 2017: 360, 361, 364, 365, 366,

29 Cf. also the discussion on the rhetorical structure and rationale of shaming in section 2.2.1.

30 Already the etymology presumes an asymmetric top-down relationship: The prefix "sub" in "suppression" means "under" (Online Etymology Dictionary 2020a) and the prefix "ob" in "occupation" means "over" (Online Etymology Dictionary 2020b).

31 Cf. also the discussion on the rationale of shaming in section 2.2.1.

373[32]). Similarly, Mack (1975: 186-187) and Arreguín-Toft (2001: 106) argue that the (unlawful) damage ("barbarism") caused by a conflict party is judged in proportion to the relative power of the different conflict parties: "Weak actors will be forgiven abuses for which strong actors will be hanged" (Arreguín-Toft 2001: 106).

3.4.1.3 The underdog / topdog effect as general perception bias

The observations of Münkler and Yarchi et al. fit quite well to research results and theories from the field of social and cognition psychology: Vandello et al. identified an "underdog effect" in a series of empirical tests, which can be described as the effect that neutral observers tend to support the underdog, i.e., an actor which is disadvantaged in comparison to its opponent (concerning the distribution of capabilities and expectations), in a competitive constellation in which an underdog is confronted with a superior opponent (Yarchi et al. 2017: 360,361,364,365,366,373[33]; Vandello et al. 2007; see also: Prell 2002). A similar study by Jeffries et al. identified a "*David and Goliath Principle*". They described the David and Goliath Principle as "the tendency for people to perceive criticism of 'David' groups (groups with low power and status) as less normatively permissible than criticism of 'Goliath' groups (groups with high power and status)" (Jeffries et al. 2012). They could observe the

32 Already earlier I have emphasized the importance of the David vs. Goliath effect in a presentation for the annual conference of the Conflict Research Society 2016 at Trinity College in Dublin (Hirschberger 2016: 13,20).

33 In a first test the participants of the study conducted in Florida were shown a list of five countries and the number of their all-time medal wins in the Olympic Games. After they had been shown this information, the interviewees were asked whom they would prefer to win a hypothetical sports competition between two of the countries. 75% of the participants supported the team with fewer medals. In another experiment, the researchers showed two different groups two different maps. One of the maps showed the comparatively large State of Israel next to the comparatively small Palestinian territories. The other map showed Israel and its neighboring countries, whereby from this perspective Israel looks comparatively small in comparison to its neighboring countries. After having been shown the maps, the participants from both groups were asked whom they would support, Israelis or Palestinians respectively Arabs. While the majority of the first group, perceiving Palestine as the underdog, supported the Palestinians, the majority of the second group perceived in the changed constellation Israel as the underdog and supported Israel (Cf. Vandello et al. 2007; see also: Prell 2002). Also, other researchers could show in experimental settings that the participants of the experiments tend to favor the underdog in different competitive contexts, such as sports competitions (Frazier & Snyder 1991; Kim et al. 2008: 2555f.), business (Kim et al. 2008: 2555f.), arts (Kim et al. 2008: 2556ff.) or elections (Ceci & Kain 1982). Furthermore, Kim et al. could confirm the underdog effect also in abstract settings (Kim et al. 2008: 2558ff.). As a limit of the underdog effect Kim et all. identify the prevalence of the self-interest of the audience. If the observing and judging audience has their own interests contrasting with those of the underdog, the influence of self-interest tends to be bigger than the influence of the underdog effect (Kim et al. 2008: 2553 ff.).

effect for Western as well as for Chinese participants of the study and, therefore, it can be assumed that the effect exists across different cultures (Jeffries et al. 2012).

Vandello et al. explain the empathy for the disadvantaged actor by arguing that "[c]ompetitive scenarios of inequality [~~may~~] arouse people's sense of fairness and justice, general principles people care about deeply" (Vandello et al. 2007: 1604) and that people tend to be averted to inequalities and "unfairness" (Vandello et al. 2007: 1604 f.; cf. also Kim et al. 2008: 2552). The perception of another asymmetric constellation as unfair can also be easily associated with similar social cleavages that play an important role for the identity of individuals and social groups that feel unjustly treated as well and, therefore, see parallels to their own emotional history (Foreign Policy 23.06.2010). Examples are, for instance, the Irish Republicans in their struggle against British Unionists (Foreign Policy 23.06.2010) and the (anti-imperialist) European Left (with the exemption of the Anti-Germans) in their struggle against capitalism, which traditionally have a particularly strong "Pro-Palestinian" orientation in the discourse of the conflict in Israel and Palestine, another prominent asymmetric struggle.[34]

Prell portends, furthermore, that within culture, arts and religion narrations with empathy for the disadvantaged are widespread as well: As examples he mentions the story of David versus Goliath in the Bible (this has been discussed above), the fight of the small Rebel Alliance in the Star Wars movies against the mighty and by far superior Galactic Empire or the participation of a Jamaican bobsled team at the 1988 Olympic Games (Prell 2002). Kim et al. also mention similar examples (Kim et al. 2008: 2550ff.). The deep rootedness of the underdog effect in culture, arts and religions and its emotional power makes it a strong cognitive shortcut for audiences confronted with conflict-related messages.

Additionally, a victory of the underdog is more spectacular and sensational than a victory of the superior actor and the idea of the underdog winning is, therefore, more exciting and interesting for audiences than the idea of the superior actor winning (Kim et al. 2008: 2552). Also taking on the challenge despite of being disadvantaged can be interpreted as brave and virtuous; and even when losing underdogs can be appreciated for their courage and their brave struggle (Moskalenko & McCauley 2019: 69). A loss of a superior actor, in contrast, would offer an opportunity for "Schadenfreude" (malicious glee about one's failure), as those riding higher have further to fall and their fall, therefore, is more spectacular and unexpected (Kim et al. 2008: 2552f.).

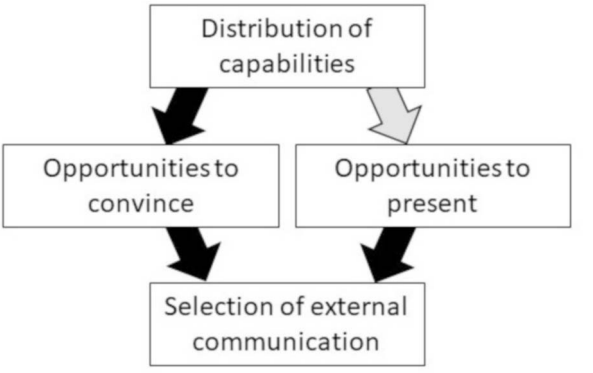
34 Azeem Ibrahim, for example, observes that "Palestine has been brutalized by decades of occupation, and [that] the suffering of Palestinians raises natural sympathy" within the left in Europe and the United States and that many "left-wing Jews share this justified anger at Israel's policies" (Foreign Policy 18.11.2019).

The underdog effect can be assumed to be particularly strong in settings that are particularly emotional. Conflicts and their cruel consequences and the moral reflections of them offer such a setting. As previously discussed, the underdog effect provides very different conditions for the external communication of topdogs (in the "Goliath" or "topdog position") and underdogs (in the "David" or "underdog position"). Mansdorf & Kedar (Mansdorf & Kedar 2008; Mansdorf 2018) refer to the topdog/underdog effect which can be observed during asymmetric conflicts also as a "psychological asymmetry", which according to Mansdorf is "the relative advantage of the weaker party in a conflict to engage in otherwise immoral and illegal behavior against a militarily stronger opponent" (Mansdorf 2018). Similarly, Avraham (Avraham 2009: 204; referring to Gilboa 2006, Navon 2006 and Galloway 2005) observes a tendency that the (international) mass media tend to sympathize with the weaker side in the conflict and concludes, therefore, that it is a big opportunity for the underdog to promote a "victim image".

3.4.2 Opportunities to present

Besides opportunities to convince the strongly unequal distribution of capabilities among the conflict parties in asymmetric conflicts also shapes different *opportunities to present* for the conflict parties. The following section discusses, therefore, how the asymmetric distribution of capabilities shapes divergent opportunities to convince for the different conflict parties in asymmetric conflicts:

Figure 5: Overview – Step of the picturability pathway discussed in section 3.4.2. (highlighted in light grey)



First, the following section 3.4.2.1. explains that opportunities to present matter, as the conflict parties cannot completely make up the events they feature in

their external communication without risking to harm their credibility. Section 3.4.2.2., then, explains the general pattern of how the distribution of capabilities shapes the opportunities to present of the conflict parties in asymmetric conflicts. The following sections, then, discuss more specifically how the distributions of military (section 3.4.2.3.), economic & financial (section 3.4.2.4.), and social/institutional capabilities (section 3.4.2.5.) shape the opportunities to present of the conflict parties in asymmetric conflicts.

3.4.2.1 Observable events and opportunities for external communication

What conflict parties can, or cannot, present in their external communication credibly strongly relies on what can be publicly observed about the conflict and the conflict parties. I.e., what is observable determines the opportunities to present of the conflict parties. At first sight, an option to circumvent the absence of opportunities to present could be to make up stories or to fake pictures. In practice, however, this is not a promising alternative. As besides the conflict parties usually other actors, such as journalists[35] and NGOs, can, and do, observe the events of the conflict, communicating and spreading information about the observed events, thus completely making up what is happening would be very risky for the conflict parties. Though the representation of events enjoys a definite autonomy (allowing e.g. different interpretations and frames for events of the conflict and selecting different perspectives), "fakes" are only likely to be successful, if they fit within the context from the point of view of the knowledge and/or opinion of the targeted audience (cf. also Sandhu 2009: 74; Bourdieu 2013: 296). Bluffing might work from a short-term perspective, but if third-party actors can credibly reveal inconsistencies with observable events making the accounts of the communicating conflict party appear implausible, the communicating conflict party risks a detrimental loss of credibility in the long-term perspective.[36] For this reason, the options that are promising for the external communication of the conflict parties are those that are not in conflict with observable events.

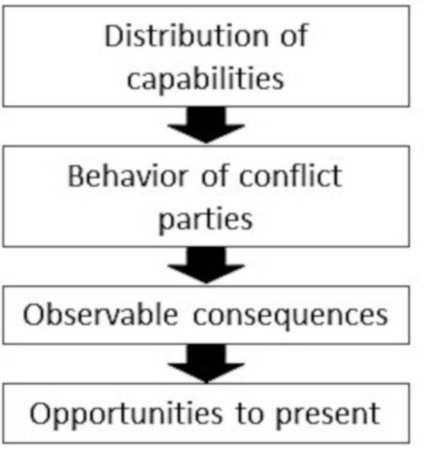
35 Studying tweets from journalists about the war in Ukraine, Ojala et al. observe four roles that can be performed by war correspondents: (1) disseminators, who disseminate first-hand observations, provide news updates from the conflict and emphasize the importance of eyewitnessing, (2) interpreters, who share views and opinions providing interpretations for the events of the conflict, (3) advocates, who aim to raise awareness for particular aspects of the conflict and to disqualify (allegedly) false claims and fake news, and (4) community-builders, who share personal experiences from their fieldwork in order to increase the journalistic transparency and to build connections with fellow journalists (Ojala et al. 2018).

36 The negative consequences of revealed photo manipulation and the subsequent credibility loss have been illustrated by Jitendra and Rohita Sharma, using the example of photojournalism (Sharma & Sharma 2017).

3.4.2.2 How the distribution of capabilities shapes divergent opportunities to present of the conflict parties – General pattern and different forms of capabilities

As they cannot, as discussed in the previous section, simply make up the events they feature in their external communication without risking to harm their credibility, conflict parties rely on the opportunities to present that are generated by the asymmetric structure of the conflict: The distribution of capabilities between the conflict parties shapes the behavior of the conflict parties. The behavior of the conflict parties, in turn, has consequences that are visible for third-party audiences. What is observable about the conflict (and what is not observable), in turn, determines which opportunities to present the different conflict parties involved in the conflict have:

Figure 6: Overview – How the distribution of capabilities shapes the opportunities to present of the conflict parties



This general pattern can be expected to be present in all major dimensions of the conflict: The asymmetric distribution of military capabilities makes the conflict parties choose military strategies in a way that yields more opportunities to present for using shaming for the underdogs than for the topdogs. Having more economic & financial capabilities and social/institutional capabilities, in contrast, provides more particularly good opportunities to present for the use of branding for the topdogs than for the underdogs (cf. overview in figure 7).

Figure 7: Overview – Distribution of different types of capabilities and resulting opportunities to present

The following sections discuss more in detail how the distributions of military (section 3.4.2.3.), respectively economic & financial (section 3.4.2.4.), respectively social/institutional capabilities (section 3.4.2.5.) specifically shape the opportunities to present of the conflict parties in asymmetric conflicts.

3.4.2.3 The impact of the distribution of military capabilities on the opportunities to present – The nexus between battlefield and communication

Section 3.4.2.3. discusses how and which opportunities to present are shaped by the distribution of military capabilities: The distribution of military capabilities shapes the selection of combat strategies of the conflict parties. Which combat strategies are selected by the conflict parties, in turn, determines what is observable about the conflict. What is observable about the conflict, thus finally, constitutes the opportunities to present of the conflict parties for using shaming (a visual overview of how the distribution of military capabilities shapes the opportunities to present of the conflict parties in asymmetric conflicts can be found in figure 8):

1. The conflict parties adapt their *combat strategies* to the conditions provided by the asymmetric distribution of capabilities. Having a lot of capabilities, topdogs have a powerful military and a low willingness to sacrifice. Consequently, topdogs tend to select a combat strategy that minimizes the risk of civilian fatalities on their own side and embrace the risk of collateral damage on the opponent side. Having only few capabilities, underdogs, in contrast, rely on a political victory and their dissatisfied populations demonstrate a higher will-

ingness to sacrifice. Consequently, they choose a combat strategy that embraces the risk of collateral damage on their own side, which has the potential to harm their opponent politically, and avoid forms of attack that might alienate potential supporters abroad. Furthermore, having a lot of military capabilities makes the topdogs powerful enough to control territory claimed and partially also populated by a population identifying itself with the opponent and to effectively exert a monopoly of violence, allowing a more centralized structure.

2. The selection of combat strategies, in turn, determines *what is observable of the conflict*: Most notably, the selected combat strategies tend to cause many more fatalities and damage on the underdog side and among these fatalities especially many civilian fatalities on their side. Furthermore, the acts of the topdogs' violence tend to be more clearly attributable than the acts of violence of underdogs. Finally, as only topdogs have control over territory populated by a population that identifies itself with the opponent; only the underdog side is affected by practices of occupation and blockading.
3. Consequently, as the mentioned acts of violence and occupation are particularly promising themes for shaming, the pictures and stories from the observable events of the conflict offer more promising shaming opportunities for the underdogs.

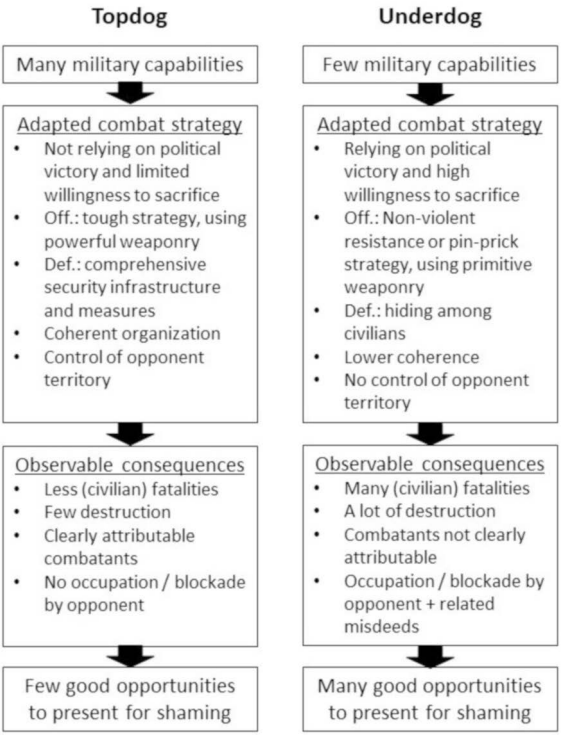
Characteristics of the typical combat strategies in asymmetric conflicts

The asymmetric distribution of military capabilities amongst the conflict parties shapes different combat strategies of the different conflict parties:

Strategic options to win and willingness to sacrifice: Topdogs have more military capabilities by far. They can afford, for example, expensive military equipment, including aircraft, marine forces and heavy weaponry (cf. section 3.2.2.2.). Underdogs, in contrast, have far fewer military capabilities. They cannot afford, and procure, advanced weaponry to the same extent and have to use comparatively simple weaponry. This clear military superiority gives topdogs the option to contain their opponents in the asymmetric conflicts by force, even though politically such measures are not unproblematic, as they are often perceived negatively by the international public and the international community. Underdogs, being militarily far less powerful, in contrast, do not have any realistic chance to score a military victory. Consequently, unlike topdogs, they purely rely on the possibility of a political victory (Mack 1975: 177).

Furthermore, the asymmetric distribution of capabilities influences the willingness within the population of the conflict parties to sacrifice as well: The sup-

Figure 8: Overview – How the distribution of military capabilities shapes the opportunities to present of the conflict parties in asymmetric conflicts



porters of the underdog side, being very dissatisfied with the status quo (cf. section 3.3.1.), are more willing to make sacrifices made in the form of "freedom" and "resistance" fighting, these tend to be more widely accepted and even glorified as "martyrdom" (cf. also Ayalon & Jenkins 2014: 3).[37] On the topdog side, being comparatively satisfied with the status quo (cf. section 3.3.1.) and being the more powerful side with strong military options, the willingness within the population to sacrifice tends to be very low (cf. e.g. Ryan 2002 on the example of the United States).[38]

37 Cf. also Mack (1975: 188) describing an asymmetry between underdogs and topdogs not only in terms of power but also concerning the willingness to suffer costs.

38 Similarly, Inglehart et al. observe a significantly lower "willingness to fight for one's country" in "high-opportunity societies" than in "low-opportunity societies" (Inglehart et al. 2015: 423).

Both the available strategic options to win and the willingness to sacrifice within one's own population influence also strongly the combat tactics of the conflict parties, as the following sections show.

Characteristics of the typical defensive combat strategies of underdogs and topdogs in asymmetric conflicts: Having much more military capabilities and, therefore, being much better equipped for conventional warfare, in a confrontation on an open battlefield topdogs could very likely defeat their underdog opponents easily. At the same time, the willingness to sacrifice is comparatively high among the supporters of the underdog and underdogs rely on political victories to make a change in the conflict, as their prospects for scoring a military victory against their topdog opponents are very low.

These conditions constituted by the asymmetric conflict structure make it attractive for the underdog to seek protection from attacks of the enemy topdog by hiding in densely populated civilian environments (Daase 1999: 100; Arasli 2011: 7; Mack 1975: 177).[39] On the one hand, hiding among civilians is possible for underdogs, as they have a comparatively high willingness to sacrifice, such a strategy is typically tolerated by the supporting civil population. On the other hand, such a strategy is attractive as underdogs rely on a political victory: An attack on a combatant target surrounded by civilian infrastructure and people would also cause collateral damage to the civilian infrastructure and people. Hiding among civilians, therefore, offers protection, as the presence of civilians that would be harmed imposes a moral and legal threshold for a potential attack (Münkler 2004: 180). In this way, civilians are abused as "human shields" (Sorgenfrei 2010). As, however, this threshold is no guarantee that a topdog will refrain from an attack, by hiding their military infrastructure and combatants among civilians, underdogs tend to deliberately embrace the possibility of collateral damage. Even the case where civilians are harmed or even killed as collateral damage, however, has a strategic value for the underdog, as attacks on the civilian population have a strong potential to cause outrage and to mobilize international pressure against the topdog opponent. As for an underdog a political victory is by far the most likely possibility to win in an

39 Besides hiding among civilians, underdogs can also try to hide their combat structures and combatants by taking refuge at sanctuaries with hard to access geography or in a sovereign neighbor country or by frequently changing their location to avoid being detected, dispersed in small groups or even as individual combatants (Daase 1999: 97, 99). As also the most remote sanctuaries are not undetectable and topdogs not necessarily shrink back from attacks across foreign borders, if the local population density is high enough, hiding among civilians remains even more promising for underdogs, considering that it offers additionally the possibility of a political backlash for their topdog opponents due to the collateral damage that an opponent attack would cause.

asymmetric conflict, it can even be tempting for underdogs to instrumentalize the strong potential civilian collateral damage and not only to embrace the possibility of collateral damage but even to provoke attacks leading to civilian collateral damage to cause outrage against the attacking opponent (Flibbert 2011; Münkler 2004: 180; Guiora 2004: 329).

In contrast, being comparatively satisfied with the status quo (cf. section 3.3.1.) and being the more powerful side with strong military options, the topdogs' willingness within the population to sacrifice tends to be very low (cf. e.g. Ryan 2002 on the example of the United States**)**. Furthermore, more than underdogs, topdogs (respectively especially in states with a democratic system their governments) are dependent on the support of their population or core constituencies and cohesion (Daase 1999: 216ff.). Therefore, in contrast to underdogs, the leadership of topdogs is likely to use any available option that could help to avoid unpopular losses on its own side. Moreover, underdogs have more financial capabilities and the military means for constructing, enforcing and maintaining advanced security measures making enemy attacks more difficult. For example, topdogs can enforce curfews and surveillance measures among the opponent population or build fortifications and "security walls". These measures can reduce the vulnerability of the topdogs against attack from the underdogs. Furthermore, being more powerful, topdogs also can limit the freedom of movement and possibly also other civil liberties of the opponent population (and possibly of their own population as well).[40]

Characteristics of the typical offensive combat strategies of underdogs and topdogs in asymmetric conflicts: The asymmetric distribution of capabilities also shapes the offensive combat tactics of the conflict parties: As they, having much fewer military capabilities, would be likely to fail badly to their topdog opponents with means of conventional warfare, underdogs tend to avoid open confrontations with their topdog opponents, instead employing guerilla and insurgency tactics (Arreguín-Toft 2001: 103f.; Lambach 2016; Daase 1999: 165, 173, Mack 1975: 176f.).[41] In their early stages for underdog actors terrorist tactics that are particularly gruesome and spectacular and that target civilians can be an option as well, as such tactics can help to attract attention and to be noticed domestically and internationally as a relevant player (Gilmour 2016). As underdogs, having only few military capabilities they, however, rely on a political victory and such a political victory is most

40 Cf. also the examples presented later in the empirical chapters of this book (section 7.3.1.).

41 Cf. also Boot (2013: Lesson #2) describing the guerilla strategy as the general strategy of the weak.

likely[42] to be achieved as a consequence of international pressure on the topdog,[43] underdogs, as soon as they have established themselves, tend to avoid forms of attacks that might alienate potential international supporters.[44] Relying on international support, they try to balance the trade-off between the domestic reputational gains of being able to present themselves domestically as a resolute force of resistance (Kydd & Walter 2006: 51, 76ff.) and potential reputational losses in the international public (Gilmour 2016; cf. also Daase 1999: 227) (as well as the risk of severe retaliations of the topdogs against the underdogs – cf. e.g. Toronto 2008). A form of guerrilla warfare, that allows such a trade-off and that, consequently, typically is used by underdogs, is to use a pinprick strategy (Mello 2014). Using a pinprick strategy means that the underdog tries to destabilize the topdog in minor, unexpected skirmishes and raids instead of having open confrontations with conventional fighting that would offer them no chance to win but which would result in severe casualties for them as the inferior conflict party. The targets of these attacks are, therefore, often symbolic, but sufficient enough to allow the underdog to present itself domestically as a resolute force of resistance. At the same time, pinprick attacks, classically, focus on military and security forces of the opponent as targets (cf. Heupel & Zangl 2004: 354 about the tactics of rebels in classical civil wars) and this way allows the underdog to avoid alienating the international public by harming civilians.

The adaptations of the underdogs also force the topdogs to adapt their offensive combat tactics: The topdogs are by far militarily superior. Having a lot of capabilities, for example, means that topdogs can afford, access and employ superior weaponry with strong firepower (cf. section 3.2.2.2.), while underdogs, in contrast, rely on very simple, cheap weapons, which they partially need to produce themselves (Arasli 2011: 6; on the challenge of acquiring weaponry cf. e.g. Lambach

42 A second major pathway to a political victory, supporting the pathway of international pressure, often described in the literature on asymmetric conflicts is the pathway of attrition: The underdog increases with its combat the costs for the topdog until the costs for the topdog exceed the benefits from upholding the fight and it withdraws (e.g. Daase 2009: 705; Mack 1975: 177, 185, 187). This additional dimension, however, is only relevant for some conflicts with an asymmetric conflict structure and not for all. While in colonial and secessionist conflicts and overseas interventions withdrawing is an option, as it would mean only a partial loss of power, in other conflicts with an asymmetric setting such as, for instance, civil wars withdrawal is not an option, as it would mean for the topdog a total loss of power (cf. also Kraemer 1971) (Mack, unlike this study, focuses rather on the former type of asymmetric conflict – Mack 1975: 191).

43 Cf. e.g. cf. Boot (2013: Lesson #5) arguing that the most important development for guerrilla warfare within the last two centuries has been the rising relevance of the international public opinion.

44 Münckler called the terrorist strategy, consequently, a "strategical deadlock" (Münckler 1992: 172 quoted by Daase 1999: 227).

2016). Unlike underdogs, due to their military superiority topdogs can be tempted to think that their chances are not limited to scoring a political victory, but also that a military victory might be possible. Topdogs, therefore, can choose to embrace the risk of civilian deaths and collateral damage on their opponents' side as a calculated risk to counter the unconventional warfare of their underdog opponents. Indeed, typically, topdogs in asymmetric conflicts perceive applying a tough approach against the enemy side as the only, or at least the most likely, successful counter-strategy to deal with unconventional warfare (Magnet 2017).[45] Disproportionate responses to attacks of the opponent underdogs can be used as a strategic, instrumental tool (Cohen 2010: 151f.; Flibbert 2011: 64ff., 70; Byman 2016; Lambach 2016; Sorgenfrei 2010). Historically, in civil wars, for example, often the more powerful state side used violence against civilians as a tool to drive a wedge between enemy combatants and the supportive civil population (Heupel & Zangl 2004: 354). Moreover, the low willingness to sacrifice within the civil population on the topdog side can create additional pressure on the topdog to apply a tough combat strategy instead of embracing the risk of civilian losses on their own side that might result from a more cautious approach against the opponent. Even if the topdog does not use violence against civilians intentionally and they even try to adopt measures to prevent civilian casualties by increasing the accuracy of its attacks, in practice, often still even targeted attacks cannot avoid civilian collateral damage completely; on the one hand, this is due to the fluent boundaries of the civil and the combatant environment created by the underdog, on the other hand, this is because of the particularly high strength of the own weapons (Flibbert 2011: 58f., 62; cf. also Clarke et al. 2015: 25ff.).

Coordination of combatants – Degree of cohesion and centralization: Moreover, the distribution of military (as well as social/institutional) capabilities affects the coordination of combatants of the conflict parties as well: Having many capabilities and being developed states, topdogs typically can effectively exert a monopoly of violence and have, for this reason, a more cohesive, centralized structure and tighter control of their combatants than underdogs (Daase 1999: 216ff.; cf. also Gallo & Marzano 2009: 3). In states, typically the monopoly of violence is exclusively exerted by the army and security forces, i.e., official bodies that are directly part of the state structures. On the underdog side, in contrast, attacks are typically not only conducted by the militias of the main opposition or "resistance" group but also often by "lone wolfs" or splinter groups and other smaller militias.[46]

45 Cf. also Arreguín-Toft (2001: 101f., 105) about "barbarism"; Guiora (2004: 329) on the topic of targeted killing and civilian collateral damage; Downes 2008: 37f. discussing the (perceived) strategic value of victimizing civilians.

46 The tendency that state actors (which are typically topdogs) have a higher cohesion than substate actors (which are typically underdogs) has already been observed by Christopher

Territorial control: Furthermore, the unequal distribution of capabilities is likely to result in significant differences concerning the territorial control of the different conflict parties: Having far superior military capabilities makes it easier for topdogs to control territory, often including territories with a population supporting the opponent conflict party. Underdogs, in contrast, have, if at all, limited territorial control and typically do not control territories with population identifying itself with the opponent side.[47]

Visible outcomes of the divergent combat strategies

Having chosen different combat strategies, what can also be observed is that the behavior of different conflict parties in the conflict differs: Most notably, the selected combat strategies tend to cause much more fatalities and damage on the underdog side than on the topdog side and among these fatalities there are particularly many civilian fatalities. Furthermore, the topdogs' acts of violence tend to be more clearly attributable than that of the underdogs. Finally, as only topdogs have control over territory populated by a population who identify themselves with the opponent, only the underdogs' side is affected by practices of occupation and similar acts of exertion of opponent power affecting the population and the territory linked with the underdog.

Observable damage and fatalities: As a result of the conflict parties' selected combat strategies, much more (especially much more civilian) fatalities can be observed on the underdog side than on the topdog side:

The defensive combat tactics of underdogs and the offensive combat tactics of topdogs both embrace the risk of civilian collateral damage within the civil population on the underdog side and a high number of fatalities on the underdog side in general. Consequently, it can be expected that the number of fatalities and especially the number of civilian fatalities on the underdog side are particularly high. In contrast, their security infrastructure and security measures can be expected to help topdogs decrease the number of fatalities and especially the number of civilian fatalities on their side. Also the selection of offensive combat tactics by the underdogs can be expected to contribute to keeping the number of civilian fatalities low

Daase. As examples of substate actors he mentions the PLO and the PKK and their problems to centralize the control of violence within their own ranks, to agree on a joint strategy and to avoid split-offs (Daase 1999: 234). He, however, also observes a tendency that substate actors in the course of an asymmetric conflict aim to monopolize the control of violence and differentiate between a political and a military sphere, while for state actors in asymmetric the line between the political and the military sphere tends to become more and more blurred (Daase 1999: 234).

47 The nexus between military power and territorial control has been explored more in detail by de la Calle and Sánchez-Cuenca (2015: esp. 797).

on the topdog side in comparison to the number of fatalities on the underdog side, as underdogs tend to focus either on non-violent resistance or at least on abstaining from particularly harmful forms of attacks, focusing on military targets, as soon as they have established themselves.[48]

Spectacularity of the attacks and their damage: Furthermore, the typically modern and powerful weapons of topdogs and their damage are more spectacular than the typically comparatively primitive weapons used by the underdogs:

Topdogs can afford heavy weaponry. Heavy weaponry, such as modern artillery and airstrikes, is powerful and can cause serious harm to the opponent. Their powerfulness makes these weapons strong, however, they are also difficult to control and, therefore, their effect is potentially indiscriminate. If the opponent hides its combatants in a civilian environment, collateral damage when using heavy weaponry is likely and civilian losses and suffering are often hard to avoid (cf. e.g. Cordesman et al. 2007: 41ff. on the examples of the 2006 Lebanon War and the military operations of the United States and its allies in Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan; cf. also Cordesman 2006: 10f. + 14). Often children, women and elderly people, i.e., groups that are typically perceived as particularly vulnerable and that are assumed to be not able to defend themselves, are affected by collateral damage (Carpenter 2016; Sorgenfrei 2010). The weaponry of underdogs, in contrast, is typically much less powerful and more primitive. While also primitive forms of attack, that are often used by underdogs, such as arson attacks, stabbings or booby traps, cause severe damage, they still remain less powerful than the weaponry topdogs can afford and, consequently, also their use and the caused damage remains less spectacular from a spectator's perspective.[49]

Recognizability and attributability of violence in the conflict: Additionally, not only more fatalities can be observed on the side of the underdog, the acts of violence of topdogs are also more easily attributable, and the combatants of topdogs tend to be easier to recognize than the ones of underdogs:

48 Cf. the sections "Characteristics of the typical defensive combat strategies of underdogs and topdogs in asymmetric conflicts" and "Characteristics of the typical offensive combat strategies of underdogs and topdogs in asymmetric conflicts" above.

49 This can already be illustrated well with the example of David's weapon in the tale of David and Goliath: His slingshot is nowadays typically portrayed as rather primitive and harmless. Military experts, however, point out that its effectiveness should not be underestimated. On the one hand, the use of the weapon was breaking with ancient conventions, giving David a surprise effect as well as higher agility (ORF 08.04.2017). On the other hand, experts point out that slingshots are deadly weapons, as they make a high acceleration of projectiles possible (Pennsylvania State University 2014).

A part of the underdogs' combat strategy is, as argued above, to hide among the civil population. To make it easier to hide often their combatants do not wear uniforms or other marks identifying them as combatants, which makes it more difficult to distinguish them from civilians and blurs the boundaries between civilians and combatants even further (Münkler 2004: 180). The military and security forces on the topdog side, in contrast, typically wear uniforms and symbols clearly marking them as combatants and, therefore, from the perspective of the humanitarian law as "legitimate" targets (Pfanner 2004; esp. 101f.). This makes them easily recognizable as combatants and makes it easy to distinguish them from civilians, whilst the combatant victims on the underdog side, being less easily recognizable, can be confused with civilians (Pfanner 2004: 123). Only the underdog side can, consequently, pretend that such combatant victims are civilian victims.

Furthermore, often on the side of the underdog attacks are not only conducted by the militias of the main opposition or "resistance" group but also often by "lone wolfs" or splinter groups and/or other smaller militias. [50] These violent incidents are more difficult to directly link to the underdog itself as the main leading opposition or "resistance" group.[51] As topdogs, in contrast, have a bigger internal cohesion with a more centralized military structure and tighter control of combatants (Daase 1999: 216ff.), violence on the side of the topdog is mostly exerted by clearly recognizable forces of the regular army (marked by uniforms and other emblems) and, therefore, comparatively easily attributable to the topdog itself.[52] Consequently, unlike the underdog side, the topdog side has not the option to excuse[53] these acts of violence by denying its responsibility. The resulting pictures and stories can, therefore, indicate a clearly attributable perpetrator.

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50 Cf. the section "Coordination of combatants – Degree of cohesion and centralization" above.

51 The lack of control can be used as "excuse". "Excusing" describes according to Jetschke the communicative strategy of admitting the existence of norm violations but denying the responsibility, e.g. because the violations are carried out by non-state actors not directly controlled by the accused government (Jetschke & Liese 2013: 36-37; Jetschke 2011).

52 As pointed out already in section 3.3.3., for topdogs, as they are states, the expectations to comply with international norms are anyway already typically higher than for underdogs: As primary legal subjects of the international law and full members of the international community, for many international norms and contracts states are the primary addressees. The status of statehood, therefore, also is linked with particular obligations and expectations and as main creators of the international legal order states are also monitored by parts of the international public to control whether they comply with their own norms or not (Ayalon et al. 2014: 4; Daase 1999: 236ff.).

53 "Excusing" describes according to Jetschke the communicative strategy of admitting the existence of norm violations but denying the responsibility, e.g. because the violations are carried out by non-state actors not directly controlled by the accused government (Jetschke & Liese 2013: 36-37; Jetschke 2011).

Observable implications of occupation: There are further consequences of the conflict parties' behavior, which may be observable for external audiences, such as the occupation and many of its implications:

As typically it is the topdog side who has control over territory populated by population identifying themselves with the opponent, it is only the underdog side who can be observed as the side suffering from occupation, meaning that it is only the topdog side who can be observed as occupying force. Moreover, controlling opponent population also requires the governance of the (possibly hostile) population. Such an exertion of power to control, however, also creates a risk of potential power abuses (cf. e.g. Manekin 2013). Consequently, there is a high chance that besides the occupation itself corresponding misdeeds of the combatants of the topdog side can also be observed.

Resulting opportunities to present

The observable implications of the conflict parties' combat strategies, that have been discussed in the last paragraphs, offer more particularly promising opportunities to present for the use of shaming for the underdogs' side than for the topdogs' side:

As discussed in section 2.2.1., pictures and stories that are particularly promising for shaming are, on the one hand, pictures and stories representing particularly extreme acts of physical violence and, on the other hand, pictures and stories representing structural violence and disadvantages that are perceived as injustices. Thereby, violence is perceived as particularly extreme, when (a) the damage is particularly large scale and the number of human casualties is particularly high (cf. also Clarke et al. 2015: 25ff.), (b) if the action causing the damage and casualties is clearly attributable to the shamed conflict party and (c) if the victims belong to a group that typically is perceived as particularly vulnerable (cf. also Münkler 2005: 90). As the considerations in the last section show, what is observable about asymmetric conflicts, is that underdogs tend to have more pictures and stories fulfilling these criteria than topdogs:

1. Suffering from many more fatalities, including civilian fatalities in particular, the underdogs have more opportunities to produce and circulate pictures and stories about suffering from extreme acts of violence at the hands of the opponent.
2. The modern weaponry of the topdogs is more spectacular than the comparatively primitive weaponry of the underdogs. The firepower of the weaponry of the topdogs and the damage they can cause is bigger than the firepower and the damage the underdogs' weaponry can cause.

3. Furthermore, the topdogs' acts of violence tend to be more easily recognizable and attributable than the ones of the underdogs, making the topdogs an easy target for shaming.
4. Only underdogs suffer from occupation, their opponents' occupation policies and misdeeds of topdog combatants in the context of the occupation, all actions that are typically perceived as unjust. Only underdogs, consequently, can use corresponding pictures and stories to shame their opponents.

Consequently, what can be observed about the conflict offers particularly many opportunities to produce and disseminate pictures and stories that are particularly promising to be used as a means of shaming the opponent by the underdogs. For the topdogs, in contrast, only comparatively few corresponding pictures and stories are available. Underdogs have, therefore, better opportunities to present to use shaming than topdogs.

3.4.2.4 The impact of the distribution of economic & financial capabilities on the opportunities to present

Like the distribution of military capabilities, the distribution of economic & financial capabilities also shapes divergent opportunities to present: The distribution of economic & financial capabilities reflects how well a conflict party performs economically and how much it can invest in prestigious projects. Having more economic & financial capabilities, topdogs can afford to invest in a "hearts and minds strategy" encompassing political, economic and social measures aiming at improving the actor's image (Daase 1999: 226) and they can, for example, spend more money on the development of high-tech products, building new architectural landmarks, arranging high-profile sports events, encouraging cultural diplomacy and exchanges with countries abroad, extravagant cultural projects and art performances and donations for aid and development.[54] The results of the economic performance and such investments are also observable for third-party audiences: Having a bigger economy, topdogs are more attractive as potential economic partners than underdogs and they have more prestigious projects they can show off. Both the economic attractiveness and the prestigious projects offer very promising pictures and stories for branding: As discussed in section 2.2.2., pictures and stories that are particularly promising for branding are (a) pictures or stories that

54 Having more economic & financial capabilities means also that topdogs have more resources that are potentially available for the production of social media content. Therefore, they can afford a high gloss production of their media contents, while underdogs often need to draw on less high gloss content or even content produced by others. On the other hand, the "street credibility" of the comparative stylistic simplicity of low-cost production posts can also be perceived as authentic.

feature something that makes it easy for the target audience to identify itself with the communicating actor (Percy & Rossiter 1992: 271),[55] (b) pictures or stories that credibly signal the target audience a significant potential benefit for itself (cf. also the basic concept of "profit motive" in economic studies, e.g. Lux 2003), or (c) pictures or stories that feature something that stands out from the average and is particularly prestigious or is perceived as particularly admirable, surprising or innovative (cf. also Schultz 2007: 191ff.; e.g. Luhmann 1996: 58f.; Galtung & Ruge 1965: 82f.).[56] As the considerations made above show the economic actions of the con-

55 Cf. also Galtung & Ruge 1965: 81 ff.; Luhmann 1996: 60f.; the concept of "brand personality" in marketing research, e.g. described by Aaker 1997.

56 Indeed, corresponding criteria are used as selection criteria in the social media work of conflict parties, as can be, for example, shown for the case of the conflict in Israel and Palestine, which is later going to be examined as a case study: Being aware of the "information overload" (Latar et al. 2010: 64f.; cf. also Dave Sharma, Australian ambassador to Israel, in Times of Israel 20.09.2016) in the modern digitalized society and media landscape, the conflict parties select only content for their social media messages which they expect to be perceived by their target audience as relevant and interesting. With spreading information that is non-relevant for the target audience, they would risk losing the attention of their target audience. The staff in the Israeli Government Press Office for example argues: "We don't like to spread the useless or not interesting information because then we will be blocked and people will stop listening to us, so we need to be focused and we need to think if what we send has a true journalistic value" (Isr GPO1: 65). Therefore, the conflict parties want their social media messages to be relevant to the daily lives of their target audiences and to touch them personally. The spokesperson's unit of COGAT for example explains: "you want to touch the daily life of the people. Because this is the reason, why they will enter and respond" (Isr COGAT: 8). Similarly, also the staff of the spokesperson's unit of the IDF emphasizes the importance of the content of the pictures and stories they select to be "appealing" and "relatable" to the target audience (Isr IDF: 63, 119). Moreover, messages are selected that are expected to be perceived by the target audience as something with an added value for itself. The staff of the spokesperson's unit of COGAT argues for example: "I think now it is the trend to give added value to the custumer. And if you need to give added value to the custumer, you do not push the product in his face. You give him the other information that he can use by using your product. And I think all the media are using that now. We should not just say COGAT, COGAT, COGAT. We need to say COGAT but also say that we are proud of something else. We are referring to another situation" (Isr COGAT: 8; cf. also the similar argumentation in Avraham 2009: 210). Furthermore, a focus on superlatives and the extraordinary can be observed in the social media work of the conflict parties. The staff of the Israeli Government Press Office, for example, gives as an example of an interesting story the story of an Israeli who was the oldest man alive in the world and additionally also a Holocaust survivor: "So for instance, the oldest man alive today in the world is called Yisrael Kristal. He lives in Haifa. That's north of Israel. He was born in September 1903, and what's super interesting in him, it's not just the fact that he's Israeli, but it's the fact that he's a Holocaust survivor from Auschwitz, and even has his number tattooed on his hand. So, this is an example of a story that we would be very interested in spreading out. We feel it sends very strong message and it's interesting. It's human, humane story, and that's something that we as I said a good example of what we

flict parties, therefore, offer many more pictures and stories fulfilling these criteria for the topdog side than in contrast to the underdog side:

1. Pictures and stories highlighting economic attractiveness can credibly signal the targeted audience a significant potential benefit for itself. Being economically particularly attractive, topdogs, consequently, can use this demonstration of their attractiveness to produce and disseminate corresponding pictures and stories that are particularly promising for branding.
2. Particularly prestigious projects offer pictures and stories featuring something that stands out from the average and that is particularly prestigious or is perceived as particularly admirable, surprising or innovative. Being able to afford funding for more prestigious projects, topdogs can consequently also produce and disseminate more such pictures and stories.
3. The distribution of economic opportunities even gives topdogs more opportunities to produce pictures and stories showing encounters with people from the target audience, i.e., with particularly relatable content, as they can afford to invest more in cultural diplomacy.

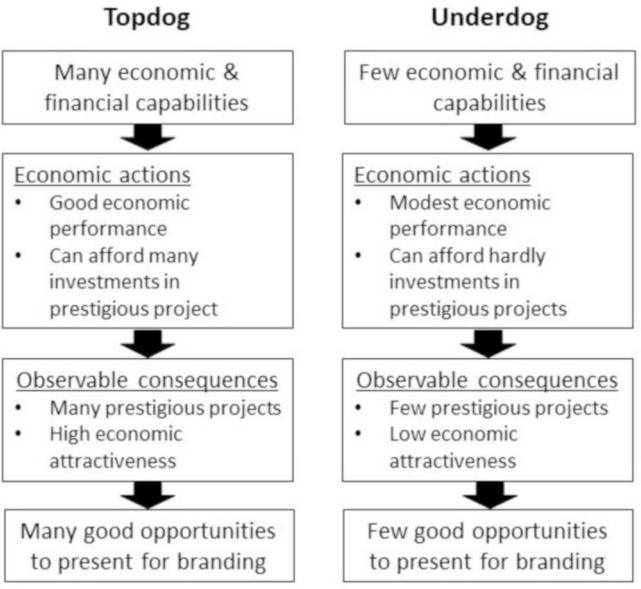
Consequently, the observable consequences of the economic actions of the conflict parties shaped by the asymmetric conflict structure offer more opportunities to produce and disseminate pictures and stories that are particularly promising for the use of branding for topdogs than for underdogs. Topdogs, conclusively, have much better opportunities to present for using branding than underdogs (a visual overview of how the distribution of economic & financial capabilities shapes the opportunities to present of the conflict parties in asymmetric conflicts can be found in figure 9).

3.4.2.5 The impact of the distribution of social/institutional capabilities on the opportunities to present

Like the distribution of military and economic & financial capabilities, the distribution of social/institutional capabilities also shapes divergent opportunities to present: The distribution of social/institutional capabilities influences how well developed the diplomatic relations of the conflict parties are and reflects how developed the statehoods of the conflict parties are. How high the social/institutional status of a conflict party is also made visible for third-party audiences: Topdogs, having a higher status, tend to have more top-level meetings with representatives

would put forward, even though it's not hardcore news. I can give many other examples, but it's not difficult to just open our Facebook page and see for yourself what kind of topics we are doing" (Isr GPO1: 65f.).

Figure 9: Overview – How the distribution of economic & financial capabilities shapes the opportunities to present of the conflict parties in asymmetric conflicts



and officials from foreign countries and more stable and developed state structures,[57] than underdogs. Both top-level international cooperation and being a stable, reliable partner offer very promising pictures and stories for branding: As discussed in section 2.2.2., pictures and stories that are particularly promising for branding are (a) pictures or stories that feature something that makes it easy for the target audience to identify itself with the communicating actor (Percy & Rossiter 1992: 271),[58] (b) pictures or stories that credibly signal the target audience a significant potential benefit for itself (cf. also the basic concept of "profit motive" in

57 Topdogs unlike underdogs typically have already completed a state-building process. They have, therefore, state structures, as they exist and are appreciated also in the Western world: They are organized in a more cohesive way, typically having a more advanced political apparatus and bureaucracy (Daase 1999: 216ff. quoting also Mitchell 1991: 33) and the ability to exert the monopoly on violence (Daase 1999: 228ff.). These similarities can be used to point out closeness to the target audiences in foreign countries and to present oneself as a stable and reliable and, therefore, useful partner.

58 Cf. also Galtung & Ruge 1965: 81 ff.; Luhmann 1996: 60f.; the concept of "brand personality" in marketing research, e.g. described by Aaker 1997.

economic studies, e.g. Lux 2003), or (c) pictures or stories that feature something that stands out from the average and that is particularly prestigious or that is perceived as particularly admirable, surprising or innovative (cf. e.g. Luhmann 1996: 58f.; Galtung & Ruge 1965: 82f., cf. also Schultz 2007: 191ff.). As the considerations made above show, is that the observable consequence of the conflict parties' unequal social/institutional status, consequently, offer many more pictures and stories fulfilling these criteria for topdogs than for underdogs:

1. The more high-ranking the representatives and officials are with whom a conflict party can meet, the more the pictures or stories from these meetings stand out from the average coverage and the more prestigious they are perceived. As the representatives of topdogs typically have more of such meetings with full diplomatic honors than underdogs, topdogs can also produce and disseminate more such prestigious pictures and stories of such meetings.
2. The perception of being able to be a reliable, stable partner can credibly signal to the targeted audience a significant potential benefit for itself. Having this ability, topdogs, consequently, can use this framing to produce and disseminate corresponding pictures and stories that are particularly promising for branding.

Consequently, the observable consequences of the social/institutional status of the conflict parties shaped by the asymmetric conflict structure offer more opportunities to produce and disseminate pictures and stories that are particularly promising to be used for branding oneself for topdogs rather than for underdogs. Topdogs, therefore, have much better opportunities to present for using branding than underdogs (a visual overview of how the distribution of social/institutional capabilities shapes the opportunities to present of the conflict parties in asymmetric conflicts can be found in figure 10).

3.4.3 Using opportunities – Identifying the most successful strategies

Having discussed how the unequal distribution of capabilities can shape different opportunities to convince, and different opportunities to present, for the conflict parties, the following section examines how the resulting opportunities to convince and present shape the selection of strategies of external communication of conflict parties in asymmetric conflicts (cf. overview in figure 11):

As shown in the previous sections, topdogs tend to have more, and better, opportunities for using branding, while underdogs tend to have more, and better, opportunities to use shaming (cf. overview in table 4).

Figure 10: Overview – How the distribution of social/institutional capabilities shapes the opportunities to present of conflict parties in asymmetric conflicts

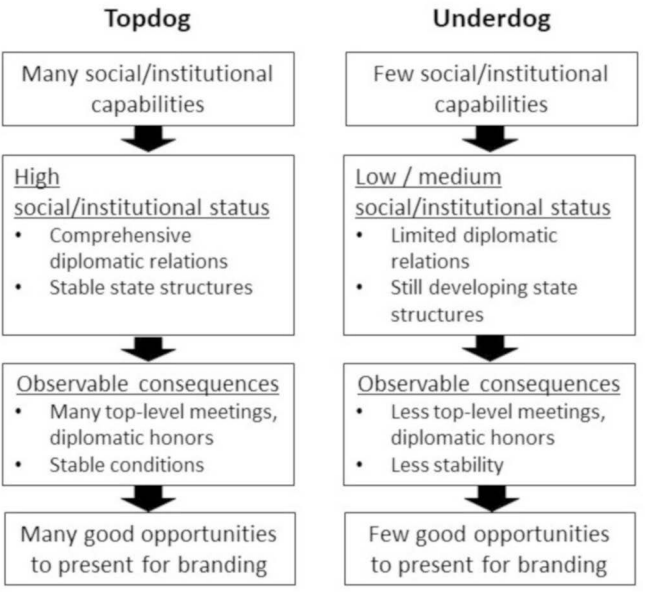


Figure 11: Overview – Step of the audience and the picturability pathway discussed in section 3.4.3. (highlighted in light grey)

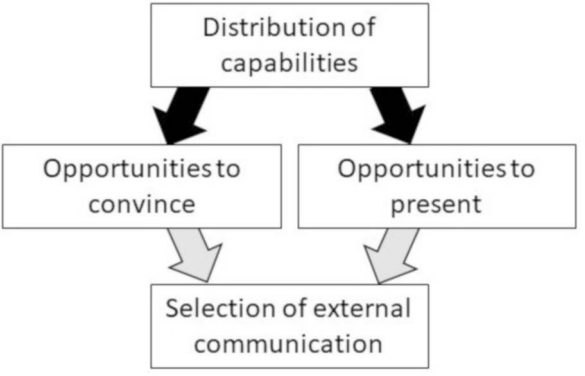


Table 4: Opportunities to use strategies of external communication successfully during asymmetric conflicts[59]

			Power position	
			Topdog (many capabilities)	Underdog (few capabilities)
Opportunities to use particular strategies	Type of opp.	Type of strategy		
	Opportunities to convince	with branding	good	slightly limited
		with shaming	limited	very good
	Opportunities to present	with branding	very good	limited
		with shaming	limited	very good
	Opportunities (overall)	with branding	very good	limited
		with shaming	limited	very good

Assuming the communicating conflict parties act strategically when planning and conducting their external communication, it can be expected that they will adapt their external communication not only according to their interests but also according to the opportunities provided by the conflict structure. Consequently, it can be expected that underdogs will choose a shaming-dominated strategy of external communication and topdogs a branding-dominated strategy of external communication, as these are the strategies of external communication that offer them the most advantages and the least disadvantages.[60]

59 Having a "victim image" can undermine the credibility of branding. Therefore, the opportunities to convince for the use of branding of the underdog are slightly limited.

60 A related field of literature, the campaigning literature, offers also some game-theoretical evidence that this logic can be even expected to be plausible when looking not only in general at branding and shaming as communication strategies, but also when looking more closely at the level of different types of pictures, stories and themes that can be used as references for branding and shaming: Most notably, Philipp Denter has observed the following trends when examining TV ads published by the opponent presidential candidates for their campaigns for the presidential elections in the United States in 2008: (I.) If no advantages for one of the opponents exist, the communication strategies of the competing opponents are likely to converge. (II.) If advantages exist, the communication strategies of the competing opponents are likely to diverge. (III.) The easier it is to draw the attention to a particular topic (i.e., the more effective is "issue priming"), the more the communication strategies diverge. (IV.) Only if a topic is particularly salient and perceived as particularly important by the targeted audience and if the disadvantage is not too big, it might be attractive for an actor to address the topic despite having a disadvantage (Denter 2013: 4). While the context of campaigning differs from the context of external communication during armed conflicts, like candidates during campaigns also conflict parties involved in asymmetric conflicts compete for the same target audience and have different advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, a similar behavior can be expected from strategically communicating actors in all kind of (dyadic) competitive settings, especially also, as argued already above, in armed conflicts: Having particularly strong pictures and stories for strong themes that can be used for shaming, therefore, underdogs can

Actors need to know about their opportunities to use particular strategies of external communication successfully in order to be able to adapt their external communication. Assuming that the communicating actors act strategically, however, this should not be a problem for them: On the one hand, the communicating conflict parties profit from their own experience. On the other hand, (especially for social media) some tools and indicators that allow them to measure the success are available:

Being at the center of the conflict and the discussions surrounding it, the communicating conflict parties can even develop a "feeling for the game" by collecting practical experience over time without a systematic, conscious reflection (Johansson 2017 quoting Bourdieu 1990: 66-68). Being confronted with reactions to the external communication, the staff in charge of the external communication receive feedback on whether using a particular type of content for its external communication works or not. Following a simple trial and error logic, then, the strategy of external communication can be adapted according to these experiences: The communication strategy is maintained, as long as it offers a sufficiently satisfying result, and it is changed, if the evaluation results show that the communication does not perform well. Assuming strategic thinking, in contrast, it is unlikely that the staff in charge of the external communication will instead merely stick to the dysfunctional routine and try to find excuses to keep the failing existing one.

When the external communication is published on a social media platform, there is a simple form to use in order to get a feeling for when the external communication is successful or not: simply read the comments and messages sent from followers. "Social media firestorms",[61] for example, can be interpreted as an extreme form of negative feedback. The appearance of assertive comments from the target group, in contrast, can be perceived as a sign of success. While assertive feedback (from within the target group) indicates success, negative feedback (from within the target group) indicates a failure and, therefore, underlines the need to change the strategy of external communication.

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be expected to focus on these strong shaming themes. In contrast, having particularly strong pictures and stories for strong themes that can be used for branding, topdogs are likely to focus in their external communication on these branding themes. This way they select the most promising pictures and stories and themes that are available for them. Additionally, focusing on one's advantages offers the opportunity to draw the attention to one's strengths and away from one's sore points (cf. also Denter 2013: 5). Only in exceptional cases, when it is not possible to draw the audience's attention sufficiently away from disadvantageous topics, strategically acting communicating conflict parties can be expected to be forced to deviate from this scheme (analogous to Denter 2013: 4). Section 3.5.2. discusses these exceptions.

61 In German-speaking countries the term "shitstorms" is more common. For a more differentiated discussion of the phenomenon of online firestorms cf. e.g. Pfeffer et al. 2014.

While, as mentioned above, neither sophisticated evaluation processes nor complicated measurements are required for identifying one's opportunities to communicate successfully, they can accelerate and refine the process of adapting to a promising strategy of external communication. In recent years both practitioners and scholars of public diplomacy have discussed possibilities of how to best evaluate the success of public diplomacy (e.g. Pamment 2014):

Social media platforms, in particular, offer accessible, and simple, indicators for measuring the success of the external communication published on the corresponding platforms. A simple indicator of the success of external communication on a social media platform would be to monitor the usage statistics of one's communication channels, for example. Online media, in particular, offers easily accessible usage statistics with plenty of simple indicators for evaluating the success of external communication.[62] It can be expected from strategically acting, success-oriented actors that these actors are critical with their own external communication and reflect it, by using simple forms of evaluation at least. A costlier but also comprehensive form of reflecting one's strengths and weaknesses, in contrast, is to conduct studies about one's image and the impact of particular narratives. For this research for example opinion polling and focus group interviews can be used.[63]

In conclusion, whilst no evaluation method can eliminate the element of subjectivity of an interpretation of the impact of communication completely as the thoughts of the audiences can be not accessed directly different evaluation methods are available for the conflict parties as means for them to get at least a rough impression about whether the effects of their external communication comply with what they have defined as their expectations.

3.5 Relations of the pathways, variation across time and possible alternative explanations

In the previous sections, the thesis has been introduced that the structure of the conflict is the key factor of the explanation determining the selection of these communication strategies during (asymmetric) conflicts. Three pathways have been identified explaining how the unequal distribution of capabilities shapes the selection of strategies of external communication of conflict parties in asymmetric conflicts. As section 3.5.1. is going to show, these pathways can be interpreted as mu-

62 Big social media platforms such as Facebook (link to Facebook Analytics: https://analytics.facebook.com/, accessed on 22.12.2020) and Twitter (link to Twitter Analytics: https://analytics.twitter.com/about, accessed on 22.12.2020) provide their own analysis tools for analyzing the usage statistics of one's social media channels.

63 Cf. also Banks 2011, pp. 33f.

tually reinforcing each other. Moreover, from the theoretical considerations made for the routine stages of asymmetric conflicts also conclusions for the selection of strategies of external communication during crisis moments of the conflict with a higher intensity can be drawn, as section 3.5.2. is going to show. Finally, in section 3.5.3. possible alternative theoretical explanations are introduced that might be able to explain a selection of strategies of external communication as predicted in section 3.2.1., too, and which, therefore, later need to be tested as well and be dismissed in order to provide additional evidence for the validity of the theoretical model introduced above.

3.5.1 Relations between the pathways

The last sections have shown that there is more than one pathway that could be identified as able to explain how the conflict structure in the form of the distribution of capabilities shapes the selection of strategies of external communication during asymmetric conflicts. In total there are three pathways that could be derived theoretically: the prioritization pathway, the audience pathway and the picturability pathway. Each of them could sufficiently explain a distribution of communication strategies as expected in this study individually, not requiring the other two pathways. However, as the conflict structure can be expected to shape interests, opportunities to convince and opportunities to present at the same time, it is likely that all three pathways occur in parallel to each other and can be observed at the same time. This, however, is not a problem, as the underlying explanations for the pathways do not contradict each other and are not exclusive to each other. Quite the opposite, the three pathways should be interpreted as pathways that are intertwined and mutually reinforcing.

3.5.2 Variation across time – Routine vs. crisis communication

Normally, due to the described conditions, it can be expected that topdogs will predominantly choose branding and underdogs predominantly choose shaming. During particularly intense stages of the conflict, however, it can be expected that topdogs choose shaming as their predominant strategy of external communication, as well. This is because these (short) stages of crisis provide different conditions than the stages of routine.[64] Nevertheless, from the theoretical considerations made for the selection of external communication by conflict parties during the routine stages of asymmetric conflicts, conclusions for the selection of strategies of exter-

64 The importance to differentiate between different conflict stages has been pointed out also by the INFOCORE research project (Frère & Wilen 2015).

nal communication by the conflict parties during crisis moments of the conflict, that are characterized by a higher conflict intensity, can also be drawn:

From the perspective of the audience pathway, branding is particularly effective, as it makes it possible for topdogs to not refer to the conflict. During the (typically comparatively short) stages of crisis, however, international attention is particularly high, meaning that very many people are talking about the crisis, also including very many people abroad. If the conflict is in the headlines of all of the media outlets, it will be difficult even for branding to distract audiences abroad from the conflict, thus making it hard for any conflict party, including the topdog, not to talk about the crisis situation everybody is talking about. Topdogs are, therefore, typically forced during such a crisis situation (unlike in a routine situation) to defend themselves, instead of using a strategy of actively shaping their own image or the image of their opponent like branding, they resort to, as an exception, shaming and justifications. From the perspective of the prioritization pathway, moreover, as the potential harm caused by not reacting to the events of the conflict during the particularly intense stages is higher than usual, it can be expected that it becomes a higher priority also for topdogs to react to the conflict. From the perspective of the picturability pathway, an additional explanation for the outliners is that during crisis stages typically the topdog also suffers from more fatalities and civilian suffering and, therefore, has more particularly promising pictures for shaming than usual.

Table 5: Overview – Expected predominant strategies of external communication of conflict parties in asymmetric conflicts (2x2 table)

Type of actor / Type of conflict stage	**Routine**	**Crisis**
Topdog	Branding	Shaming
Underdog	Shaming	Shaming

3.5.3 Alternative explanations

Besides the theoretical model introduced above two other alternative theoretical explanations might be able to explain a selection of strategies of external communication as predicted in section 3.2.1. They are, therefore, introduced in the following two sections and later (in section 8.2) they are tested as well, as it would further

strengthen the plausibility of the theoretical model introduced above, if it should be possible to dismiss them.

3.5.3.1 External communication as a dysfunctional relict from the actors' history

A first possible alternative explanation of the outcome that has been predicted for the empirical analysis for the selection of strategies of external communication (topdog selects mostly branding, underdog mostly shaming) is that the expression of the identity of the individual communicating actors resulting from the individual history of each actor and conflict has a bigger impact on the selection of communication strategies than strategic considerations. Indeed, this alternative explanation has been formulated, most prominently by Ron Schleifer for the case of the conflict in Israel and Palestine: Schleifer argues that it is not the structure of the conflict that shapes the Israeli communication but that the roots of Israeli "hasbara"[65] lay deep in the Jewish history. According to this explanation, the modern Israeli strategy of external communication is a relict shaped by the historical experience of pressure toward Jewish communities across the Jewish history (Schleifer 2003: 123ff.), which is according to Schleifer dysfunctional, as it is from his point of view too "benign" (Schleifer 2003: 145).

3.5.3.2 External communication as a result of nonreflective diffusion of typical activism respectively marketing practices

Another group of theoretical approaches emphasizes that actors can adopt practices not only because of (rationalizing) strategic decisions or due to being influenced by their domestic culture but also because of the (not necessarily reflective) international diffusion of practices (cf. e.g. Strang & Meyer 1993: 487ff.). Relations between actors can lead to assimilation of practices by mirroring each other's practices (Strang & Meyer 1993: 488, 500 about relational models and faithful copying). In particularly fast practices can diffuse, if they are based on a theory (Strang & Meyer 1993: 492ff.). In the case of practices of external communication, this could be ideas or "theories" about how quality communication practices should look like, perceived as generalizable "best practice" or as general expectation.[66]

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65 "Hasbara" can be translated roughly with the English term "explain". It is the Hebrew term for "external communication". Today the Israeli practitioners rather tend to prefer the term "public diplomacy" instead, as they consider the early Hasbara efforts as too defensive (Isr MFA2: 57, 48; cf. also Kretschmer 2017: 8; Gilboa 2006: 735).

66 Indeed, evaluating public diplomacy practices and identifying best practices is, for example, a goal of many contributions from the field of public diplomacy (cf. e.g. Banks 2011). Cf. also Witt & Miska 2018, mentioning the concept of "perceived best practices" (Witt & Miska 2018: 5, 20).

Depending on their social context different communities produce different theories.[67] Depending on to which community an actor is attached, actors might, therefore, adopt different communication practices. Topdogs, as states, have different relations than underdogs as non-states (cf. section 3.2.2.2. on social/institutional capabilities). The former tend to interact a lot with other administrations, armies of other states and with Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs) (cf. section 3.2.2.2. on social/institutional capabilities), the latter with activists and international human rights NGOs (cf. e.g. Risse 2002: 3). The former group, as also the public diplomacy literature points out has been influenced strongly by ideas from marketing and PR research (Gilboa 2008: 65ff.; Signitzer & Coombs 1992). Activism and the communication of activists, in contrast, have been typically treated as a different subject than the public diplomacy of states (e.g. as part of the human rights diffusion literature, e.g. Risse et al. 1999). That topdogs choose branding, while underdogs choose shaming could theoretically, therefore, also be a consequence that the topdogs belong to the former group, the marketing and diplomacy community, with its own theories about best practices of external communication and underdogs belong to the latter group, the activist community, with distinct best practices of external communication. Indeed, e.g. the literature on norm diffusion characterizes shaming as the strategy of the weak side and international NGOs (cf. e.g. Risse et al. 1999: 27, 138; Hafner-Burton 2008: 689ff.).

67 Strange and Meyer explain that different expert communities construct different theories for different populations (cf. also Strang & Meyer 1993: 493ff. & 495ff., introducing the concepts of theorists and populations).