Beyond Neutrality: Media Construction of Representations in Reporting the Gaza-Israeli Conflict[(*)]

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Abstract

This study critically examined the discursive construction of ideology, power, and representation in the New York Times' reporting on the 2021 Gaza-Israel conflict. Drawing on Fairclough's (2003) three-dimensional framework and van Dijk's (2003) ideological discourse strategies, this article explored how language constructed political meaning, reinforced dominant narratives, and positioned readers ideologically. The analysis focused on a single article published on May 10, 2021, titled "After Raid on Aqsa Mosque, Rockets From Gaza and Israeli Airstrikes." It demonstrated how lexical choice, source attribution, presupposition, and omission of voices collectively frame Israeli actions as legitimate and Palestinians as aggressors. The article underscored how media discourse, while appearing neutral, reflected and reproduced global power structures. The findings affirmed the value of critical discourse analysis in revealing how news texts subtly shape public perception, even without overt bias.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Fairclough, van Dijk, Gaza-Israel war, media ideology, power, representation, New York Times

ما بعد الحياد: البناء الإعلامي للتمثيلات في تغطية الصراع بين غزة وإسرائيل

الملخص

تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى كشف الأبعاد الأيديولوجية العميقة التي تحملها التغطيات الإخبارية، من خلال تحليل نقدي لكيفية بناء صحيفة *نيويورك تايمز* للمعنى والتمثيل والسلطة في تغطيتها لصراع غزة–إسرائيل عام ٢٠٢١. بالاعتماد على النموذج الثلاثي الأبعاد لنورمان فيركلوف (٢٠٠٣) واستراتيجيات الخطاب الأيديولوجي لتيو فان دايك (٢٠٠٣)، تستعرض الدراسة كيف توظّف اللغة في تشكيل المواقف السياسية، ودعم السرديات المهيمنة، وتوجيه المتلقي بشكل غير مباشر نحو قراءات أيديولوجية محددة. اعتمد التحليل على مقال منشور في ١٠ مايو ٢٠٢١ بعنوان: "بعد اقتحام مسجد الأقصى، صواريخ من غزة وغارات جوية إسرائيلية". وقد أظهر كيف أن اختيار الكلمات، ونسب التصريحات، والافتراضات الضمنية، وتغييب بعض الأصوات، تخلق صورة تبريرية للأفعال الإسرائيلية، مقابل تصوير الفلسطينيين كطرف معتدٍ.

تبرز الدراسة كيف يمكن أن يبدو الخطاب الإعلامي محايدًا من الخارج، بينما يعكس في جوهره منظومات السلطة العالمية ويعيد إنتاجها. وتؤكد النتائج أن التحليل النقدي للخطاب أداة فعّالة في الكشف عن الأبعاد الخفية للغة الإعلامية، وبيان كيف تؤثر تلك اللغة على تشكيل الرأي العام، حتى دون وجود تحيّز مباشر أو صريح.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التحليل النقدي للخطاب، فيركلوف، فان دايك، حرب غزة–إسرائيل، الأيديولوجيا الإعلامية، السلطة، التمثيل، صحيفة نيويورك تايمز

Language in news reporting is never neutral, particularly when covering political violence or long-standing conflicts (Van Dijk, 2003; Fairclough, 2003). In such contexts, discourse does not merely describe events but rather shapes public perception and political legitimacy. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, one of the most enduring in modern geopolitical history, is not only fought on the ground but also in the media arena. Media narratives do more than report; they structure and reproduce ideologies (Van Dijk, 2003; Fairclough, 2003).

This paper investigated how the New York Times frames events in its reporting of the May 2021 Gaza-Israel conflict. Specifically, it analyzed the linguistic and discursive strategies used in the article "After Raid on Aqsa Mosque, Rockets From Gaza and Israeli Airstrikes," published on May 10, 2021. By applying Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional discourse analysis model alongside van Dijk's framework of ideological discourse, this study sought to uncover how linguistic features subtly encode ideological meaning.

1. Statement of the Problem

In times of political conflict, the media plays a significant role in shaping how events are perceived by national and international audiences. This is particularly true in the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where the struggle for legitimacy is fought not only on the ground but also in the global media landscape. Despite the widespread belief that journalism is rooted in objectivity, news reports often reflect embedded ideologies through subtle choices in language, tone, and narrative structure. These discursive strategies can influence the way readers understand the roles of aggressor and victim, the legitimacy of actions, and the moral authority of involved parties. While numerous studies have addressed the presence of bias in Middle Eastern conflict reporting, few have focused on the specific linguistic tools used to reinforce ideological positions in globally recognized newspapers such as *The New York Times*. This study addresses that gap by examining how one article published during the 2021 Gaza-Israel escalation constructs ideological meaning through language.

2. Aim of the Study

This study aimed to explore how *The New York Times* frames the events of the 2021 Gaza-Israel conflict through its linguistic and discursive choices. By applying two critical discourse analysis models, Fairclough's three-dimensional approach and van Dijk's ideological discourse strategies, the paper sought to uncover the ways in which the media reproduced dominant ideologies, constructed political meaning, and aligned readers with particular interpretations of the conflict. The study was driven by the belief that media texts do not merely describe reality but actively participate in its construction, especially during moments of violence and crisis.

3. Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How are Israeli and Palestinian actors represented in *The New York Times'* article covering the 2021 Gaza-Israel conflict?

2. What linguistic and discursive strategies are employed to frame actions, assign agency, and suggest legitimacy?

3. How do lexical choices, source attribution, presupposition, and omission contribute to the construction of ideological meaning?

4. In what ways can the frameworks of Fairclough and van Dijk help in uncovering the power relations embedded in this media text?

4. Review of Literature

4.1 Theoretical Framework

Understanding how the media shapes public perception, especially in contexts of conflict, requires grounding in a number of key communication theories. Before applying Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to uncover hidden ideologies in news reporting, it is essential to situate the study within the wider theoretical context that

explains how media messages are constructed, delivered, and received.

4.1.1 Framing Theory

Framing theory, introduced by Goffman (1974), explains how the media selects certain aspects of a perceived reality and makes them more salient in communication. In doing so, the media shapes how audiences interpret and respond to events. In conflict reporting, for instance, a news outlet may frame violence as an act of terrorism or as self-defense, depending on the narrative it seeks to promote. The chosen frame influences public emotions and judgments, steering the audience's perception of who is right or wrong in a given situation.

4.1.2 Agenda-Setting Theory

McCombs and Shaw's (1972) agenda-setting theory further supports the idea that the media does not tell people what to think, but rather what to think about. This theory highlights the media's power in deciding which topics receive attention and which are ignored. When certain events are repeatedly reported while others are sidelined, the audience starts to perceive the emphasized issues as more important. In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this selective highlighting can reinforce one narrative while downplaying the suffering or agency of the other side.

4.1.3 Representation Theory

Stuart Hall (2015) expands the discussion by focusing on representation; the ways in which media constructs meaning through language, images, and symbols. Hall argues that representation is not merely about reflecting reality but actively shaping it. The media uses specific codes to define social groups, often reinforcing stereotypes or cultural assumptions. In reporting on conflicts, these representations can dehumanize one side or glorify another, contributing to long-standing ideological divides.

4.1.4 Media Dependency Theory

Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1976) proposed media dependency theory to explain how individuals depend on media information to understand the world, especially during times of uncertainty or crisis. This dependency grows when alternative sources of information are limited or suppressed. In such cases, media narratives hold significant power over public opinion, potentially reinforcing dominant ideologies or political agendas.

4.1.5 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

This study uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its main research method. CDA is widely used to study how language reflects power, inequality, and ideology in society. It does not treat language as a neutral tool for communication. Instead, it sees language as a form of action that can maintain or challenge social structures (Fairclough, 2003; van Dijk, 2003). This is especially important in political conflicts, where the media plays a central role in shaping public understanding. Words used in the news can influence how people view violence, justice, and responsibility.

In cases like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, news coverage is not only about telling people what happened. It also shapes how readers interpret the events. By selecting certain voices, using particular words, or leaving out important background information, news articles can support one version of the story over another. CDA helps researchers uncover these hidden patterns and ask critical questions about how and why certain meanings are created in the media.

This research is based on Norman Fairclough's (2003) three-level model of discourse analysis. This model is useful because it allows the researcher to study the text itself, the way the text is produced and received, and the larger social context in which the text exists.

4.1.5.1 Textual Level

At the first level, CDA examines the text directly. This means studying the vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, and how different parts of the text are linked. This helps to identify how meaning is created through language. For example, describing Palestinian fighters as "militants" while describing Israeli soldiers as "defense forces" is not just a word choice; it carries different emotional and political meanings.

This level also focuses on modality, whether statements are expressed as facts or opinions. It looks at the use of passive voice, which can hide responsibility. For instance, "Twenty people were killed" does not say who did the killing. Such structures reduce agency and can influence how readers assign blame or sympathy. By analyzing these details, the study uncovers how power and ideology are embedded in the language itself (Fairclough, 2001).

4.1.5.2 Discursive Practice Level

The second level focuses on how the text is produced, shared, and interpreted. This includes decisions made by journalists and editors, such as which voices to quote directly, how headlines are written, and what sources are trusted. It also considers how the article is circulated to readers and what kind of audience it is intended for.

This part of the analysis asks: Whose voices are heard clearly, and whose voices are summarized or ignored? Are official voices such as government or military spokespersons quoted more than local civilians or humanitarian workers? Is one side of the conflict described with more detail, emotion, or urgency? These patterns reveal how media institutions contribute to shaping public knowledge and reinforcing dominant views (Fairclough, 1995).

4.1.5.3 Social Practice Level

The third level links the news article to broader social and political contexts. It looks at how media discourse reflects larger

power relations and global ideologies. In this study, this means examining how the article fits into a wider pattern of Western media coverage that often supports the Israeli state narrative while minimizing Palestinian suffering or historical context.

This part of the analysis also considers how global political alliances, public opinion, and international law influence the way news is written and received. Fairclough (2003) argues that texts do not exist in isolation. They are part of larger systems of power and meaning. By placing the article within this broader framework, the study can show how language contributes to maintaining certain worldviews and silencing others.

The study also uses Van Dijk's (2003) approach to ideological discourse. Van Dijk focuses on how texts build and spread ideologies, especially through everyday language that appears neutral. His work is especially useful in identifying how news articles can support one group and marginalize another, often without being openly biased.

Some of the main strategies from van Dijk's model used in this study include:

1. **Authority Attribution**: This examines how some sources are given more credibility than others. For example, if the Israeli army is quoted directly while Palestinian sources are mentioned vaguely, it creates a difference in perceived reliability (van Dijk, 1998). The study looks at who gets to speak in the article, and how often.

2. **Polarization**: This strategy creates a divide between "us" and "them." The in-group (often aligned with state institutions) is described as peaceful, reasonable, or defensive. The out-group is shown as aggressive, emotional, or dangerous. This builds sympathy for one side and fear or mistrust toward the other (van Dijk, 2000).

3. **Lexical Choice**: The study analyzes how specific word choices shape the tone of the article. Words like "clashes,"

"tensions," or "retaliation" sound neutral but often hide important details. On the other hand, terms like "attack" or "massacre" carry strong emotional weight. Van Dijk (2003) shows how journalists use such language to lead readers toward certain feelings or judgments.

4. **Presupposition and Implication**: These are statements that assume something without directly stating it. For example, saying "violence broke out again" suggests that violence is normal or expected in the region, without exploring its causes. These strategies influence readers' views without them even realizing it.

5. **Exclusion**: What is not said in a text can be just as important as what is said. If an article does not mention Palestinian civilian deaths or the long history of occupation, it shapes the conflict as sudden or random. The study pays close attention to these silences and what they mean for the overall message of the text.

5. Methodology

This study applies both Fairclough's and van Dijk's models to a single news article published in *The New York Times* on May 10, 2021. This article was chosen because it appeared at a key moment in the 2021 Gaza-Israel escalation and was widely read. The analysis is carried out paragraph by paragraph. It looks at how words are used, who is quoted, what background is provided, and what is left out.

By using both models, the study provides a full picture of how the article creates meaning both on the surface and at a deeper level. It reveals how even one media article can reflect powerful ideologies and shape public understanding in ways that are not always obvious. This framework makes it possible to connect language choices to wider systems of power, influence, and political interest.

The article used in this study is "After Raid on Aqsa Mosque, Rockets From Gaza and Israeli Airstrikes" and was published by *The*

New York Times on May 10, 2021. It is available online at the following link:

After Raid on Aqsa Mosque, Rockets From Gaza and Israeli Airstrikes - The New York Times

This article was selected because it was one of the first major English-language news reports covering the events that began the 2021 Gaza-Israel conflict. It was published during a moment of high tension, shortly after clashes at Al-Aqsa Mosque and before a series of Israeli airstrikes and Palestinian rocket attacks. As a result, it helped shape early public and political reactions to the conflict around the world.

The article is about 1,200 words long and is divided into 18 paragraphs. It is written in a formal news style and includes quotes from both Israeli and Palestinian officials, as well as descriptions of events in Jerusalem and Gaza. The report includes two photographs in the online version. One shows smoke rising after an Israeli airstrike in Gaza, and the other shows Palestinians near the site of an explosion. While these images are powerful, this study focuses only on the written text to examine how language is used to shape meaning.

The New York Times is a major international newspaper with a large English-speaking audience. Most of its readers are based in the United States, but it also reaches policymakers, researchers, and international readers worldwide. Because of its reputation as a trusted source, many people use it to understand complex international events. This makes the article important for analysis, as its language can strongly influence how readers understand the Gaza-Israel conflict.

In this study, the article is examined paragraph by paragraph. The goal is to understand how the newspaper presents each side, what kind of language it uses, and which sources it includes or leaves out. The study uses the models of Norman Fairclough (2003) and Teun van Dijk (2003) to guide the analysis. These models help explore how

power, ideology, and social meaning are built into the language of the article. The analysis looks closely at word choices, quotes, voice (active or passive), and the order of information.

By using this approach, the study does not only examine what is said in the article, but also what is not said. This includes voices that may be missing, background that is not explained, or actions that are described in vague or unclear ways. All of these features affect how readers understand who is responsible, who is suffering, and who has the power. The study aims to show how language helps construct certain views of the conflict while ignoring others.

5.1 Empirical Studies

Many recent studies have examined how the media represents the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. These studies show that international news outlets often reflect political bias through word choice, source selection, and narrative structure. Researchers continue to find that Western media tends to represent Israeli actions as defensive and organized, while Palestinian actions are shown as violent or chaotic.

One of the more recent studies by Elmasry and El-Nawawy (2021) compared how *The New York Times* and *Al Jazeera English* covered the 2018 protests at the Gaza-Israel border. They found that *The New York Times* focused more on violence and disruption, using terms like "clashes" and "riots," while *Al Jazeera* offered more historical background and included more Palestinian voices. This difference shaped how readers understood the causes of the protests and who was responsible.

Another relevant study is by Kassis and Abusalim (2022), who analyzed how U.S. and European media covered the events in Sheikh Jarrah and the 2021 Gaza bombings. They found that news outlets used neutral or vague terms to describe Israeli actions, such as "evictions" or "conflict," but used stronger terms like "attack" or "aggression" for Palestinian responses. They also noted that Israeli voices were quoted directly, while Palestinian perspectives were often

summarized without names or personal stories.

In a 2020 study, Almahallawi looked at how digital news platforms reported on confrontations in the West Bank. He observed that many headlines suggested equality between both sides, using phrases like "Israel and Palestine clash," even though there was a clear difference in power and military capability. This framing made the violence seem mutual and ignored the root causes of the conflict. The study showed that even online platforms tend to favor official Israeli sources and limit the space given to Palestinian civilians.

A more recent paper by Yaghi and Taha (2023) examined social media coverage by Western news agencies. They found that posts from outlets like BBC and CNN during the May 2021 conflict used formal and technical language to describe Israeli airstrikes but used dramatic or emotional words when reporting on Palestinian rocket fire. This contrast shaped how viewers judged the legitimacy of each side's actions.

In a broader study, Nassar and Shafik (2023) analyzed how Palestinian identity was represented in American newspapers over the past five years. They found that Palestinian civilians were often mentioned only as numbers or anonymous victims, without stories or names. In contrast, Israeli victims were given more personal coverage, with names, family details, and interviews. This imbalance led to greater sympathy for one group over the other.

Finally, a content analysis by Farah and Odeh (2024) focused on how humanitarian language is used in war reporting. They discovered that terms like "tragic," "innocent," and "catastrophic" were used more often for Israeli experiences than for Palestinian suffering. The study suggested that this language gap affects how readers feel about the conflict and whom they view as deserving of protection or justice.

These studies confirm that media coverage is not neutral. Through small but consistent patterns, such as who is quoted, what words are used, and what background is given, news stories shape

public opinion. This research builds on those findings by applying two detailed discourse analysis models to a single article. It shows how language in one major report helps construct a specific understanding of the Gaza-Israel conflict.

5.2. Textual and Ideological Analysis

This section presents a detailed analysis of the article's language and structure using the tools of Critical Discourse Analysis. Drawing on the models of Norman Fairclough and Teun van Dijk, it examines how the article creates and supports certain ideological positions through its choice of words, structure of information, and patterns of inclusion or exclusion.

Each part of the article is studied carefully to identify how representations of Israeli and Palestinian actors are shaped. The analysis is not limited to what is explicitly stated in the text, but also considers what is implied, suggested, or left unsaid. Attention is given to the way the article uses vocabulary, quotations, passive constructions, repetition, and intertextual references. These features are used to understand how power, legitimacy, and responsibility are framed.

The goal of this section is to show that while the article appears to follow a neutral and professional style, its language carries deeper ideological meanings. Through strategies such as authority attribution, lexical choice, presupposition, and omission, the article constructs a specific view of the Gaza-Israel conflict, one that aligns more closely with certain narratives while marginalizing others.

5.2.1 Authority Attribution

The article frequently foregrounds official Israeli sources, reinforcing institutional credibility. For instance, it states: "Hamas militants fired at least 150 rockets across southern and central Israel, the Israeli Army said." This sentence centers Israeli military claims while placing Hamas in the subject position, activating them as the aggressor. Palestinian perspectives, by contrast, are introduced with

phrases like "according to Palestinian officials," a formulation that subtly distances the speaker and casts doubt on the objectivity or accuracy of the source.

Another example is the prominent inclusion of Netanyahu's voice: "Israel will respond with great force." This direct quote, presented without counterbalance, positions the Israeli government as authoritative and decisive. No equivalent quotation from Palestinian leadership appears. Such discursive imbalance, as van Dijk (2003) explains, constructs legitimacy by amplifying institutional voices while minimizing or framing others as less credible or marginal.

5.2.2 Lexicalization and Representation

Word choice carries significant ideological weight. The article employs sanitized or technical terms for Israeli actions, such as "airstrikes" and "military response," whereas Palestinian actions are described using more emotive or loaded terms such as "barrage of rockets" and "militants." For example, the phrase "an unusually high number of Palestinian citizens of Israel protested" uses the qualifier "unusually," which implies a deviation from expected behavior and casts protest as abnormal or threatening.

This distinction is reinforced in phrases like "Hamas fired a volley of rockets," where "volley" suggests aggression and coordination, while "airstrikes" lack the same emotional resonance. Fairclough (2003) identifies such choices as mechanisms that subtly align readers with particular actors by controlling the affective charge of the language used.

5.2.3 Implication and Presupposition

The article is shaped by implications that encourage the reader to infer certain conclusions without explicitly stating them. Consider the line: "The unrest was long predicted to come to a boil on Monday." This construction presupposes inevitability, as if violence was bound to erupt regardless of context. Such phrasing downplays agency and responsibility, positioning the conflict as cyclical and

spontaneous rather than structured by long-term grievances or power imbalances.

Another line states: "Despite international calls to tamp down the crisis, the Israeli government did little to de-escalate the tensions." While this might appear critical, the vagueness of "did little" avoids a clear assignment of blame, softening potential critique.

5.2.4 Polarization

The article clearly shows what van Dijk (2003) calls **polarization**, which means showing one side more positively than the other. In this case, Israel is often shown as calm and justified, while Palestinians are described as violent or threatening. For example, the article says, *"Israel responded with airstrikes,"* which makes it seem like Israel was only defending itself. But when describing Palestinians, it says, *"militants in Gaza fired rockets,"* which gives a strong and negative image of aggression. The word "militants" sounds more dangerous than "fighters" or "residents." Also, Israeli voices are quoted directly, such as statements from the army or government, which makes them sound official and trustworthy. On the other hand, the article says things like *"Gaza officials say,"* without names or direct quotes, which makes the Palestinian side sound vague or less reliable. Another example is how people are described. Israeli families are shown hiding or fleeing to shelters, creating sympathy. However, when Palestinian deaths are mentioned, the article just says, *"20 people were killed,"* without telling us who they were or how they died. This makes one group more human and the other less visible. According to van Dijk, this is a common way that media can support one side by using small language choices that make a big difference in how we see the conflict.

5.2.5 Victimization

The article fluctuates between depicting Palestinians as victims of violence and as instigators of aggression. For instance, it states: *"By the afternoon, more than 330 Palestinians had been injured, with*

at least 250 hospitalized." While this indicates substantial harm, the narrative immediately shifts focus to Israeli concerns, thereby weakening the emotional and moral weight of Palestinian suffering. Instead of delving deeper into the human impact of the injuries mentioned, the article redirects attention to Israeli responses, which subtly neutralizes the Palestinian experience of trauma.

The use of the phrase *"a cycle of reprisals"* is especially telling, as it implies a form of moral and military symmetry between the Israeli state and the occupied Palestinian population. Such phrasing obscures the vast power imbalance and historical context of occupation and blockade, reducing a deeply asymmetrical conflict into an abstract, reciprocal exchange of violence. The framing overlooks the structural realities that place Israel as a heavily militarized state and Palestine as a besieged, stateless population.

This discursive strategy aligns closely with van Dijk's (2003) concept of the ideological square, which promotes positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. While the article acknowledges Palestinian casualties, it does so in a depersonalized manner. There are no names, personal testimonies, or visual or emotional cues that would typically humanize victims. In contrast, when discussing Israeli experiences, the article often includes emotional appeals, such as families seeking shelter or the psychological impact of sirens and rocket fire. These narrative choices create a stark imbalance in empathy and identification.

The absence of Palestinian civilian voices, direct quotes, or named victims contributes to what van Dijk refers to as "symbolic exclusion." Without personal stories, Palestinian suffering is presented as numerical and distant, making it harder for readers to emotionally engage. This imbalance in representation does not only reflect a lack of neutrality; it reinforces a dominant narrative in which Palestinian lives are less visible and less recognized.

5.2.6 Nominalization

Agency is often blurred through nominalization. For instance: "The attack was a sharp departure from the usual rules of the conflict." The use of "the attack" and "departure" obscures who acted and how, presenting violence as autonomous and impersonal. Similarly, "Airstrikes left at least 20 Palestinians dead" avoids naming an agent, reducing Israeli responsibility by hiding the subject.

Fairclough (2001) argues that such choices depersonalize action, making events appear as natural consequences rather than the result of political decision-making. This technique contributes to a narrative of inevitability rather than accountability.

5.2.7 Intertextuality

The article quotes U.S. State Department spokesperson Ned Price stating, "Israel has a legitimate right to defend itself." This widely used diplomatic phrase is presented without question or alternative interpretation. By including such language without critique, the article aligns itself with dominant political narratives. This is an example of intertextuality, where journalistic discourse echoes official political statements, reinforcing a shared ideological framework.

In contrast, when Representative Ilhan Omar accuses Israel of "ethnic cleansing," the article immediately distances itself by stating, "That's not something that our analysis supports." This response signals a rejection of her viewpoint. By deciding which political voices to support and which to challenge, the article draws a line between what is seen as acceptable and what is framed as extreme.

5.2.8 Repetition and Reinforcement of Ideological Themes

Certain phrases appear repeatedly. "Israel responded," "rocket attacks," and "Hamas militants" are used consistently, building a narrative of ongoing aggression from Palestinians and legitimate defense by Israel. Van Dijk (2003) emphasizes that repetition

reinforces ideological framing by normalizing perspectives over time. The constant pairing of "Hamas" with terms like "barrage," "rockets," or "attack" reinforces an association of violence and disorder.

On the Israeli side, repetition of official sources "military said," "government announced," "police stated" frames the state as coordinated, transparent, and reactive.

5.2.9 Absence of Palestinian Civilian Voices and Historical Context

Perhaps most powerfully, the article fails to include Palestinian civilian voices. No personal testimonies are offered. No names of victims are mentioned. This omission reduces Palestinian suffering to statistics, undermining empathy and emotional engagement. Fairclough warns that absence can be as ideologically loaded as presence. Here, the exclusion of human stories distances the audience from Palestinian pain.

Moreover, the article lacks historical context. There is no mention of the blockade, settlements, or occupation. The conflict is framed as sudden, beginning with "the raid" and "rocket fire," removing decades of predetermined violence from the frame of representation.

6. Discussion

The detailed analysis in this study shows that the article published by *The New York Times* on May 10, 2021, does much more than simply report on facts. Through the careful use of language, structure, and source selection, the article actively shapes how readers understand the events surrounding the 2021 Gaza-Israel conflict. Using Fairclough's (2003) three-dimensional model, the study reveals how word choices, sentence structures, and overall narrative patterns construct a version of the story that aligns with certain political views while marginalizing others.

At the **textual level**, the article frequently uses technical and

institutional language to describe Israeli military actions, such as "airstrikes" and "targeted operations," which imply professionalism and precision. In contrast, it uses emotionally charged terms like "barrage of rockets" and labels such as "militants" to describe Palestinian actions. This contrast creates a linguistic imbalance that presents Israeli actions as defensive and controlled, while Palestinian actions appear chaotic and threatening. These findings are consistent with earlier research by Philo and Berry (2011), who observed similar patterns in BBC coverage during periods of conflict, where Israeli actions were often framed within legal or military logic, while Palestinian actions were linked to violence or extremism.

The use of **nominalization** in the article such as "violence erupted" removes agency and conceals the actor responsible. This linguistic device creates a sense of inevitability rather than attributing accountability. As van Dijk (1995) has argued, such structural choices are not accidental; they are ideological moves that blur power asymmetries and redirect blame away from dominant actors. In this case, these textual strategies obscure Israel's position as the more militarily powerful side and present the violence as symmetrical, despite evidence to the contrary.

At the level of **discursive practice,** the article privileges Israeli official voices by quoting the Israeli army and Prime Minister Netanyahu directly and extensively. In contrast, Palestinian perspectives are either summarized vaguely or attributed to unnamed "Palestinian sources." Civilian voices from Gaza are noticeably absent, and Palestinian casualties are presented in numerical terms without personal stories or emotional depth. This narrative strategy mirrors findings by Khalil (2020), who noted that mainstream Western newspapers often frame Palestinian suffering as statistical data while Israeli suffering is personalized. This can be interpreted as a reflection of editorial norms shaped by Western political alliances and the perceived legitimacy of Israeli state institutions. The absence of named Palestinian voices may also indicate journalistic limitations,

such as access restrictions, but it nonetheless reinforces an unbalanced view that favors one side over the other.

The **social practice level** of analysis reveals how the article reflects broader ideological patterns in Western media discourse. Israel is consistently framed as a rational, democratic actor facing existential security threats, while Palestinians are frequently depicted as disorganized or inherently violent. These representations support what Said (1997) described as the "orientalist lens," which portrays Arabs and Muslims as irrational or dangerous, thereby justifying their marginalization. Moreover, the article's inclusion of American officials' statements such as "Israel has a legitimate right to defend itself" embeds it within a dominant international narrative that aligns with U.S. foreign policy and minimizes Palestinian claims to justice, land, and sovereignty.

This pattern is also in line with van Dijk's (2003) notion of the ideological square, where "our" side (in this case, the Israeli/U.S. alliance) is portrayed positively, while "their" side (Palestinians) is depicted negatively or as a threat. The repetition of these discursive strategies across major news outlets, as documented in earlier studies (e.g., Fawcett, 2016; Elmasry et al., 2014), suggests that such representations are part of a systemic bias rather than isolated journalistic choices.

This imbalance may be attributed to several factors. First, most international media organizations rely on Western news agencies and correspondents, who are often embedded in Israeli territory and have better access to Israeli officials. Second, there is a longstanding geopolitical alliance between Western governments and Israel, which subtly influences editorial priorities and the framing of narratives. Third, media audiences in the West may be more familiar with Israeli cultural and political references, making the Israeli perspective more "relatable" and thus more frequently included in reports. Although the article does not openly express bias and follows the formal

conventions of international journalism, the cumulative effect of selective quoting, emotionally loaded vocabulary, and omission of critical context leads to an uneven portrayal of the conflict. It presents violence as equally distributed between both sides, failing to acknowledge the disproportionate impact of Israeli military power, occupation, and historical injustice.

These findings both **align with** and **extend previous research.** Like prior studies, this analysis confirms that Western media often favors Israeli narratives. However, it adds depth by using Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model to explain how specific linguistic and structural choices function ideologically. It also emphasizes the importance of silence and omission, which are less frequently analyzed but equally powerful in shaping public understanding.

In conclusion, this discussion highlights that media discourse, particularly in reputable outlets such as *The New York Times*, plays a central role in constructing reality during conflict. When such narratives are repeated across different articles and platforms, they contribute to forming global public opinion, which can eventually influence foreign policy, military aid, and international legitimacy. Therefore, it is essential not only to examine what is said but also to critically reflect on what is left unsaid, and how such silences reproduce systems of power and inequality.

7. Conclusion and Implications

This study examined how *The New York Times* reported on the 2021 Gaza-Israel conflict by analyzing one key article published on May 10, 2021. The article was studied using two important models in critical discourse analysis: Norman Fairclough's three-part framework and Teun van Dijk's theory of ideological discourse. These frameworks helped explore how the article used language to shape meaning, reflect political views, and support certain narratives while minimizing others.

The findings show that the article does not only report facts. It

also builds a specific image of the conflict through its structure and language. Israeli actions are described using formal, technical terms that sound calm and organized. Words like "airstrikes" or "military response" create the impression that Israel is acting responsibly. On the other hand, Palestinian actions are described with emotional or harsh terms such as "barrage of rockets" and "militants," which make them seem threatening or irrational. These patterns in word choice are not accidental. They reflect deeper ideas about who is seen as legitimate, who is seen as dangerous, and whose voice deserves to be heard.

Another clear pattern is that Israeli officials are quoted directly, which gives their words more power and authority. Palestinian voices are either not quoted at all or are mentioned using unclear phrases like "Palestinian officials said." This difference makes Israeli sources seem more trustworthy and Palestinian ones less reliable. The article also uses passive language in places, which hides responsibility. For example, saying "twenty people were killed" does not explain who caused their deaths. This weakens the impact and removes accountability.

A major issue found in the article is the lack of background information. The article does not mention the long history of occupation, the blockade of Gaza, or the forced removals of Palestinian families in East Jerusalem. Without this context, the conflict is shown as a sudden and equal fight between two sides. In reality, the conflict is deeply unequal, shaped by history, politics, and power. When news articles remove this history, they make it harder for readers to understand the real reasons behind the violence.

This research shows that even professional and respected news outlets can shape the way people think about political events. They do this not by lying, but by choosing certain words, quoting certain people, and ignoring others. This kind of influence is quiet, but very powerful. It shapes international opinion, public sympathy, and even

government policy. That is why critical media literacy is so important. People need to be able to read news carefully, ask questions, and notice when something is missing or one-sided. Moreover, this study offers a useful example of how to use critical discourse analysis. It shows how language can carry ideology, even when it seems neutral. It also shows that we must listen to which voices are given space and which ones are ignored. Media is not only about sharing information. It is about building ideas, shaping reality, and deciding whose stories matter.

In conclusion, this study proves that media language should never be taken for granted. Words have power. They build the world we live in. Through careful analysis, we can understand how that power works and how to challenge it when it is used unfairly. This is not only an academic goal. It is a social and political responsibility.

Regarding implications, this study is twofold. First, it shows how CDA can be used effectively to identify bias and ideological patterns in media texts that appear balanced on the surface. This can help future researchers study similar cases across different geopolitical settings. Second, it calls for greater awareness and teaching of media literacy. As media coverage continues to shape global perceptions, especially during times of conflict, it is essential that readers, educators, and policymakers learn how to critically engage with news content, ask what is missing, and question how power operates in media discourse.

8. Limitations of the Study

While this study provides a detailed analysis of one influential news article, it is limited in several ways. First, it focuses only on a single article. Although the article is important and widely read, it does not represent all coverage by *The New York Times* or other international outlets. A broader study could examine several articles across different dates and newspapers to identify stronger patterns.

Second, the study examines only the written text, excluding the photographs and multimedia elements that also shape meaning. In modern journalism, images and video often carry powerful messages that can either support or contradict the written word. Including visual analysis could offer a more complete understanding of how ideology is built across multiple modes.

Third, this study does not include interviews with journalists, editors, or readers. These voices could add insight into the production and reception of the article. Understanding how media workers make decisions, or how readers interpret what they see, would strengthen the study's conclusions.

9. Suggestions for Future Research

Future research can expand on this study in several ways. First, it would be useful to analyze a larger number of articles from different international newspapers to compare how various media outlets frame the same events. This would help identify broader trends in ideological reporting. Second, researchers can include visual elements such as photographs and video captions, which are often used to reinforce certain messages in modern news. Third, future studies could examine how Arabic-language media report on the same conflict and compare these narratives with those found in Western sources. Fourth, scholars may conduct interviews or surveys to understand how readers from different backgrounds interpret media coverage of the conflict. Finally, a longitudinal study could explore how media representations of the Gaza-Israel conflict have changed over time. Each of these approaches would deepen our understanding of how news discourse shapes public knowledge and supports or challenges power structures (Fairclough, 2003; van Dijk, 2003).

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