

Framing Resistance: Western Discourse, Double Standards, and the Dehumanization of Palestinians

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ABSTRACT

This paper critically examines the persistent double standards in Western political and media discourse concerning state violence, resistance, and human rights, with a particular focus on the representation of the Palestinian struggle. While Western democracies often claim to uphold international law and moral responsibility, their support for Israeli military actions despite overwhelming evidence of civilian harm reveals a profound dissonance between stated values and foreign policy practices. This contradiction not only undermines global norms of justice but also entrenches a discourse that dehumanizes Palestinians and delegitimizes their resistance. The study adopts Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2001) to interrogate how language and power interact in Western media and political rhetoric. CDA enables the exploration of how ideologically loaded terms such as "terrorism," "self-defense," and "security" are employed to frame Palestinians as perpetual threats while obscuring the structural violence of occupation and apartheid (Pappé, 2006; Finkelstein, 2003). Drawing on postcolonial theory, particularly Said's (1978) notion of Orientalism, the paper argues that Palestinians are persistently othered through orientalist tropes that portray them as irrational, violent, and culturally incompatible with Western values. The analysis is further supported by media framing theory (Entman, 1993), which highlights how selective emphasis and omission shape public understanding and policy outcomes. The findings reveal several key patterns: (1) Palestinian resistance is discursively delegitimized through labels like "terrorism," ignoring legal justifications under international law; (2) Israeli actions are consistently framed as defensive, while Palestinian voices and historical grievances are marginalized; (3) orientalist tropes reinforce colonial hierarchies and justify violence; and (4) human rights discourse is applied inconsistently, suggesting a racialized or strategic hierarchy of victimhood (Butler, 2008; Douzinas, 2007). Ultimately, these discursive patterns are not merely rhetorical but serve to legitimize geopolitical asymmetries and reinforce settler-colonial domination in Palestine.

Keywords: double standards, CDA, western discourse, dehumanising Palestinian

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INTRODUCTION

In an era where liberal democracies assert a commitment to universal human rights, international law, and the protection of oppressed peoples, stark contradictions persist in their foreign policy and media narratives particularly regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Despite extensive documentation of Israeli military aggression, displacement, and systemic inequality, Western political leaders and mainstream media continue to offer near-unconditional support to Israel. These actions are frequently framed as legitimate “self-defense,” while Palestinian resistance is portrayed as inherently violent and illegitimate.

This disparity reflects more than geopolitical alignment; it stems from a broader discursive framework that applies legal and moral principles selectively, often based on racial, cultural, or strategic considerations (Butler, 2008; Douzinas, 2007). Nowhere is this contradiction more apparent than in the representation of Palestine, where Palestinians are consistently othered and dehumanized through orientalist tropes that depict them as irrational, threatening, or culturally incompatible with Western values.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has long been a focal point of Western media and political rhetoric. This study critically examines the double standards in these discourses, particularly in relation to state violence, resistance, and human rights. Employing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2001), the research explores how language functions as a political instrument to shape public perception and legitimize asymmetrical power relations. Terms such as “terrorism,” “security,” and “self-defense” are frequently used to frame Palestinians as perpetual threats while concealing the structural violence of occupation and apartheid (Hitchcock, 2023).

Incorporating postcolonial theory, especially Said’s (1978) concept of *Orientalism*, and media framing theory (Entman, 1993), the paper demonstrates how discourse reinforces colonial hierarchies and geopolitical asymmetries. Labels like “clashes” or “cycle of violence” obscure the settler-colonial dynamics at play, thereby sanitizing state violence and delegitimizing resistance. These discursive patterns not only shape public understanding but also serve to rationalize ongoing injustice and oppression.

By interrogating the intersection of language, power, and ideology in Western portrayals of the Palestinian struggle, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how discourse sustains global complicity in the denial of Palestinian rights.

Research Gap

While numerous scholars have examined media bias and Western representations of Palestine (e.g., Philo & Berry, 2011; Finkelstein, 2003), this study offers a distinctive contribution by focusing on real-time media discourse in the immediate aftermath of the October 7, 2023 attacks and the 2023–2025 Gaza war. By applying a multi-theoretical lens that integrates Critical Discourse Analysis, postcolonial theory, media framing, and Butler’s concept of grievability, the paper uncovers how discursive patterns work to legitimize state violence and erase Palestinian

agency. Additionally, the analysis of metaphorical constructions such as “war is a journey” or “trauma is a burden” provides fresh insights into how language mediates moral hierarchies. This interdisciplinary framework allows for a nuanced critique of how Western discourse shapes global complicity in ongoing injustice.

Limitations

This study is not without limitations. The media sample, though carefully selected from high-impact English-language outlets, represents only a slice of the broader discursive landscape. Future research could benefit from incorporating a multilingual corpus or cross-platform analysis including social media or non-Western media sources for a more holistic picture. Furthermore, while the CDA approach provides deep interpretive insight, the study could be complemented by quantitative or corpus-based methods to validate findings across a larger dataset. Recognizing these boundaries allows us to position this research as a foundational inquiry that invites further interdisciplinary engagement.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The core research questions guiding this study are:

1. How does Western political and media discourse delegitimize Palestinian resistance and reinforce double standards in the application of international law and human rights?
2. What are the linguistic and ideological mechanisms that sustain global complicity in Palestinian dispossession?

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and the Politics of Language

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides a foundational lens for analyzing how language constructs and legitimizes power in public discourse. As Fairclough (1995) emphasizes, discourse is not merely descriptive but constitutive it actively shapes and reflects social hierarchies. Van Dijk (2001) extends this by highlighting how elite discourse, particularly in media and politics, constructs ideological narratives that reproduce inequality. Recent applications of CDA to the Palestinian context reveal how linguistic framing can obscure occupation and normalize violence under the guise of counterterrorism (Bibi & Shaheen, 2025).

The use of discourse to criminalize Palestinian resistance is not accidental but politically calculated. Language choices such as “militants,” “terrorists,” and “human shields” do more than convey information they embed judgments that serve state interests. As Bibi and Shaheen (2025) demonstrate in their analysis of Mahmoud Abbas’s speeches, even counter-narratives produced by Palestinian leadership are subjected to discursive containment in Western media, where their framing is selectively distorted or stripped of context.

2. Postcolonial Theory and Orientalist Representations

The theoretical grounding of this study is also rooted in postcolonial critiques, especially Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), which underscores how the West constructs the Arab "Other" as irrational, violent, and morally inferior. These orientalist logics continue to pervade contemporary media depictions of Palestinians, reinforcing colonial hierarchies and legitimizing military aggression.

As Isaac and Hall (2025) argue, Palestinian resistance today, including through non-violent platforms such as tourism, remains entangled in global settler-colonial dynamics that seek to erase indigenous identity and claim moral legitimacy for occupation. Their work highlights how seemingly apolitical spaces become contested arenas of discursive and material resistance.

Likewise, Khoury, Da'Na, and Falah (2013) introduce the concept of *feminized resistance* in Palestinian literature and cultural production, demonstrating how metaphorical representations such as "Palestine as a woman" subvert orientalist binaries and reclaim agency. These symbolic frameworks intersect with discourse to challenge dominant geopolitical narratives and recenter Palestinian subjectivity.

Figueira (2024) seminal exposition of the Hamas charter further complicates the landscape by presenting resistance not merely as reactive but as ideologically rooted. Although often decontextualized or selectively quoted in Western discourse, the charter positions itself within a long tradition of anti-colonial struggle, grounded in local, religious, and political legacies.

3. Double Standards in International Discourse and Human Rights

A key theme emerging from recent scholarship is the inconsistent application of international law and moral rhetoric, particularly in how Western actors frame conflicts involving their strategic interests. Slimia and Othman (2022) highlight the stark contrast between Western responses to Ukraine and Palestine, arguing that moral condemnation is mobilized selectively based on geopolitical calculations. Their analysis labels this phenomenon "Western hypocrisy" a discursive stance that undermines the supposed universality of human rights.

This is echoed in Aswadi's (2023) comparative legal study, which examines the invocation of sovereignty and international law in the two conflicts. He finds that legal justifications for self-defense are disproportionately granted to state actors like Israel, while Palestinians are denied recognition as a people with the right to resist under international law. This double standard is reinforced through media discourse, which acts as both a mirror and an amplifier of state narratives.

4. Media Framing Theory and the Manufacturing of Consent

Media framing theory, particularly as developed by Robert Entman (1993), focuses on how information is selected, emphasized, and organized to promote particular interpretations. Entman defines framing as "selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient... to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or

treatment recommendation.” In conflicts like Palestine-Israel, media outlets often frame Israeli actions as reactive or defensive, while Palestinian actions are framed as aggressive, even when initiated in response to structural violence.

Empirical studies support this imbalance. For example, Cherkaoui (2024) found that BBC and ITV news systematically failed to provide historical or legal context for Palestinian grievances, leading audiences to perceive Palestinian violence as unprovoked. Similarly, studies by Khalidi (2020) and Antai (2025) have shown how media silence around international law and occupation functions as a form of ideological reinforcement, shielding Israel from accountability.

4. The Selective Application of Human Rights and International Law

Legal scholars have critiqued the racialized application of human rights discourse, arguing that not all suffering is treated equally. Butler’s concept of “grievable lives” captures the idea that some lives are deemed more worthy of mourning or protection than others. This concept is highly relevant in Western discourse on Palestine, where civilian deaths are often framed as regrettable collateral damage in contrast to Israeli casualties, which are highlighted as tragedies.

This selective moral lens is reinforced by political rhetoric that abstracts the conflict from its colonial roots, ignoring the legal frameworks that define occupation, apartheid, and the right to resist. International law clearly permits resistance against occupation (UNGA Resolution 37/43), yet Western discourse routinely criminalizes such resistance by invoking the specter of terrorism.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach to examine how Western political and media discourses construct, legitimize, or obscure narratives around Palestinian resistance and Israeli state violence. Rooted in the works of Fairclough (1995) and van Dijk (2001), CDA offers a robust framework for interrogating the relationship between language, ideology, and power. It is particularly well-suited for exploring how certain discursive practices produce asymmetrical representations of conflict, reinforcing dominant geopolitical hierarchies.

Research Design

To critically analyze the discursive construction of Palestinian resistance and Israeli state violence, this study adopts a qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) methodology anchored in the foundational works of Fairclough (1995) and van Dijk (2001). The research draws upon a purposive sampling strategy, targeting high-circulation, English-language Western media outlets known for their influence on public and policymaker perception specifically *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *CNN*, *BBC*, *Sky News*, and *Fox News*.

Scope and Justification

The selection includes twenty-five articles and statements published between October 7, 2023, and May 2025, focusing on major flashpoints such as the October 7 Hamas-led attacks, the 2023–2024 Gaza war, and Western diplomatic responses. These texts were chosen based on their high visibility, representational framing of both Palestinian and Israeli actors, and presence of emotionally or ideologically charged discourse. This time frame enables the identification of recurring linguistic and rhetorical patterns in moments of heightened conflict, when discourse is most intensely politicized.

Analytical Procedures and Coding

To enhance methodological transparency, a structured analytical protocol was followed. Each article was initially read for thematic orientation and relevance, after which a coding scheme was developed to extract discursive features. These included:

- Lexical choices (e.g., use of “terrorist,” “clashes,” “militant”)
- Grammatical constructions (passivization, modality)
- Evaluative language (emotive or judgmental terms)
- Metaphor usage
- Framing elements (problem definition, causal attribution, moral evaluation, treatment suggestion)

Codes were generated deductively from existing CDA and media framing literature (e.g., Entman, 1993; Martin & White, 2005) and then refined inductively as patterns emerged from the data. Coding was conducted manually to preserve sensitivity to nuance, and each coded segment was categorized under the corresponding CDA dimension: textual, discursive practice, or social practice.

To ensure reliability and reduce interpretive bias, preliminary findings were discussed collaboratively among the authors, all of whom have backgrounds in discourse studies and Middle East politics. This reflexive cross-checking allowed for critical triangulation of interpretations and reinforced analytical rigor.

Analytical Framework

The CDA methodology is structured through three interrelated dimensions:

1. **Textual Analysis** – Identifying specific linguistic elements (lexical choices, metaphors, modality, and passive constructions) used to describe violence, agency, and morality. For example, how terms like “clashes,” “terrorists,” or “human shields” are employed to obscure structural power imbalances.
2. **Discursive Practice Analysis** – Examining how texts are produced, circulated, and interpreted in institutional contexts. This includes analysis of press briefings, official diplomatic language, and editorial framing in mainstream media.

3. **Social Practice Analysis** – Situating discourse within broader ideological formations such as Orientalism, settler colonialism, and neoliberal geopolitics. This level engages with postcolonial theory (Said, 1978; Pappé, 2006) to show how discourse both reflects and sustains colonial hierarchies and racialized forms of violence.

Theoretical Integration

The methodology integrates insights from:

- **Postcolonial theory**, particularly Said’s (1978) critique of Orientalism, to trace how Palestinians are “othered” as culturally incompatible and politically irrational.
- **Media Framing Theory** (Entman, 1993), which explains how selection and salience in reporting shape public understanding and policy legitimization.
- **Human rights critique** (Butler, 2008), which helps assess the racialized inconsistency in how international law and moral responsibility are applied.

This multi-level, interdisciplinary approach enables a nuanced investigation of how discourse functions not merely as rhetoric but as a political technology that sustains structural violence and legitimizes asymmetry in global power relations.

Having established the theoretical and methodological foundations of this study, we now move into a detailed textual analysis of selected media narratives. These cases exemplify the linguistic strategies through which Western discourse frames Israeli and Palestinian actors in asymmetrical terms.”

Data Analysis and Findings

Textual Analysis:

URL: [Fox News Article](#)

Publication Date: October 9, 2024

Focus: On the prolonged captivity of Israeli hostages in Gaza and the political and operational challenges surrounding negotiations.

Table 1: CDA Analysis of Fox News Article on Gaza

Dimension	Analysis
1. Lexical Choices	The article uses emotionally loaded words such as “squalid conditions”, “lost faith”, “deteriorating health”, and “hope fades”. These lexical choices construct a narrative of humanitarian urgency and emotional despair, but only for the Israeli hostages. Terms like “terrorists” and “militant group” appear repeatedly to describe Hamas, evoking fear and illegitimacy.

2. Passive Constructions	Phrases like “hostages are believed to be held” and “intel is drying up” deflect agency. No clear subject is responsible for inaction or lack of progress, which subtly reduces blame on Israeli or U.S. decision-makers. Similarly, “hostages remain in Gaza” removes agency of both captors and negotiators, passivizing the crisis.
3. Labeling	Hamas is consistently labeled as a “terrorist group” or “militants” , while Israeli figures are referred to by their official titles (e.g., “Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu” , “Israeli defense officials”). This dichotomy legitimizes one side’s political standing while delegitimizing the other as unlawful actors. The hostages are humanized and individualized, but Palestinian civilians affected by Israeli operations are not mentioned or labeled.
4. Framing (Entman)	The article frames the problem definition as the prolonged hostage crisis, the cause as Hamas’ refusal to negotiate, the moral evaluation as the cruelty of hostage conditions, and the treatment recommendation as increased international pressure. Structural causes of the conflict occupation, blockade, or disproportionate Israeli military actions are omitted. The frame promotes a one-sided moral hierarchy, reinforcing Israeli victimhood.
5. Orientalist Tropes (Said)	The article indirectly perpetuates Orientalist binaries : Palestinians are depicted as uncivilized, unpredictable, and irrational aggressors (e.g., holding civilians in “squalid” underground tunnels), while Israelis are modern, organized, and victimized. This reflects Said’s logic of constructing the “Orient” as culturally inferior and threatening. The enemy is faceless and brutal, while Israeli suffering is portrayed with emotional specificity.
6. Human Rights (Butler)	The notion of “grievable lives” (Butler, 2008) is clearly selective. The Israeli hostages are grieved, named, and described with concern for their wellbeing. No mention is made of Palestinian civilian deaths, mass displacement, or humanitarian conditions in Gaza. The suffering of one group is centered, while the other is erased thus demonstrating a racialized or strategic hierarchy of victimhood.
7. Metaphor	Metaphors like 'hope fades' (dimming light) and 'intel is drying up' (scarcity) suggest an irreversible decline. These naturalizing metaphors make the situation seem inevitable rather than politically constructed.
8. Evaluative Language	Terms such as 'extremely unlikely', 'deteriorating', and 'worsening' evoke pessimism. These evaluations reinforce a sense of helplessness and urgency for Israeli victims, ignoring Palestinian contexts.

Contextual Analysis and Interpretation

The Fox News article titled *“As Gaza war drags past 1 year mark, hope fades for a deal to bring hostages home soon”* exemplifies a dominant pattern in Western media that centers Israeli suffering and erases or decontextualizes Palestinian realities. Published on October 9, 2024 marking one year since the October 7, 2023 Hamas-led attacks the article narrates the hostage crisis with emotionally laden descriptions and metaphors of despair.

The lexical choices are heavily tilted toward humanizing and individualizing Israeli hostages through phrases like “*squalid conditions*” and “*deteriorating health*”. In contrast, Palestinians are abstracted into faceless actors or labeled “*terrorists*”, aligning with Orientalist narratives that depict Arabs as irrational or inherently violent (Said, 1978).

By employing passive constructions, such as “*hostages are believed to be held*”, the article avoids attributing agency or responsibility to the broader systems of blockade, occupation, or Israeli military decisions. The framing, as per Entman’s model, promotes a narrow understanding: the problem is Hamas’ intransigence; the cause is their terrorism; the moral evaluation is Israel’s justified fear and suffering; the solution is increased international pressure on Hamas.

Furthermore, metaphors like “*hope fades*” and “*intel is drying up*” imply inevitability and helplessness, subtly absolving powerful actors of accountability and presenting the crisis as apolitical or natural. These metaphors serve to depoliticize the conflict and construct it as a humanitarian issue stripped of its structural roots.

In Butler’s (2008) terms, the article operationalizes a hierarchy of grievable lives: Israeli victims are mourned and dignified, while Palestinian victims despite the scale of destruction in Gaza are excluded from the narrative. Their invisibility reinforces a moral asymmetry that shapes Western policy and public opinion.

Table 2: CDA Analysis of October 7 Media Framing

Dimension	Analysis
1. Lexical Choices	Israeli suffering is described using emotionally charged language such as 'trauma', 'disaster', and 'embarking on a difficult journey'. In contrast, Palestinians are described with militaristic or criminal terms like 'militants', 'gunmen', and 'terrorists'.
2. Passive Constructions	The use of passive voice in phrases like 'Palestinian militants fired rockets' omits agency for structural violence or retaliation, making Palestinian aggression appear unprovoked.
3. Labeling	Hamas and Palestinian actors are labeled as 'terrorists', 'gunmen', and 'assailants', while Israeli forces are referred to as the 'IDF' or 'troops', conferring legitimacy and institutional authority.
4. Framing (Entman)	Western media frame the October 7 events as a catastrophic Israeli tragedy and legitimate cause for war. Palestinian perspectives are excluded. Problem: Hamas aggression; Cause: Palestinian attack; Moral evaluation: Israeli victimhood; Solution: war against Gaza.
5. Orientalist Tropes (Said)	Palestinians are presented as irrational, violent, and barbaric, reinforcing the Orientalist dichotomy of civilized West vs. savage East. Their actions are described through metaphors of chaos and criminality.
6. Human Rights (Butler)	Israeli victims are represented as grievable through individualized suffering, while Palestinian deaths and destruction are either omitted or presented in aggregate, stripping them of humanity or narrative focus.

7. Metaphor	WAR IS A JOURNEY, WAR IS A RAGE, TRAUMA IS A BURDEN, and MOVEMENT metaphors dominate. They frame Israeli responses as noble and inevitable while reducing Palestinian suffering to footnotes.
8. Evaluative Language	Terms like 'worst disaster', 'murderous attack', and 'terrifying attacks' are used to elevate Israeli pain. Palestinians are subjected to negative behavioral judgement (e.g., 'terrorists'), not affective empathy.

Contextual Analysis and Interpretation

Following the attacks of October 7, 2023, Western media quickly adopted a discursive framework rooted in metaphors, selective labeling, and moral asymmetry. Quoting Israeli officials such as Prime Minister Netanyahu, outlets like CNN and Sky News framed the Israeli response as a legitimate and noble act of national defense. For instance, Netanyahu's declaration that Israel is "at war" was uncritically reproduced, activating the metaphor CONFLICT IS WAR and soon expanded into WAR IS A JOURNEY, with phrases like "*embarking on a long and difficult war*". These metaphors focus the reader's attention on Israel's endurance and resilience, masking the violent implications for Palestinians.

The lexical choices consistently emphasize Israeli pain through emotionally evocative terms such as "*trauma*", "*disaster*", and "*burden*", particularly when describing the psychological aftermath for Israeli society. On the other hand, Palestinians are described through militaristic or dehumanizing labels "*gunmen*", "*militants*", "*terrorists*" which strip them of political agency and cast their actions as inherently criminal or irrational. This is in line with Orientalist tropes (Said), which frame the Palestinian side as chaotic, violent, and culturally unfit for Western norms of civility.

The media further entrenches this binary through passive constructions that obscure the initiators of violence. Phrases like "*clashes erupt*" or "*hostages were taken*" lack clear attribution, diluting Israeli agency in military escalations. Meanwhile, framing (Entman) positions Israel as the victim of an unprovoked attack, with Hamas serving as the cause of suffering and the justification for continued bombardment. The structural context namely occupation, apartheid, and Gaza's blockade is omitted, which reinforces a false sense of symmetry or moral clarity.

Evaluative language supports this asymmetry by highlighting the "*worst disaster in Israel's history*" while failing to apply similar moral gravity to mass Palestinian casualties. In Butler's terms, this reveals a discursive economy of grievability: Israeli lives are mourned, individually accounted for, and centered in the narrative. Palestinian lives, by contrast, are backgrounded or entirely absent from Western reporting.

This linguistic and ideological pattern is not merely descriptive it plays a central role in shaping public perception and legitimizing continued military aggression. The use of metaphors like WAR

IS RAGE and TRAUMA IS A BURDEN attributes emotional necessity to Israeli actions while denying Palestinians narrative complexity or moral standing.

In addition to lexical and syntactic patterns, metaphorical language plays a crucial role in shaping public perception. The following section explores how metaphors serve to naturalize violence and construct moral asymmetries.”

Metaphor Analysis:

In their coverage of the October 7 events, western media began to cite descriptions by politicians, Benjamin Netanyahu among them:

- Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel is “*at war*” (CNN, October 7, 2023).

The expression “at war” indicates that the Israeli Prime Minister framed the October 7 events and the subsequent conflict with the Palestinians as a war (CONFLICT IS WAR/BATTLE). Later, once the war was established, the JOURNEY metaphor was employed:

- "Israel is '*embarking* on a *long* and *difficult* war'", Israeli Prime Minister says (CNN, October 8, 2023).

This news headline features the Israeli Prime Minister declaring ‘entering into’ a state of war with the Gaza strip. This war’s length is not finite, it is rather depicted as a ‘long’ JOURNEY, that the entire state of Israel is poised to ‘embark’ on.

These instances of the CONFLICT IS A WAR/BATTLE and JOURNEY metaphors appeared in western media after the Israeli Prime Minister employed them. Framing the conflict as a war, and subsequently the war as a journey, highlights two key aspects. It first underscores that the entire state of Israel must be engaged in this war, meaning the imposition of the state of war extends not only to Palestinians, but also to Israelis. Second, viewing the war as a JOURNEY neutralizes the impact of the war on Palestinians. As a ‘journey’, the devastating effects of the war on Gaza are not emphasised; rather, the Israeli state’s entrance into this journey is focalized. Ultimately, these metaphors primarily serve to highlight the Israeli perspective.

Furthermore, these two instances rely on “attribution” by citing sources of information (Martin and White, 2005). While giving sources is an important feature of the language of media, overreliance on one source shows an inclination towards one side of the conflict. This bias towards the Israeli perspective is also seen in the use of metaphors similar to those employed by the Israeli Prime Minister in other instances.

- Israel *ground* offensive into Gaza, (Sky News, May, 12, 2025)
- IDF troops *move* into the Gaza Strip (Sky News, May, 12, 2025)

- Israel launches its large-scale *ground* assault (Sky News, May, 12, 2025)
- Israel's *ground* offensive *pushes deeper into* Gaza (Le monde, May 13, 2025).

These instances adopt the viewpoint of the Israeli Prime Minister describing military operations in Gaza as physical movements into and within territory (MILITARY OPERATIONS ARE ACTIONS/MOVEMENT). The movement metaphor is part of the journey metaphor, launched by the Israeli Prime Minister. The use of this metaphor shows that Western news outlets such as Sky News and Le Monde adopt the same perspective as the Israeli narrative of the events. Secondly, this metaphor emphasises the physical nature of the IDF troops movements, and hides the atrocities of the war. Military actions are simply seen as physical movements in the Gaza Strip.

In addition to the Journey metaphor, other ways of talking about the October 7 events and the resulting war include references to physical burden:

- "*Trauma* of Oct 7 attack *still hangs* over Israel" (Reuters, October 7, 2024)

A year after the events of October 7, this news headline describes the events as a 'trauma' that 'hangs' like a heavy object over Israel. The metaphor TRAUMA IS A PHYSICAL BURDEN/WEIGHT combines two concepts: the psychological impact of trauma and its long-lasting effects, as encapsulated by the 'burden' metaphor. The Israelis are not suffering from the physical effects or the material losses of the 7 October events; rather, they are suffering from the emotional chock. This is also highlighted by the metaphor THE OCTOBER 7TH ATTACK IS A DISASTER/CATASTROPHE.

- "The attack was the *worst disaster* in Israel's history." (Reuters, October 7, 2024)

The disaster metaphor is further emphasised by the use of the superlative 'worst', which, from an Appraisal Theory perspective, represents a negative evaluation of an event in terms of its "aesthetic dimension" (Martin and White, 2005). Focusing on the aesthetic dimension of events, rather than the direct material and physical effects shows the western media's focus on the subjective experience of the Israeli perspective, rather than the real material loss. One possible explanation for this focus is that the material loss is negligible, compared to the psychological trauma. It is not the atrocity of 7 October events that Israelis suffer from, but rather their refusal to accept such a humiliating event. The Western media continues to highlight the suffering of Israelis because this justifies the ongoing war against the Gaza Strip.

The focus on the Israeli perspective in Western media can also be seen in cases where the war is likened to rage:

- War continues to *rage* in Gaza (Sky News, May, 12, 2025)
- One year after the October 7 attacks, war continues to *rage* between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip. (France 24, October 6, 2024)

In these instances, the war on Gaza is depicted as a force of rage (WAR IS A FORCE OF RAGE). Rage is a state of extreme anger, and according to Lakoff (1987), an anger scenario usually starts with an offending event. Describing the actions of war as rage shifts the focus to the offending event that caused this war, and consequently, places all responsibility for the war on the initial offending event: the 7 October events. This metaphor legitimises the war on Gaza as an act of retribution for the offending event. Moreover, the metaphor highlights the psychological state of Israelis, showing that Western media report the news from an Israeli perspective.

In addition, while Israeli troops are referred to as the ‘IDF’, Hamas is conceptualised as an enemy.

- Just after dawn on Saturday, October 7, 2023, Hamas *unleashed* a *barrage* of rockets and mortar shells on Israeli towns and military bases. (France 24, 07/10/2024)
- Hamas *launches* rocket attack towards Tel Aviv (BBC, 26 May 2024)
- ... after Palestinian militants from Gaza *fired a deadly barrage of rockets* and *sent gunmen into Israeli territory* Saturday morning (CNN, October 8, 2023).
- More than a month after Hamas *terrorists launched an unprecedented surprise* attack on Israel and *infiltrated* the country by air, land and sea on Oct. 7, the region stands on high alert amid fears of a wider conflict and thousands dead on both sides of the Israel-Gaza border. (ABC News, November 22, 2023)
- Hamas-led gunmen killed some 1,200 people during a rampage through communities in southern Israel and took more than 250 *hostages* into Gaza, according to Israeli figures, the worst single-day loss of life for Jews since the Nazi Holocaust (CNN, October 8, 2023).
- Assailants from Hamas, the Islamist militant group that *controls* the impoverished and densely populated Gaza Strip, had by nightfall killed hundreds of people and wounded hundreds more. (CNN, October 8, 2023).
- The Izzedine al Qassam Brigades, the armed wing of Hamas, claimed to *capture* “dozens” of Israelis during the Hamas *surprise attack* on Saturday. (CNN, October 8, 2023).

These examples demonstrate Hamas’ ability to ‘launch rocket attack’, to ‘infiltrate’, to ‘take...hostages’, ‘to control...Gaza’ and to ‘capture dozens of Israelis’. These expressions reveal that Hamas is not only an enemy, but also a strong and dangerous one. Indeed, these expressions

manage to build an image of Hamas and Palestinian militants as TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS or A FORCE OF CHAOS. Palestinian militants are also depicted as CRIMINALS and BARBARIANS as they ‘capture’ people, ‘take hostages’, etc.

When depicting the two conflicting sides (Israeli troops and Palestinian militants), Western media outlets use different metaphors. The MOVEMENT metaphor is used to describe the Israeli troops war on Gaza, while the ENEMY metaphors (TERRORIST, CRIMINAL, BARBARIAN) are used to talk about Palestinian militants. These metaphors are coupled with evaluative terms. News outlets use negative terms of ‘affect’ to describe emotions towards the Israeli side (Martin and White, 2005). Examples of these negatively loaded terms are ‘deadly surprise attack’, ‘thousands of others are wounded’, ‘murderous attack’ and ‘terrifying attacks’. The use of such terms to describe the Israeli state is meant to affect the readers and lead them to side with Israel. However, words such as ‘militants’ and ‘terrorists’ imply a negative judgement of behaviour, which means that the news outlets negatively judge the behaviour of Palestinians with respect to values of social sanction (Martin and White, 2005).

Discursive Practice Analysis

Discursive practice analysis explores how the Fox News article constructs meaning through patterns of text production, distribution, and consumption that reflect institutional norms and ideological positions. In this case, the article’s narrative centers on the prolonged captivity of Israeli hostages in Gaza, employing selective framing, lexical emphasis, and source bias to produce a particular version of reality. The article predominantly uses emotionally charged language such as “*squalid conditions*,” “*deteriorating health*,” and “*hope fades*” to evoke sympathy for Israeli hostages. Simultaneously, Palestinian actors, specifically Hamas, are consistently labeled as “*terrorists*” or “*militants*,” reinforcing a binary moral framework. This lexical dichotomy not only humanizes Israeli victims but also dehumanizes and delegitimizes Palestinian resistance actors.

The use of passive constructions, such as “*hostages are believed to be held*,” minimizes agency and accountability, particularly regarding the geopolitical and humanitarian context in Gaza. This technique subtly absolves powerful actors, including the Israeli military and Western governments, from their role in sustaining the conflict or obstructing negotiation outcomes. Furthermore, the article’s source reliance is skewed toward Israeli officials and Western intelligence, without incorporating Palestinian voices or neutral third-party accounts. This imbalance reflects the institutional routine of mainstream media prioritizing elite and state narratives, in line with Marques’ (2024) critique of elite discourse reproduction. These discursive practices work to naturalize Israeli victimhood and obscure the broader structural realities of occupation, siege, and asymmetric warfare, thereby shaping public opinion through a narrow interpretive lens.

Table 3: Discursive Practice Analysis of Fox News Article on Gaza

Dimension	Evidence/Excerpt	CDA Analysis
1. Lexical Choices	<i>“Squalid conditions”, “deteriorating health”, “hope fades”</i>	Emotionally charged language evokes sympathy for Israeli hostages. Centers Israeli victimhood and suffering, creating a humanitarian urgency narrative.
	<i>“Militant group”, “terrorists”</i>	Repeated negative labeling of Hamas reinforces criminality and delegitimizes Palestinian resistance.
2. Passive Constructions	<i>“Hostages are believed to be held”</i>	Passive voice obscures agency, who is responsible or why they are held is unclear, diverting focus from systemic causes (e.g., occupation or blockade).
	<i>“Intel is drying up”</i>	Abstract, naturalizing phrase that deflects blame from Israeli or U.S. decision-makers; implies inevitable decline rather than structural failure.
3. Labelling	<i>“Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu”, “Israeli defense officials”</i> vs. <i>“militants”</i>	Use of official titles for Israelis and generic negative terms for Palestinians establishes asymmetry in legitimacy and status.
4. Framing (entman)	Problem: Prolonged captivity; Cause: Hamas’ refusal to negotiate; Moral: cruelty; Solution: pressure on Hamas	Frame defines Hamas as obstructionist and violent while omitting broader historical, legal, or military context of the Israeli occupation.
5. Orientalist Tropes	Gaza tunnels described as <i>“underground”</i> , <i>“squalid”</i> , Hamas as <i>“unpredictable”</i>	Reinforces Said’s (1978) Orientalist binaries, Palestinians depicted as barbaric, uncivilized, and inhumane, in contrast to rational, modern Israeli identity.
6. Human Rights (butler)	Focus on Israeli hostages’ names, ages, and conditions; no mention of Palestinian casualties	Applies the concept of <i>“grievable lives”</i> , Israeli lives are mourned and individualized, while Palestinian deaths are invisible, reinforcing a racialized moral economy.
7. Metaphor	<i>“Hope fades”, “intel is drying up”</i>	Metaphors naturalize the crisis as a declining process instead of a politically constructed reality.

8. Evaluative Language	<i>“Extremely unlikely”, “worsening situation”, “deteriorating”</i>	Language induces pessimism and urgency for Israeli victims; ignores Palestinian suffering or any possibility of nonviolent resolution.
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Table 3 provides a detailed breakdown of how language is constructed and operationalized in the Fox News article to shape public understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Each row in the table represents a distinct linguistic or rhetorical feature, such as lexical choices, metaphors, passive constructions, and evaluative language, and explains how it contributes to the framing of Israeli hostages as humanized victims and Palestinians as illegitimate aggressors.

Through these discursive patterns, the article draws heavily on institutional routines and news production norms that favor elite sources and state narratives, particularly those of Israel and its Western allies. The use of emotionally charged language, selective labeling, and omission of Palestinian context reflects broader ideological mechanisms that reinforce Western geopolitical alignment and suppress alternative perspectives. Ultimately, this analysis reveals that media discourse is not neutral but deeply implicated in maintaining dominant power structures through linguistic framing.

Social Practice Analysis

At the level of social practice, the Fox News article participates in the broader ideological project of reinforcing settler-colonial narratives and Orientalist binaries within Western discourse on Palestine. Drawing on Said’s (1978) concept of Orientalism, the portrayal of Hamas as barbaric and the Gaza Strip as a chaotic, lawless zone perpetuates the image of Palestinians as culturally regressive and inherently violent. This discursive framing positions Israelis as modern, rational, and legitimate state actors, thus justifying their geopolitical authority and moral high ground.

The selective grievability of lives, as theorized by Butler (2008), is apparent in the article’s affective focus. Israeli hostages are described with empathy and detail, emphasizing their emotional and physical suffering, while Palestinian casualties, displacement, or humanitarian suffering are completely absent. This omission reveals a racialized moral hierarchy, wherein some lives are deemed more worthy of protection and mourning than others. In line with media framing theory (Entman, 1993), the article defines the problem as Hamas’ refusal to negotiate, attributes blame solely to Palestinian actors, and prescribes increased international pressure as the solution, without questioning the legitimacy or consequences of Israeli actions such as ongoing blockade and military aggression. The omission of structural violence, such as Israel’s long-term siege of Gaza and occupation policies, reifies a depoliticized, humanitarian crisis narrative rather than a contextually grounded account of colonial conflict. Thus, the article operates within a hegemonic Western media apparatus that legitimizes Israeli state violence while erasing Palestinian agency

and suffering. These social practices are not just reflective but constitutive of global complicity in the erasure of Palestinian rights and the reproduction of symmetric power relations.

Table 4: Social Practice Analysis of Fox News Article on Gaza

Dimension	Evidence/Excerpt	Analysis (Ideological Function & Broader Social Impact)
Orientalism (Said, 1978)	Descriptions of Hamas as “terrorist group,” Palestinians as irrational aggressors, Gaza as “squalid” tunnels	Reproduces Orientalist binaries: Palestinians are dehumanized and depicted as culturally inferior, violent, and uncivilized, justifying Western support for Israel.
Settler-Colonial Logic (Pappé, 2006)	Absence of historical context of occupation, blockade, and apartheid	Omits structural causes and Palestinian claims to land and rights. Normalizes Israeli sovereignty and security needs while erasing indigenous Palestinian narratives.
Hierarchy of Grievability (Butler, 2008)	Israeli hostages are named, humanized, and described with emotional detail; Palestinian suffering is omitted	Demonstrates racialized valuation of life, Israeli lives are considered “grievable” while Palestinian deaths are backgrounded or ignored.
Legitimation of State Violence	Frames Israeli actions as responses to “terror” or “hostage crises”	Frames Israeli military power as necessary and defensive, thereby legitimizing disproportionate force and shielding Israel from accountability.
Moral Asymmetry	Focuses solely on the suffering of Israeli families, no reference to collective Palestinian trauma	Constructs a one-sided moral narrative in which Israelis are victims and Palestinians are threats, sustaining emotional investment in state-aligned narratives.
Geopolitical Alignment	Uses Israeli official language and sources without critique (e.g., quoting Netanyahu’s framing of “war” and “journey”)	Shows media alignment with Western and Israeli state interests. News discourse becomes an instrument of soft power and narrative control.
Erasure of Palestinian Agency	Lack of Palestinian voices, legal justification for resistance, or international law references	Denies Palestinians political agency, reduces them to objects of security discourse, and suppresses global recognition of their rights under international law.
Neoliberal Humanitarianism	Crisis framed as humanitarian, emotional, and depoliticized (“deteriorating health,” “hope fades”)	Shifts discourse from structural injustice to individualized suffering, allowing international audiences to sympathize without challenging systemic power dynamics.

Table 4 situates the language of the Fox News article within broader ideological and historical frameworks, drawing on theories of Orientalism, settler colonialism, and racialized hierarchies of moral concern. It interprets how the article’s representations function as discursive instruments that normalize Israeli state violence, marginalize Palestinian political agency, and frame the

conflict through a selective humanitarian lens. Each entry in the table aligns a specific discourse pattern (e.g., erasure of Palestinian voices, emotional prioritization of Israeli suffering) with a social or ideological function (e.g., legitimization of state violence, reproduction of colonial hierarchies). By doing so, the table highlights how media texts do not merely reflect reality, but actively reproduce geopolitical asymmetries and racialized moral economies. The social practice analysis thus exposes the article's complicity in a larger structure of epistemic and political domination that extends beyond journalism into the realm of global discourse governance.

DISCUSSION

This study set out to critically examine how Western political and media discourses construct, distort, or obscure the realities of Palestinian resistance through a triangulated lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), postcolonial theory, media framing, and the concept of grievability. The analysis reveals a persistent pattern of discursive asymmetry in which Israeli narratives are humanized, legitimized, and framed within a moral vocabulary of defense and trauma, while Palestinian voices are reduced to abstraction, criminality, or barbarism.

Delegitimization Through Lexical and Grammatical Choices

At the textual level, the repeated use of emotionally charged labels such as “terrorist,” “militant,” or “gunman” to describe Palestinian actors serves not merely as journalistic shorthand but as ideological positioning. These lexical choices strip Palestinians of political rationality and transform them into threats to be neutralized rather than subjects with legal and moral claims under international law. The selective use of passive constructions e.g., “clashes erupted” or “hostages are believed to be held” systematically obscures agency, particularly when describing Israeli military actions, thereby neutralizing critique and displacing responsibility. Such linguistic decisions are not arbitrary; they reflect and reinforce larger power structures.

Framing and Metaphorical Legitimization

Building on Entman's framing model, this study illustrates how Western media frame narratives around selective problem definitions and moral hierarchies. Israeli suffering is often framed as immediate and visceral emphasized through vivid imagery, human-interest stories, and direct quotations from officials while Palestinian suffering is presented as generalized, contextualized minimally, or omitted altogether. Metaphors such as “war is a journey,” “trauma is a burden,” or “hope fades” were consistently adopted from Israeli political figures and reproduced uncritically by Western outlets. These metaphors serve to normalize prolonged violence and present Israeli military campaigns not as acts of aggression but as stoic responses to emotional injury. In contrast, Palestinian actions are rarely granted metaphorical richness or emotional depth.

Orientalism, Settler-Colonial Logic, and Grievable Lives

At the social practice level, the findings underscore how the media's discursive practices are embedded in broader ideological formations particularly Orientalism (Said, 1978), settler-colonial logic (Pappé, 2006), and racialized moral economies (Butler, 2008). The portrayal of Palestinians as culturally regressive, irrational, and violent aligns with long-standing Orientalist tropes that justify Western support for colonial domination under the guise of modernity and security. Meanwhile, the concept of "grievability" is operationalized through selective empathy: Israeli victims are named, individualized, and emotionally foregrounded, whereas Palestinian deaths despite their vastly higher toll are anonymized or ignored. This hierarchy of life reveals a discursive economy in which moral concern is allocated along racial and geopolitical lines.

Implications for Knowledge Production and Policy

These findings are not only relevant to academic discourse but carry profound implications for public understanding, policy legitimization, and the global human rights agenda. When language dehumanizes and delegitimizes, it creates the conditions under which violence becomes not only thinkable but justified. As such, media narratives do not merely describe reality they help construct it. Recognizing and interrogating the discursive mechanisms that sustain these asymmetries is essential for promoting a more equitable media landscape and resisting the erasure of Palestinian voices from global consciousness.

Moreover, the paper contributes to ongoing debates about epistemic injustice where certain populations are denied full access to narrate their reality on the global stage. The structural omission of Palestinian perspectives from mainstream discourse reflects a broader pattern of narrative control in which dominant powers define whose pain matters, whose voice is credible, and whose resistance is criminal.

Future Research

Future studies could extend this work by incorporating Arabic media, social media discourse, or corpus-based comparative analysis to map linguistic patterns across cultural contexts. Additionally, computational discourse analysis may complement the CDA approach to test the prevalence of framing devices across larger datasets.

CONCLUSION

This study has critically interrogated how Western political and media discourses construct a highly asymmetrical representation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict one in which Palestinian resistance is delegitimized, Palestinian lives are devalued, and Israeli narratives are discursively privileged. Through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), supported by postcolonial theory, framing theory, and the concept of grievability, we have shown how seemingly neutral language choices metaphors, labels, framing devices, and omissions actively reproduce systems of power, ideology, and complicity. By closely examining major Western media outlets' coverage of

the October 7, 2023 events and subsequent Israeli military operations in Gaza, this paper has revealed the rhetorical mechanisms through which Palestinians are linguistically erased or criminalized, while Israeli suffering is amplified and individualized. Terms like “terrorists,” “militants,” and “human shields,” combined with metaphors such as “war is a journey” and “trauma is a burden,” participate in a larger project of moral asymmetry. These discursive practices do not merely reflect geopolitical bias they sustain it. They naturalize settler-colonial violence and silence historical grievances under the guise of balance and objectivity.

At a deeper level, the findings affirm that language functions as a political technology one capable of shaping global perceptions, policy decisions, and moral hierarchies. The denial of narrative space to Palestinians in Western discourse reinforces not only epistemic injustice but also the material conditions of occupation, displacement, and siege. The persistent framing of Israeli actions as defense and Palestinian actions as aggression distorts international legal norms and undermines global efforts toward justice and decolonization.

This conclusion is not an endpoint but a call to action. For scholars, journalists, educators, and policymakers, there is an urgent need to interrogate the role of discourse in legitimizing violence and marginalization. It is imperative that future research continues to expose these discursive imbalances, expand the linguistic and media corpus across languages and platforms, and elevate Palestinian narratives from the margins to the center of scholarly and public conversations. Ultimately, dismantling the discursive architecture that sustains colonial hierarchies is a necessary step toward achieving not just media fairness, but political justice and human dignity for all peoples Palestinians included.

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