



# Contrasting narratives: A critical discourse analysis of the BBC and Al Jazeera's coverage of the October 2023 Gaza War

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\*Mohd Faizal Kasmani

*Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, Malaysia*

*faizalkasmani@usim.edu.my*

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## ABSTRACT

This article compares the BBC and Al Jazeera English's online news coverage of the October 2023 Gaza War during its early stages. It uses the framework of critical discourse analysis (CDA) to examine how language and social practices shape each outlet's reporting. The analysis covers the period from October 7 to October 9, 2023. Excluding blogs and picture news, the BBC published 11 news reports and Al Jazeera, 13. The main questions concern the similarities and differences between the BBC and Al Jazeera's coverage and the reasons behind them. Findings indicate that the BBC emphasises Israeli victimhood and frames Hamas as the primary aggressor, while Al Jazeera presents Israel as the dominant force escalating the conflict, with a focus on Palestinian perspectives. The findings reveal that the BBC and Al Jazeera offered conflicting narratives in their coverage of the 2023 Israeli-Palestinian war. Through selective language choices, asymmetrical representation, and limited Palestinian perspectives, the BBC legitimised Israeli military actions as defensive, which may shape public perception by focusing on Israeli suffering while downplaying Palestinian experiences. In contrast, Al Jazeera highlighted Israel's dominance and the power disparity in the conflict, portraying Palestinians as victims of overwhelming Israeli force. While Al Jazeera attempts to include both perspectives, its coverage predominantly amplifies the Palestinian narrative and provides greater historical context compared to the BBC.

Keywords: **Critical discourse analysis, the BBC, Al Jazeera, Gaza, Israel, Palestinian**

## INTRODUCTION

Media globalisation is influencing not only how we consume news, but also how we see global issues like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Global media networks such as Al-Jazeera and BBC World News offer a diverse range of perspectives, potentially challenging dominant narratives and increasing cross-cultural empathy.

The depiction of global news relates to how news organisations convey and portray information from all around the world. Choices in reporting, framing, and storytelling shape the audience's comprehension of international events (Lück et al., 2018). Further, cultural perspectives, editorial decisions, political pressures, and economic concerns all can have an impact on representation. The portrayal of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in worldwide news, for example, is more than just a reporting of events; it is a carefully produced narrative shaped by framing, source selection, and imagery. This precisely crafted image has enormous capacity to shape worldwide public opinion and even alter the direction of this long-running and complex battle.

The coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by major global news organisations, such as the BBC (The British Broadcasting Corporation) and Al Jazeera, is under constant examination due to its tremendous impact on public knowledge, worldwide attitudes, and diplomatic ties. Both adopt similar reporting style, yet at the same time, different editorial approaches of these news organisations, with the BBC's commitment to objectivity and fairness and Al Jazeera's purpose to present an alternative viewpoint, frequently question prevailing Western narratives. The issue addressed in this article is twofold: first, how similar or different the BBC and Al Jazeera's coverage of the latest Israeli-Palestinian war is, and second, what explains these differences.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Coverage of Israel-Palestinian conflict by global news media*

The enduring Israeli-Palestinian conflict, spanning several decades, has attracted significant international attention, drawing involvement from external actors. The prolonged strife and unrest have generated curiosity among the global community about the dynamics between the two nations. Considering these factors, it is undeniable that the developments in Israel and Palestine have transcended geographical boundaries, capturing the interest and emotions of people worldwide (Ben-Meir, 2023).

The BBC has faced criticism for its portrayal of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The BBC has repeatedly been accused of biased reporting, and this topic is well documented and addressed (Amer, 2022; Barkho, 2011). In a critical analysis of the BBC's reporting on the May 2021 Gaza crisis, experts discovered recurring issues with its coverage (Miladi et al., 2023).

Many studies on the BBC's representation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict indicate that the network's English service frequently lacks critical context and historical explanations (Llewellyn, 2023; Philo & Berry, 2004). Furthermore, the reporting tends to misrepresent the true nature of the conflict and the behaviour of those engaged (Amer, 2022; Barkho, 2011). The BBC's coverage of the Occupied Territories is criticised for lacking historical and causal explanations, which instead focuses on shock value to cater to the audience's short attention spans (Miladi et al., 2023).

Philo and Berry (2004) contended that the BBC's goal of "balance" frequently results in juxtaposing Palestinian casualties with the Israeli narrative, rather than properly covering the Palestinian reality. Their follow-up book, *More Bad News from Israel* (2011), demonstrates how the BBC naively accepted the Israeli perspective following the 2008-2009 Gaza offensive. While Israel's response to Palestinian rockets received extensive coverage, Israel's violation of the truce and the terrible conditions in Gaza following years of closure were rarely noted. This lack of adequate reporting added to widespread confusion (Miladi et al., 2023).

Llewellyn (2023) also faulted the BBC for failing to frame the struggle as one between an occupying military power and an occupied people. He claimed that the BBC's emphasis on "balance" portrays the fight as an equal one, despite Israel's huge military superiority. In his view, emotive language is frequently employed to describe Palestinians without providing contextual explanations, such as the consequences of decades of Israeli military occupation.

Amer (2022) echoed these conclusions, stating that the BBC's coverage of the 2021 Gaza crisis mostly ignored the background of Israel's occupation, colonisation, and violations of international law.

In contrast to the BBC, studies show that Al Jazeera's news coverage prioritises developing countries and Middle Eastern issues, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. El Damanhoury and Salleh (2024) analysed 320 images published by Al Jazeera Arabic and Fox News during their coverage of the May 2021 Gaza War, examining how Qatar's and the US' proximity to Israel and Palestine influenced the outlets' visual framing choices, respectively. Both media organisations employed the David and Goliath master narrative but presented highly polarised portrayals of the conflict. Al Jazeera emphasised narratives supporting Hamas and pro-Palestinian perspectives, highlighting the suffering of Palestinian civilians. In contrast, Fox News legitimised Israeli military actions, portraying Hamas as a terrorising force that disrupts Israeli lives and fosters anti-Jewish sentiments in the US. The study explored cultural differences in the depictions of death, representations of Israelis and Palestinians, and recurring visual themes. It concluded by discussing how news agencies influence photographic choices and the implications of strong alignment within proximity-framing for the portrayal of a mediated clash of civilisations in the digital media landscape.

An earlier study by El Damanhoury and Saleh (2017) conducted a comparative examination of how two US-based news outlets, CNN and Al Jazeera, framed the 2014 Gaza War. The findings reveal that Al Jazeera exclusively cited Palestinian citizens and consistently differentiated between militants and civilians when reporting Palestinian casualties. Al Jazeera articles included more direct quotes from Palestinian sources than CNN. Furthermore, Al Jazeera was significantly more likely to distinguish between Palestinian civilians and militants, while CNN often referred to Palestinian victims as militants without using quotation marks. Al Jazeera English (AJE) employed a distinct discursive technique, referring to Palestinian victims as fighters, armed Palestinians, or civilians.

Elmasary et al. (2013) conducted a comparative analysis of Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya's coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict during the 2008/2009 Gaza war. The findings reveal that while both networks devoted substantial attention and resources to the story, particularly during the conflict, Al Jazeera allocated significantly more effort

and arguably demonstrated higher professional standards in its journalism. Over half of Al-Jazeera's reports were on-the-ground package stories filed by correspondents in Israel or the Palestinian territories. These stories, while expensive to produce, represent a higher journalistic standard. In contrast, Al Arabiya predominantly relied on voiceover segments, where anchors narrated over video footage sourced from agencies such as Reuters and the Associated Press. This approach, though more cost-effective, often involved second-hand, unverified information, resulting in coverage of a lower professional standard.

### *Critical discourse analysis*

This article's framework is based on critical discourse analysis (CDA), which explores the dialectical link between semiotic modalities in languages and social activities (Fairclough, 2012). CDA believes that language and social processes are inextricably linked and sees language as a representation of social practise that creates meaning in social processes (Bednarek, & Caple, 2014; Chouliaraki, 2008). Thus, critical discourse analysts play a crucial role in dissident research, aiming to examine, reveal, and ultimately address societal inequality (Shafie et al., 2024).

The CDA paradigm is one of the most widely used methodologies for studying media discourse, particularly in news. What distinguishes CDA from other forms of discourse analysis is that it primarily concerns the obscure as well as visible structural relationships of power and ideology, and it goes beyond a "descriptive" analysis of linguistic qualities in the analysis of texts (Carvalho, 2008).

Although the CDA approach is predicated on the notion that power relations influence language and highlight the supremacy of specific social objectives, rendering it ideological (Matheson, 2005), this study does not see news discourse as "merely ideology." According to Siegfried Jäger (2001), a discourse reflects its own reality, has its own material reality, and is fed by previous and (other) current discourses. Thus, mediated ideology in discussions should not be restricted to "anything shady," which might be dubbed "warped," "falsified," or "distorted" (Geertz, 1973, p. 196). Clifford Geertz (1973) elaborated in his seminal book, *The Interpretation of Culture*, that the role of ideology is to make autonomous politics imaginable by providing the authoritative conceptions that make it meaningful, as well as the persuasive imagery that allow it to be rationally comprehended. These images, formed and conveyed as interacting symbols and meanings, are extrinsic sources of information that can be used to design human action—extrapersonal systems for perception, interpretation, judgement, and manipulation of the environment. Ideology is a set of cultural patterns and programmes that structure social and psychological processes. For better or worse, it transforms individuals into political animals and develops social order schemas (Geertz, 1973).

Because discourse is used in varying ways, this study refers to the term "discourse" as a "macro-topic" taken from a complex bundle of simultaneous and sequential interrelated linguistic acts, which manifest themselves within and across social fields of action as thematically interrelated semiotic, oral, or written tokens, very often as texts (Wodak, 2014). Discourse can also be referred to as collective symbolisms known as "topoi," which are popular among members of society and help people visualise a comprehensive picture of societal reality (Jäger, 2001).

CDA was used to uncover the discursive practices in the BBC and Al Jazeera's news coverage of the October 2023 Gaza War. Additionally, the BBC was chosen to represent

the dominant global media due to its extensive international reach, while AJE represents the contraflow category within global news media.

The principle of impartiality has been a cornerstone of the BBC's operations since its inception in 1932 with the launch of its Empire radio service. The BBC Royal Charter explicitly mandates that the corporation must ensure that controversial subjects are handled with due accuracy and impartiality across its content (BBC, 2023). This commitment to impartiality has historically safeguarded the BBC from direct government control. However, this does not entirely insulate the network from state influence. As a government-funded institution, the BBC's editorial independence is acknowledged in its Royal Charter, but the Charter itself must be renewed by the British government every decade. This renewal process places the BBC in a vulnerable position, particularly as the end of each term approaches, when external critics may seek to influence the organisation's direction (Medhurst, 2024). During this period, the BBC is especially attuned to government and establishment opinions.

AJE, launched in November 2006 as the second channel of Qatar's Al Jazeera network, is often regarded by scholars as a legitimate alternative contraflow to major global networks like BBC World News and CNN International (Ahmad, 2023; Sadig & Petchu, 2021). Although state-funded, Al Jazeera insists that it operates independently from Qatari government influence. Qatar's royal family has repeatedly asserted that they do not interfere with the channel's editorial decisions (Barkho 2021; Maziad, 2021). This perceived independence—an anomaly in Middle Eastern media—has significantly enhanced Al Jazeera's credibility among viewers. Supporting this claim is the observation that Al Jazeera's editorial policies occasionally conflict with Qatar's foreign policies. For example, the channel frequently provides platforms for political dissidents and critiques the human rights practices of Middle Eastern governments, while Qatar maintains diplomatic relations with most nations in the region (Barkho, 2021; Maziad, 2021).

## METHODOLOGY

On October 7, 2023, Hamas launched a large-scale surprise attack on Israel, marking the beginning of the latest Israeli-Palestinian war. This attack was unprecedented, involving a barrage of rockets and coordinated ground assaults, which triggered a swift military response from Israel, resulting in significant casualties on both sides.

The period from October 7 to October 9, 2023, was chosen for analysis as it captures the critical opening days of the war. These days are pivotal, as they showcase the intensity of the initial Hamas offensive, including infiltrations into Israeli towns, and Israel's massive retaliatory strikes. This period sets the tone for the ongoing conflict and highlights the unique elements distinguishing this escalation from previous ones.

During this timeframe, excluding blogs and news in pictures, the BBC and Al Jazeera published 11 and 13 news reports, respectively. The news articles were accessed from the respective news websites.

Both BBCWN and AJE news reports were subjected to critical discourse analysis (CDA). The analysis of the online news is based on two levels of analysis: micro-level analysis and macro-level analysis. The micro-level analysis which analyses the internal relations of a text (Fairclough, 2012) looks into the lexical features and sentence construction of texts. Lexical analysis explains the usage of words that may “convey

the imprint of society and value judgment” (Richardson, 2017). This includes the way people are named in the news script and the manner in which social actors are referred to. The analysis of sentence construction is based on the analysis of transitivity. Transitivity explains the relationship between participants in a news report including the role they play and how actions that appear in a text are represented (Richardson, 2017). Analysis of transitivity investigates the process and participants in the sentence, the agency of the sentence, the usage of nominalisations, how sentences are connected, as well as the usage of active/passive voice and negative/positive sentences (Fairclough, 2013).

The macro-level analysis, which examines a text's external relations, is founded on the concept of “intertextuality,” which refers to the idea that writings cannot be read or examined in isolation and must be understood in relation to other texts (Richardson, 2017). Intertextuality emphasises the historicity of texts and how they always serve as additions to existing chains of spoken communication (Fairclough, 2012). According to John Richardson (2017), intertextuality in news reporting includes duplicating other people's perspectives, such as reproducing a speech or a quotation from a source involved in the reported events, primarily through direct and indirect citation. The way journalists cite their sources is significant at this level of analysis because the farther away from direct quotation that reported speech moves, the more the interpretative impact of the reporter, and therefore, the higher the possibility for distortion and representation (Richardson, 2017). The study of text intertextuality also considers assumptions or presuppositions in news reporting. Presupposition is an implicit claim buried inside the clear meaning of a document or statement (Richardson, 2017). Presuppositions may serve an ideological role by evoking certain texts or textual series that frame the reader's textual experience and background information (Fairclough, 2012).

## FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

A comparative analysis of these reports reveals clear differences in how each outlet framed the events. The BBC predominantly leaned towards Israel's perspective, while Al Jazeera provided more context about Hamas's actions and motivations, highlighting key differences in lexical choices, transitivity, and framing of the conflict.

### *The BBC*

The analysis of the BBC's reporting identified three framing strategies employed by the news corporation in its coverage of the war. First, there is a repetitive use of lexical choices and labelling that emphasises Hamas as a violent, organised force. Terms like “militant” create a portrayal of Hamas as an aggressive and dangerous actor, reinforcing the perception of it as a severe threat. This specific word choice underscores the power dynamics and clearly places Hamas in the role of the perpetrator of violence.

The BBC article titled “How Hamas Staged Israel Lightning Assault No-One Thought Possible,” published on October 9, for example, consistently refers to Hamas as an “Islamist militant organisation” and highlights its designation as a terrorist group in the UK and elsewhere.

The BBC article on October 7, titled “Hamas Attack Shocks Israel, but What Comes Next?” and the article from October 8, titled “Israeli Forces Fight to Drive Out Hamas Militants as Death Toll Passes 600,” not only employ loaded lexical and referential

choices when discussing Hamas, but also use the terms “Palestinian militants” and “the Islamist group”. The term “militants,” used for Palestinians rather than Hamas, broadens the labelling of violent, organised forces to the broader Palestinian and Muslim population. The article further emphasises that, with this latest attack, “Hamas seems keen to burnish its credentials once again as a militant organisation.”

In contrast, Israeli forces are described in more neutral or formal terms, such as “Israeli security forces” and “IDF”. This distinction frames Israeli forces as legitimate actors responding to violence, while Hamas is depicted as a violent, non-state group, underscoring the asymmetry between the two parties.

The BBC article on October 8, titled “Israeli Forces Fight to Drive Out Hamas Militants as Death Toll Passes 600,” for example, frames the Israeli military as protectors, working to “rescue hostages” and “secure areas.” This language presents Israeli military operations as legitimate and necessary to protect their citizens from Hamas. On the other hand, Hamas’s actions are described as cold and calculated violence, with phrases like “executed Israeli civilians in cold blood” contributing to their portrayal as ruthless aggressors. This clear moral contrast positions Israel as the side defending its population, while Hamas is depicted as the instigator of violence.

The second theme of the BBC’s coverage during the first three days of the war reveals a tendency to emphasise Hamas’s violent actions and the resulting Israeli casualties without delving into the underlying causes of the conflict or the motivations driving these attacks. This omission results in a one-sided narrative, focusing solely on Israeli victims’ suffering while neglecting Palestinian perspectives or grievances.

The BBC often downplays the context behind Hamas’s actions. For example, in the first BBC article on October 7, the situation in Gaza is described as tense but not necessarily on the verge of war: “Tensions had recently risen in the Gaza Strip, but the conventional wisdom was that neither Hamas, the Islamist group that governs there, nor Israel wanted an escalation.” The attacks are characterised as “an awful drama played out live on social and mainstream media.”

A quote from Mohammed Deif, described as the Hamas militant commander, is included, where he calls on Palestinians and Arabs to join the fight to “sweep away the [Israeli] occupation.” However, the article questions whether Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem, or elsewhere in the region, “will heed his call.”

The second BBC article on October 7, titled “Hamas blindsides Israel with the most serious attack in a generation,” written by seasoned reporter Jeremy Bowen, discusses “the deepening risk of an explosion between Palestinian armed groups and Israel.” However, it only focuses on the West Bank, where continuous confrontations and violence have occurred throughout the year. Armed Palestinians, particularly from West Bank towns like Jenin and Nablus, are described as attacking Israeli soldiers and Jewish settlers.

While the article notes that “Hamas said it acted because of threats to Jerusalem’s mosques,” it also echoes the sentiment of the previous article, suggesting that the situation between Israel and Palestine was “not exceptionally tense.”

The third aspect of BBC reporting is the absence of Palestinian voices and the humanisation of Israeli victims. While the BBC includes statements from Hamas and reports on Palestinian casualties, it does not provide in-depth insight into the experiences of Palestinian civilians affected by the retaliatory strikes.

For instance, an article published by the BBC on October 8, which discusses the abduction of Noa Argamani, humanises Israeli victims by emphasising their vulnerability. In contrast, Palestinian deaths are framed as a consequence of “retaliatory Israeli strikes,” with reporting that lacks similar emotional depth. This framing potentially justifies the Israeli military response as defensive rather than aggressive.

The use of numbers and statistics adds a sense of credibility and authority to the BBC reports. For example, in the article titled “Israeli forces fight to drive out Hamas militants as death toll passes 600,” published on October 8, the death toll—600 Israelis and over 370 Palestinians—is primarily sourced from Israeli authorities and media. This lends more weight to Israeli accounts, even though the article mentions Palestinian casualties. However, Palestinian figures are presented in a neutral tone, without personal stories or emotional emphasis. This asymmetry reinforces the perception that Israeli losses are more immediate and significant, while Palestinian deaths seem more distant.

Although the BBC reports casualties on both sides, Israeli deaths receive far more detailed coverage, including emotional narratives of individual victims. Palestinian casualties, on the other hand, are briefly mentioned, often in more abstract terms, with less focus on their personal experiences. This imbalance may lead readers to view Israeli suffering as more real and immediate, while Palestinian suffering is perceived as a distant consequence of the conflict.

For instance, in the article titled “How Hamas staged Israel lightning assault no one thought possible,” published on October 9, the narrative opens with a depiction of Israeli civilians during the Jewish Sabbath, engaging in everyday activities such as spending time with family or attending synagogue. This humanises the Israeli victims and contrasts with the sudden, violent attack by Hamas, which is described as “unprecedented” in scale and coordination. The article highlights the failure of Israel’s defence systems, which had long been considered impenetrable, thus evoking a sense of shock and vulnerability among Israeli citizens.

The article’s focus on Israeli victims vividly portrays the suffering they endured. Descriptions of militants “firing at will” at a music festival and civilians being instructed to hide indoors amplify the horror and trauma experienced by Israelis. Hostages taken by Hamas and paraded through Gaza streets are described graphically, reinforcing the brutality of the attack. This imagery strengthens the portrayal of Hamas as ruthlessly violent, adding emotional weight to the article.

This omission of Palestinian voices and experiences contributes to a one-sided portrayal of the conflict, where the suffering of Palestinians is backgrounded in favour of emphasising Israeli losses and the actions of the Israeli military.

### *Al Jazeera*

Al Jazeera employed four framing strategies. The first highlights the power and force of Israeli airstrikes. On October 7, 2023, an article titled “Fears of a ground invasion of Gaza grow as Israel vows ‘mighty vengeance’” focused more on the fears of Gaza residents rather than on Hamas’s attack against Israel, stressing the anticipated Israeli retaliation. The title’s transitivity assigns agency to Israel, using phrases like “fears of ground invasions” and “Israel vows mighty vengeance,” effectively framing Israel as the driving force behind the escalation.

In the article published on October 9, titled “Israel doesn’t care about collateral damage: Bunker busters used in Gaza,” this framing continues. The headline, “Israel doesn’t care about collateral damage,” positions Israel negatively, suggesting indifference to civilian casualties. The term “collateral damage” implies unintended harm, but the use of “doesn’t care” indicates a more severe accusation of disregard or intent. This sets an ethically questionable tone toward Israel’s military actions from the outset.

Further into the article, the powerful use of terms like “bunker busters” reinforces the idea of Israel as an overwhelmingly strong force using advanced munitions on a vulnerable population in Gaza. Describing the bombs as “horrible pieces of ammunition” and elaborating on their destructive abilities heightens the perception of a disproportionate use of force.

Another article on October 7, titled “Israel retaliation kills 230 Palestinians after Hamas operation,” emphasises Israel’s responsibility for Palestinian casualties through transitivity in the headline. This choice of wording reinforces a clear cause-effect relationship between Israel’s retaliation and the deaths without contextualising Hamas’s initial attack.

In contrast, Hamas’s attack is described with phrases like “a deadly multi-pronged attack by Hamas forces” and “launched the largest attack on Israel in years.” These descriptions elevate Hamas’s operation as highly coordinated and significant, potentially influencing how readers perceive its scale and impact.

On October 9, Al Jazeera published, “Death toll soars to 1,300 as fighting between Hamas and Israel rages,” portraying Israel as a dominant and aggressive force. Phrases like “pummels” and “battles continue” illustrate Israel’s overwhelming military response.

This article attributes significant agency to Israel, describing it as systematically calling up reservists, conducting airstrikes, and enforcing a blockade. In contrast, Hamas is framed reactively, launching a “multipronged offensive” with less emphasis on its own decision-making, further portraying Israel as the dominant actor in the conflict.

An additional October 9 article, “Reports of mass casualties as Israeli air attack hits refugee camp in Gaza,” highlights the sheer force of Israeli airstrikes, especially in densely populated civilian areas like the Jabalia refugee camp, underscoring high casualty numbers.

Another article from October 8, titled “No place for Gaza residents to flee after Israel declares war, bombs homes,” portrays Israel’s military actions as disproportionately affecting civilians. Emphasising Israeli airstrikes targeting residential buildings positions Israel as responsible for the civilian suffering in Gaza, focusing on the destruction of homes and displacement.

Al Jazeera’s second framing strategy provides significant context and background on why Hamas launched its attack, as well as the historical context of the Palestinian conflict. In contrast to the BBC, Hamas is referred to simply as “Hamas,” without the negative qualifiers typically found in other outlets.

The article titled “Fears of a ground invasion of Gaza grow as Israel vows ‘mighty vengeance’” on October 7 explains Hamas’s attack as a response to “the desecration of the Al Aqsa Mosque as well as Israeli atrocities against Palestinians over the decades.” These atrocities are described as including “the 16-year blockade of Gaza, Israeli raids inside West Bank cities over the past year, increasing attacks by settlers on Palestinians, as well as the growth of illegal settlements.” While the attack by Hamas is characterised

as a “rampaging” of Israeli towns and “unprecedented,” the article focuses heavily on the long-standing grievances of Palestinians rather than on the immediate act of violence.

Another article from October 7, “ Hamas says it has enough Israeli captives to free all Palestinian prisoners,” provides a more detailed background on Hamas’s attack on Israel. It characterises the operation as “unprecedented,” the “biggest operation,” and a “surprise” offensive, framing it as a significant escalation in the conflict.

The article contextualises the attack by linking it to broader tensions, stating that it followed “the killing of four Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, widespread Israeli settler attacks, and tensions at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in occupied East Jerusalem.” This connection to prior events provides the reader with a deeper understanding of Hamas’s motivations and the wider political landscape.

In the Al Jazeera article from October 9 titled “Israel doesn’t care about collateral damage’: Bunker busters used in Gaza,” the article provides historical and political context to frame the current violence. The mention of Gaza being under blockade since 2007 and facing shortages of basic resources like water, electricity, and medicine highlights the ongoing hardships faced by Palestinians. This background information frames the airstrikes as part of a broader, long-standing conflict, not just an isolated response to the Hamas attack.

Another article on October 9, “Reports of mass casualties as Israeli air attack hits refugee camp in Gaza,” similarly provides historical and political context. The mention of Gaza being under blockade since 2007 and facing shortages of basic resources like water, electricity, and medicine further emphasises the ongoing struggles of Palestinians. This background suggests that the airstrikes are part of a broader, long-standing conflict, not just an immediate response to the Hamas attack. By including this context, the article implies that the current military action exacerbates an already dire situation for Gaza’s residents. At the same time, there is less emphasis on Hamas’s role in the escalation of the conflict, with most of the analysis directed toward Israel’s military response.

The Al Jazeera article titled “Death toll soars to 1,300 as fighting between Hamas and Israel rages” attributes significant agency to Israel, positioning it as the actor driving much of the military action and escalation. Israel is repeatedly described as carrying out airstrikes and imposing blockades, while Hamas is primarily framed as responding or reacting. For example, the article describes Hamas’s actions in more reactive terms, such as launching a “multipronged offensive,” but the Israeli response is described as systematic and large-scale, with Israel calling up 300,000 reservists and conducting over 1,000 air raids. This asymmetry in agency positions Israel as the dominant force in the conflict, while Palestinians are portrayed more as victims or reactive agents.

In the article on October 9 titled “Dozens of civilians being held hostage by Hamas: Israeli military,” significant agency is attributed to both Hamas and Israeli officials. Hamas is described as taking hostages, making demands, and being responsible for the large-scale attack on Israel. On the Israeli side, Lieutenant Colonel Richard Hecht and the Israeli military are given the role of informing the public about the hostage situation and managing the response to the crisis. Israeli officials are quoted at length, particularly regarding the unprecedented nature of the attack and the uncertainty surrounding the situation, such as not being able to confirm the number of hostages or their nationalities. This framing presents Israel as a reactive entity attempting to manage a crisis initiated by Hamas.

The third framing strategy employed by Al Jazeera appears to provide a balanced presentation of voices. Al Jazeera attempts to include expert opinions and civilian perspectives from both sides, though the overall framing leans towards a critical view of Israel and its potential disregard for civilian life.

For example, the use of direct quotations in the article titled “Fears of a ground invasion of Gaza grow as Israel vows ‘mighty vengeance’” (October 7) presents a balanced perspective by quoting three sources from Israel or supporting Israel and three from Hamas or those supporting Hamas. However, priority is given to Mohammed Deif, described as a “Hamas military commander,” who states: “The time has come for the enemy to understand... they cannot keep going without consequences.” This is followed by a quote from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who declares a “state of war” and vows to fight Hamas “to the bitter end.”

Other quotations include Saleh al-Arouri, the deputy chief of Hamas’s political bureau, who claims that Hamas holds many Israeli captives, including senior military officials. On the Israeli side, Danny Danon, a member of Israel’s Knesset, signals that a response against Hamas is imminent. Additionally, US President Joe Biden is quoted condemning the “unconscionable” assault by Hamas and pledging to ensure Israel has “what it needs to defend itself.”

Lastly, Iran’s foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani is quoted praising the Hamas operation, describing it as “a new page in the field of resistance and armed operations against occupiers.”

Another article from October 7, titled “Hamas says it has enough Israeli captives to free all Palestinian prisoners,” similarly demonstrates Al Jazeera’s attempt to give both sides a chance to speak, although Palestinian sources still hold a prominent position. The article emphasises a quote from Saleh al-Arouri, deputy chief of Hamas’s political bureau, where he claims that Hamas captured enough Israeli soldiers to pressure Israeli authorities into freeing all Palestinian prisoners.

The article concludes with a quote from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, declaring that Israel is “at war.” Indirect references to statements from the US and European countries affirm Israel’s right to defend itself while condemning Hamas’s actions.

An Al Jazeera article, titled “Israel retaliation kills 230 Palestinians after Hamas operation,” published on October 7, contains eight quotations. Israel’s Defence Minister Yoav Gallant is quoted first, warning Hamas that it made a “grave mistake” by launching the attack. Following Gallant’s quotation, the article includes seven quotations from Palestinian citizens and leaders, primarily condemning Israel’s actions.

In the October 9 article titled “Israel doesn’t care about collateral damage: Bunker busters used,” the article includes quotes from Israeli officials, such as the military spokesperson and Prime Minister Netanyahu. However, the majority of the narrative focuses on the Palestinian perspective. Civilian voices, health officials, and local news agencies dominate the discourse, particularly in their accounts of the casualties and destruction caused by the airstrikes. This emphasis on Palestinian voices gives prominence to the humanitarian angle of the conflict, highlighting the devastating effects of the airstrikes on Gaza’s population.

The Al Jazeera article from October 9 titled “Death toll soars to 1,300 as fighting between Hamas and Israel rages” again takes a balanced approach by humanising

victims on both sides. The deaths of Israelis, including those killed at a music festival, are described with emotional detail, such as through quotes like, "It was just a massacre, a total massacre." Personal stories, such as that of Arik Nani, who survived the attack, provide insight into the human toll of violence on the Israeli side. Similarly, the devastation in Gaza is described through firsthand accounts from residents and journalists, emphasising civilian casualties and the destruction of homes and infrastructure.

In the October 8 article titled "Tel Aviv's residents start venturing out," Al Jazeera attempts to portray the experience of Tel Aviv residents as one of slow recovery and adaptation. The opening sentence describes the city as waking up from "shock and confusion," emphasising the psychological impact of the attacks on civilians. Words like "timid efforts" and "bewildered and frightened" highlight the lingering fear and uncertainty among the population, portraying residents as cautiously attempting to return to normalcy while still processing the trauma of recent events.

The fourth framing strategy used by Al Jazeera involves portraying Palestinians as the primary victims of the conflict. In the article titled "Israel doesn't care about collateral damage: Bunker busters used in Gaza" (October 9), Palestinian suffering is highlighted, especially through the mention of children among the casualties and the vivid description of "frantic scenes" as rescue workers pull people from the rubble. This language humanises Palestinian victims, emphasising the humanitarian toll of Israeli airstrikes.

The article titled "Death toll soars to 1,300 as fighting between Hamas and Israel rages" (October 9) underscores the number of Palestinians killed and displaced, further focusing on their plight due to Israeli military actions. Israeli airstrikes and blockades are described in active terms, while Palestinians are portrayed as passive victims.

Similarly, the article "Reports of mass casualties as Israeli air attack hits refugee camp in Gaza" humanises Palestinian victims by focusing on children and civilian casualties, evoking empathy through the language used to describe the humanitarian impact.

Lastly, in "No place for Gaza residents to flee after Israel declares war, bombs homes" (October 8), personal stories of civilians like Ashour and Al-Hassi are highlighted, showcasing their fear and displacement, reinforcing the theme of powerless civilians caught in the crossfire. The contrast between Israeli military might and the vulnerability of Palestinians is emphasised throughout these articles, portraying the Palestinians as suffering under an overwhelming force.

## DISCUSSION

This article emphasises the relevance of media discourse in the news. Through a critical discourse analysis (CDA), it examines the dialectical relationship between semiotic modalities in languages and social practises of both the BBC and Al Jazeera, as well as how news language and social processes are inextricably linked to represent social practise that constitutes meaning in social processes.

The findings reveal that the BBC and Al Jazeera's coverage of the 2023 Palestinian and Israeli war differ. The discrepancies exist not only at the micro level, specifically in the use of lexical and transitivity, but also at the macro level, in the selection of quotations and sources.

The BBC report creates a narrative that highlights Israeli victims while portraying Hamas as the principal aggressor. The article's language choices, framing of victims, and asymmetrical representation all contribute to legitimising Israeli military actions as defensive. Palestinian losses and perspectives are obscured, contributing to a more one-sided depiction of the conflict, which may influence public perception by stressing Israeli suffering while downplaying Palestinian experiences. Through precise language choices, an emphasis on Israeli victims, and a lack of Palestinian perspectives.

Overall, Al Jazeera's storyline portrays Israel as the dominant and controlling force. The article's tone and structure highlight the power disparity and suffering, showing Palestinians as helpless while blaming Israel for escalating the conflict with overwhelming force. While Al Jazeera seeks to present both sides of the subject, the Palestinian perspective dominates its sources and narratives. Compared to the BBC, Al Jazeera provides more perspective and historical background on the long-running conflict.

The BBC's reportage during the early stages of the conflict was significantly biased toward Israel, echoing long-standing criticism of its coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Similar to previous criticisms (Llewellyn, 2023; Philo & Berry, 2004), the BBC's October 2023 coverage lacks historical context and does not adequately depict Palestinian realities. Israeli perspectives dominate, with little attention paid to the long-term realities in Gaza under occupation. Attempts to preserve balance frequently undercut the Palestinian position, repeating prior studies of Israeli domination in the BBC narratives (Barkho, 2007).

Al Jazeera's coverage promotes Palestinian perspectives. However, it occasionally includes voices from Israel. Compared to the BBC, Al Jazeera delivers more direct citations from Palestinian sources and richer background and historical context about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Barkho, 2007). This approach reflects a more thorough examination of the conflict's underlying causes, presenting a narrative that prioritises the Palestinian experience while occasionally addressing Israeli perspectives.

As a public broadcaster, the BBC's future depends greatly on its national audience. Although the BBC is a self-governing organisation that is not subject to government control, it is constrained by its need to fulfil the public aims defined in its Royal Charter. According to Flood et al. (2011), the BBC journalists confront "impossible standards." The corporation must achieve its public goals while simultaneously adhering to the idea of impartiality, which is part of its mission. In the October 2023 Gaza War, one could claim that it was essentially the BBC's obligation to support the opposition's goal for a Jewish state, which the British founded in 1948. If the narrative inspired sympathy for Palestinians, it would be a violation of the BBC's obligation to serve the public interest. The BBC, meanwhile, must at times forsake its sense of impartiality in order to fulfil its public aims in sustaining British liberal values of supporting the Jewish state, which appears to be more democratic (Flood et al., 2011).

This finding is consistent with the findings of Barkho's (2008) interviews with the BBC editors. He discovered that when reporting on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the corporation's values, standards, and preconceptions influence its discourse on the subject. Although the BBC purports to be objective and neutral in its coverage, its language reflects many of the ideas, values, and standards that are common throughout the company. Furthermore, his investigations show that the usage of language on the BBC news mirrors realities on the ground as well as inequalities in power, control, and status (Barkho, 2008). In the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, rhetorical practises reflect basic inequities

between the two parties. The desire to provide more voices for the Israeli perspective originates from the fact that, unlike Palestine, Israel is a democratic country with a more advanced media infrastructure, a strong economy, significant technical progress, and stronger support from the United States.

According to Barkho (2007), the differences in discursive practise in Middle Eastern reporting between the Qatari network, the BBC, and CNN are due to its organisational culture, which is “rooted in the soil of the Middle East.” According to Seib (2016), despite the fact that Al Jazeera English (AJE) distributes news to global English audiences and is not as explicitly “pro-Arab” as its Arabic counterpart, the network is nonetheless run by an Arab news company. According to Seib, AJE would have a stronger political role than its parent networks because English is more widely spoken among Muslims than Arabic. He also suggested that AJE may foster intellectual cohesion among the 1.4 billion Muslims.

The network went one step further its Arabic counterparts, attempting to balance information flow between the South and the North. In this context, “South” refers not only to physical location (Powers & El-Nawawy, 2009), but also to underserved and unreported groups that are typically overlooked in other international coverage. According to Ustad Figenschou (2010), Al Jazeera broadcasts more news from developing regions including Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America than developed regions like Europe and the United States. Her research indicates that AJE’s coverage of the “South” is more detailed, with more journalists on the ground (Ustad Figenschou, 2010).

As a result, many international news experts see Al Jazeera as a viable counter-flow to more established global networks such as the BBC and CNN. AJE also aims to distinguish itself from Western news media. In his book *Mission Al Jazeera*, AJE US journalist Josh Rushing (2007) clearly indicates that the network is seeking to shake up the West’s news agenda, which is controlled by the BBC and CNN.

## CONCLUSION

The findings show that there are more contrasts than similarities in global news coverage between major Western media firms like as BBCWN and newbies like AJE. These networks interact with each other and provide alternative narratives about world events to global audiences (El-Nawawy & Powers, 2014). This conflicting interpretation and multiplicity of coverage not only challenges the discourse on the Westernisation of the global media, but also undermines the conventional conceptions of the homogeneous public realm (Cottle, 2021). Rather than having only Western broadcasters, such as CNNI and BBCWN, dominate the global perspective of international news flow, with the rest of transnational broadcasters following their agenda, non-Western broadcasters, such as AJE, manage to diffuse the dominant discourse by providing a different perspective on international events.

The article has limits, as it only examines the first three days of the battle. It would be fascinating to conduct a comparison analysis of global news reportage at the beginning of the war and weeks later, following worldwide protests of Israel’s atrocities against Palestinians in Gaza. Furthermore, the Gaza war occurred within the social media era, and it would be useful for future research to explore how the information war on Gaza is fought on social media.

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### Mohd Faizal Kasmani

is a former broadcast journalist at 8TV/TV9 in Malaysia (2004-2007), was awarded a Commonwealth scholarship in 2004 and earned his MA in Broadcast Journalism from the University of Sheffield. He later obtained his PhD in Arab, Islamic, and Middle Eastern Studies from the Australian National University. He is currently Associate Professor in the Faculty of Leadership and Management at Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM), specialising in journalism, social media, and political communication.

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