

The Securitization of Media Imagery, Public Opinion Formation, and Relation with the Other -The war on Gaza as a case study

أمننة الصورة الإعلامية وبناء الرأي العام والعلاقة بالآخر-الحرب على غزة نموذجاً-

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Abstract:

The media is considered one of the most influential sources in shaping images, owing to the advanced capabilities and technologies it now possesses, which have enabled it to attract millions of viewers. Through repetition, these images transform into stereotypes that define the nature of the relationship with the “other,” depending on whether the image presented is positive or negative. The impact may even extend to the adoption of unfavorable decisions based on an incorrect image. Accordingly, media imagery plays a crucial role in the perceptual process of its recipients—whether policymakers or the general public. The image tends to be positive when relations with the other are good, and negative when relations are strained. Such media-produced images become a social problem when a group collectively adopts and believes in them, resulting in a form of social exclusion directed toward the other group.

Keywords: Media Imagery, securitization theory, War on Gaza

الملخص:

يعتبر الاعلام أحد أهم مصادر تشكيل الصورة نتيجة لما يمتلكه الآن من قدرات وتقنيات عالية استطاعت جذب الملايين لها ، هذه الصورة بتكرارها تتحول الى صور نمطية تحدد طبيعة العلاقة بالآخر تبعاً لنوعية هذه الصورة سواء كانت سلبية أم ايجابية، بل يتعدى الأمر الى اتخاذ قرارات سلبية استناداً الى الصورة الخاطئة ، ومن ثم فان الصورة الاعلامية تؤدي دوراً هاماً في العملية الادراكية لمتلقي تلك الصورة سواء كان صانع قرار أو الجمهور العام ، فتكون الصورة ايجابية في حالة وجود علاقة جيدة بالآخر وبالمقابل تكون سلبية في حالة وجود علاقة سيئة معه، أين تتحول تلك الصورة الاعلامية الى مشكلة اجتماعية عندما تشارك مجموعة من الأشخاص في الايمان بها ماينجم عنه نوع من العزل الاجتماعي للمجموعة الأخرى.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الصورة الإعلامية، نظرية الأمننة، الحرب على غزة

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Introduction:

In a globalized world governed by modern communication means, the media image has become one of the most powerful tools influencing the formation of collective consciousness, shaping public opinion, and directing attitudes toward major national and humanitarian issues. The image has transformed from merely a news medium conveying events to an active tool in constructing narratives and shaping peoples' perceptions of themselves and others. The importance of the media image increases in contexts of conflicts and wars, where it becomes a central player in the battle over interpretation and meanings, with competing narratives determining the legitimacy of causes and the justification of parties involved. The war on Gaza, in its various rounds, is a clear example of this phenomenon. Images coming from the besieged Gaza Strip have taken a central role in spreading the suffering of civilians, exposing the severity of human rights violations, and mobilizing regional and international sympathy. This is countered by opposing attempts to frame the victim as responsible for their fate or to justify the aggressor's actions. Thus, the battle over the image is no less important than the battlefield itself and may sometimes surpass it in significance, given its potential to influence official and popular stances worldwide. From this perspective, this article aims to study how the media image contributes to building public opinion regarding conflict issues, focusing on the war on Gaza as a case study. The article will first address the concept of the media image and its communicative functions, then the mechanisms of its influence on the audience and public opinion formation, before analyzing its role in defining relationships with the "other" - whether an adversary or an ally. Finally, the article will highlight how images transmitted from Gaza have become a stage for solidarity, while also revealing the limits of the image's influence amid global power balances and media discourse.

On this basis, we pose the following problematic question:

How does the securitization of media imagery shape public opinion and redefine perceptions of the “other” in contexts of armed conflict, specifically during the war on Gaza?

Sub-Questions

- How is the media image constructed and framed in conflict contexts?
- How do images from Gaza contribute to shaping global narratives about victims, aggressors, and responsibilities?
- What role do political, geopolitical, and media power asymmetries play in limiting or redirecting the impact of these images?
- How does media imagery contribute to constructing or deconstructing the representation of the “other”?

Hypotheses

- Media imagery contributes significantly to shaping public opinion during conflicts by triggering emotional, cognitive, and moral responses.
- The securitization of media imagery (linking it to threats, fear, or legitimacy) plays a key role in shaping how audiences perceive the “other,” whether as a victim, aggressor, or threat.

Research Objectives



- Analyze the communicative functions of media imagery in shaping perceptions during conflict.
- Examine the mechanisms through which images influence public opinion and emotional mobilization.
- Investigate how competing actors securitize narratives through selective use of imagery.
- Study the representation of the “other” in the context of the Gaza war.

Theoretical & Conceptual Framework

Your topic naturally draws on:

- Securitization Theory (Copenhagen School): to understand how imagery is used to justify actions, threats, and legitimacy.
- Framing Theory: how images are framed to produce specific readings.
- Agenda-Setting & Priming: how media highlight certain aspects and shape public evaluation.
- Representation & “Othering” Theories: how images build perceptions of self vs. other.
- Visual Communication & Iconic Images Studies: the power of images in creating collective meaning.

1. The literature on the concept of image

The image in the simple interpretation is an idea and self-assessment of the public for a particular issue, as the ideas, beliefs, feelings and impressions of individuals express what is justified in the minds of the audience receiving the behavior of individuals, and there is a very important principle in the image is the difficulty of change after receiving it by the public, and after the simple understanding of the idea of the image can be asserted that personal judgments on many things from different entities and topics became the main component of the understanding process along with other components of political and social construction, cultural environment and other components, here we cannot neglect the role of the media in shaping and building the image and public opinion.

1.1- The image in its conceptual context

The image in its conceptual context considered a pre-existing, ready-made visions and perceptions of a country or people that are derived through some historical interpretations or created by someone himself, while in practice, the concept of image can be considered a person's opinion about a group, people or country.

Thus, both perception and imagination can be wrongly adopted, whether at the level of the political leadership or at the level of the people. In this sense, information is closely related to the emergence of perception, which means that the distortion of information or its absence will inevitably lead to distortion of the image. (Whiting, 1979)

On the other hand, some consider the image as a kind of racial discrimination practiced by the majority against the minority, because those images are the social identity of that minority. On the other hand, some consider the image as a kind of racial discrimination practiced by the majority against the minority, because those images are the social identity of that minority. (Rachad, 2004)

It is worth noting here that the image may be negative or positive depending on the tools used to export the image or influence it, and the media comes as one of the most important sources of image formation because of the capabilities and high technologies it now possesses that can attract millions.

With the advent of television and the widespread use of satellites as communication technologies and its inclusion of several advantages such as combining image and sound, it became a tool to achieve social enjoyment and an educational tool, but with the developments in the international community today, television and primarily the image is no longer a tool for entertainment or culture only, but has become a political tool to put pressure on the masses and decision-makers, as Wilbur Schramm believes that about 70 percent of the images that humans construct of their world are derived from mass media. The image has become a factory for the opinions, ideas and attitudes of individuals and governments, as Wilbur Schramm believes that about 70 percent of the images that humans build of their world are derived from mass media, so the image plays a role in forming the public's knowledge and impressions, which leads, after categorization and selection, to form the mental image¹ that affects human behavior. (Bouhdane, 2006)

Most Western studies in the field of image during the years 1970-1996 showed that the most common tools used to stabilize the image of one group of people about another group are opinion polls and questionnaires within social psychological research methods that study people's opinions, attitudes, and motivations for their behavior that support or oppose the dimensions of the negative or positive image of others. (Barakat, 2000)

In the same context, American studies have been interested in the topic of the image since the beginning of World War II and tried to explore it according to concepts and values based on studies from psychology, sociology, media, history and literature, but the interest of media studies in the topic of images was since 1933 through a survey of 100 university students about the mental images spread in American universities,

1.2- Image in the media context

Visual communication media such as television and Internet networks have become the main source for the public to receive local and global information where communication technology does not recognize regional borders in the era of globalization of communication and information, which made the latter an important actor that cannot be neglected in the entity of contemporary society, but the influence of the image on public opinion was not of recent origin, as research and studies were conducted at the beginning of the last century by **Harold Lasswell** and **Karl Hovland** to emphasize the strong influence of the cinematic image on individuals and groups on several levels: Cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral levels, and then several theories were formulated that served as the theoretical building blocks for the establishment of a new science, communication science, after it was merely theoretical trends and intellectual trends framed in other scientific fields such as sociology and psychology. (anholt, 2011)

Building and forming psychological impressions of others is not based on emotions and attitudes, but rather on objective foundations or mental perceptions formulated based on

correct information that establishes a certain image or images of others, and thus these images and psychological perceptions will determine the nature of our relationship with him and our dealings with him.

1.3- The image as a perception maker

Herman and Chomsky emphasized that today's audience needs to process and flow more information through daily news, especially in the current industrialized economic system where the customer is obliged to access multiple global news, so news promoters, including governments, are obliged to help the media by using various means such as:

- Creating the means.
- Provide journalists with copies of politicians' speeches in advance to be able to offer preliminary interventions.
- Schedule press conferences with major news broadcasts.
- Use accessible language to write press releases.
- Take care of organizing photo opportunities and press conferences. (anholt)

1.4- The impact of image on public opinion

The literature on image overlaps with the literature on public opinion because they meet at the point of interest, which is the perception of the image of one party towards another through public opinion questionnaires and surveys.

The image extraction research at the level of the Arab world, despite its rarity, relied on the science of content analysis to determine the status and image of a people towards others through the analysis of media materials, and the most prominent of these researches is the study of "Mr. Yassin" on the study of the image of Arabs to themselves and the image of Arabs to others

Then Dr. Ibrahim Al-Daouki's study on the image of the Turks among Arabs, in which he analyzed the content of 13 newspapers to determine the extent of the change in the nature of the Arab perception of the Turks since the Ottoman caliphate, followed by Dr. Ibrahim Arafat's study on the image of India among Egyptians, and the added value of his study was the comparative study between the perception of the educated elite and the common people due to the different sources of image formation in each of them.

The literature on image and its relation to public opinion has seen great progress, but it still lacks a realistic formulation due to the presence of social and cultural influences that go into the formation of the image and are difficult to measure at the same time. (Ibrahim al-Daouki, 2001)

Moreover, it is difficult to develop a general theoretical framework that can be applied to countries around the world, as it is necessary to take into account the differences in public opinion and its characteristics from one society to another.

Public opinion is subject to constant change as the issues under discussion change and certain developments occur (Davison, 2024). It is also characterized by a lack of knowledge of basic information and facts related to foreign policy, even in the most culturally and educationally developed countries, which creates a false image of a particular people or group. (Selim, 1997)

Hence the difficulty of measuring the image through composite public opinion, given that its impact varies according to different political systems, the foreign policy issues at hand, and the extent of public opinion agreement on these issues. (Selim)

1.5- Relationship to the Other Depending on the Received Image

The stereotype has a direct relationship with the self and the other and the contradictory feelings between them, as the image may turn into a social issue when a group of people share a belief in it within the social formation of that group, and thus that participation turns into a kind of social isolation of the other group, and then the process of cumulative discrimination against ethnic and religious groups appears clearly in the images spread against minorities in the world, and the image is positive in the case of a good relationship between the two parties and negative in the case of a breakdown and deterioration of the relationship between them.

Hence, the image can be both a catalyst and an undermining influence on public perception of others:

- **The image as a catalyst for public awareness of the other**

(A model image to sensitize about the seriousness of climate change caused by human activities would enable a global audience that is aware of the seriousness of the current environmental situation and the threat to the future of generations.) On December 29, 2004, an earthquake that hit several states in the Indian Ocean with a magnitude of 09 on the Richter scale, killing 225,000 people, received exceptional media coverage. In addition to massive and emergency international aid, it has resulted in massive environmental disasters, including disease, hunger, lack of potable water, lack of emergency medical care, lack of shelters, unrest, violence, human trafficking, child exploitation, and destruction of infrastructure, thus threatening all human life, and the world could not have known and felt the seriousness of climate change without the visual media of television and the Internet. The New York Times devoted 24 articles on the tsunami and its effects within two weeks of the disaster, and the American television news networks devoted 80 programs to the disaster. This comprehensive American coverage indicates the importance of the media image in the United States, as the media acted as human security agents by questioning the concerned population and representatives of NGOs and UN agencies, which contributed to raising public awareness of the seriousness of natural disasters. (Scott, 2011)

- **The image as an undermining of the public's awareness of the other**

The image may become a negative weapon that leads audiences around the world to antagonize certain groups of society due to different affiliations, mentalities or religions. It often reaches the point of offending and insulting certain religions and religious figures due to false beliefs about them, as happened in the offensive images of the Prophet, "May Allah bless him and grant him peace" published by the Danish newspaper Bollandsposten on September 30, 2005, where the newspaper published 12 cartoons offensive to the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and in 2006 both the German, French and Norwegian newspapers republished them. This provoked and hurt the feelings of the vast majority of the Muslim masses and resulted in many measures, such as the dismissal of the editor-in-chief of the French newspaper France Soir, followed by protests in all Muslim cities,

such as burning the Danish consulate in Beirut and setting fire to the Danish embassy building in Syria.

The Western image of Islam and Muslims is considered biased and unfair, through which a collective culture is formed that is hostile to Islam and Muslims in particular. According to the American writer "Jack Shaheen" Southern Illinois in his book "Deceivers": "Arabs in the Western media are divided into four categories:

- 1) Yuppie oil sheikhs.
- 2) Bomb-throwing terrorists.
- 3) Greedy merchants.
- 4) Bad people with hooked noses. (Bouhdane)

After studying more than 900 American films, the researcher concluded that Arabs are portrayed in the coarsest stereotypes: they are yuppie sheikhs with kufis and shirts that clearly show signs of luxury, extravagance, flatulence and obesity, and unscrupulous terrorists with long beards, bomb throwers and murderers of innocent people. This image was further reinforced after September 11, 2001.

Muslim women were not exempt from these offensive images of them and their religion, where men, deprived of their freedom, depicted them only as homemakers covered with a cloak that reveals their suffering from coercion and oppression. (Bouhdane)

Islam is portrayed as a tribal and primitive religion and Muslims as the bearers of backwardness and primitiveness. Shahin points out that Hollywood, the city of American cinema, has presented hundreds of films, including "The Killing Game, American Ninja and Genocide, In the Sun, The Return of the Mummy" All of these films exaggerated the defamation of Arabs and Muslims and all of them are rhetorical acts aimed at convincing audiences of the danger and threat of Islam and Muslims to global security.

2. The Image in international relations and securitization theory

2.1- Image in international relations

The development of international relations with the development of development technologies and the globalization of trade, environment and tourism has become a responsibility of the state, all these factors and others have a great role in influencing the "image of the state", on the other hand, the image taken about the state by the receiving public has a great impact on attracting investment and increasing the number of tourists, and these factors also enhance the status of the state in the international community and make its political decisions audible in the forums. (Onioru, 2000)

It is worth noting that the importance of the concept of image in international relations came after the concept of power became dominant in international relations theories, especially during the 1950s with the contributions of Morgenthau, who introduced the power model to explain the relationship between states and peoples, followed by the emergence of the concept of image as an alternative model to relying on power in explaining international relations.

According to Kunczik, the images of some countries, whether true or false, may be developed through a very complex communication process involving complex information sources, the process begins with early life experiences in school in children's books, but radio,

television, sending international programs, newspapers, magazines, exchange programs(6) of cultures, sports and news are supposed to have a stronger impact where the image is more influential and effective, especially in today's world. Especially in today's world, the role of the media in building the image and public opinion is very large, in the framework of the social system and the process of democratization of the state, the media play a major role in influencing the public and developing public opinion.

Many literatures appeared in the 1960s focusing on the study of perception and image to understand interstate relations, including Boulding in *The Image* and Robert Jervis in *Perception and Misperception in International Relations*.

The image also proved its effectiveness and impact on the course of international relations during the Cold War in light of the propaganda campaigns between the two poles, where propaganda campaigns at that time focused on stereotypes in moving people's feelings, controlling their attitudes, establishing a negative and bad image of the other and attaching all the disgraceful epithets and descriptions to the opponent to push the majority of the masses and convince them that they must hostile to it.

Another rhetorical act that recognizes the existence of certain threats to entities of reference is the so-called information selectivity and the so-called "propaganda", which is intended to address an issue or issue by using a selective package of information, data or video events, it can be considered a kind of message or speech directed to the public, where this phenomenon has gained a significant place in the current international system. (Onioru, 2000)

2.2- The Securitization Theory

The debate over the nature and concept of security has become the center of contention in the field of security studies as it "broadens" its agenda to include post-narrow threats to state and military security and "deepens" the of the security agenda to include threats beyond the narrow confines of state and military security, the "deepening" of the security agenda by including the concerns and security actors of individuals and groups in what is known as "human security," and the focus on global concerns that were initially marginalized within the traditional official military concept. The process of securitization¹ must be seen within the context of the moving security agenda and as part of the expansion of the theoretical movement to study the social construction of security, thus the Copenhagen School has gained a privileged position within this debate. In securitization theory, "security" is not treated as an objective condition but as the result of a certain social process of the social construction of security issues by analyzing "security discursive acts" through which threats become recognized and issues become securitized. Ole Weaver summarizes it as follows:

¹ The process of securitization occurs when a particular issue is moved from a politicized issue to a securitized issue, which is presented as an "existential threat" that calls for exceptional measures and actions outside the boundaries of normal politics, so it can be said that the process of securitization includes three types of units that make issues securitized: Referent objects (objects that are perceived to be existentially threatened and have a legitimate claim to survival), securitizing actors are the actors that securitize issues by declaring something existentially threatened, the speech act is the specialized expressions and vocabulary used by securitizing actors to "Securitizing actors do not act in a vacuum," says Barry Buzan, who distinguishes two types of conditions for the success of the speech act, inspired by John Austin's 1962 *Conditions of Bliss*: The first is an internal moral base, and the second is an external socio-contextual one: social, contextual, and external

What is security then? With the help of language, we can consider security as a speech act, as speech itself is an act that allows the use of necessary and important measures to prevent it."

This position allows the Copenhagen School to demonstrate that the expansion and restriction of the security agenda is based on the supply of discursive action. In principle, the security agenda is expanded not only by the expansion of the world of potential threats, but also by the emergence of new actors who claim to be threatened, called "referent objects", which can be extended to include post-military and post-nation-state security actors. Accordingly, the Copenhagen School emphasized that the security perspective can include five sectors, each of which includes a specific referent entity, specific threat and specific agenda. In the military sector, for example, the reference entity is the territorial integrity of the state and the threats are clearly defined in external military threats, while in the political sector, the reference entity is the loss of government authority and legitimacy and the threats can be ideological, while in the sociocultural security sector, the identity is threatened by multiple dynamics such as cultural diversity, economic integration, and population movements. (Brito, 2009)

The Copenhagen School is clearly on the same level as the constructivist understanding of discourse acts developed by Osteen and Searle, who were very influential in developing constructivism in international relations and considering security as a kind of social achievement, which led to the expansion of discourse act patterns from the linguistic space to the image space.

2.3- Images as Discursive Acts in Securitization

The concept of social and civilizational security is one of the most important elements of criticism of the Copenhagen School. For example, **Bill Missoni** emphasized that while the issue of social and cultural security appears to be an important issue in contemporary security relations, the Copenhagen School ends up enshrining both "society" and "identity" in a weak analytical way by defining society based on identity. In doing so, **Missoni** stressed that the concept of social and cultural security defined society in practice as having a single identity, which would neglect multiple social identities. **Missoni** adds that the emphasis of the Copenhagen School on the idea of defining society as an identity would legislate intolerance and increase risk.

The second major criticism of the Copenhagen School relates to security ethics. For them, security is nothing more than a social security practice linked to a rhetorical act of a certain existential threat that requires a certain exceptional policy and procedure. This means that anything can be considered a security issue. As a result, it is an exceptional form of violence and irrational policy. Security doctrine implicitly commits itself to an objective, irrational, politically irresponsible methodology that lacks a rule that assesses the claim of threat, hostility and emergency. The security process involves moving issues from the security agenda to the world of public political discourse "normal situation."

Securitization theory has been developed by the Copenhagen School and has thus far been considered one of the most important research in contemporary security studies, thus demonstrating its importance in expanding the logic of security in the theory of international relations. It also confirms that, despite criticism of the safety theory, the increasing influence of television communication in security relations provides us with a fundamental challenge to

understanding the processes and institutions involved in security and in the political ethics advocated by the Copenhagen School.

Over the past decade, the field of security studies has become one of the contentious concerns in international relations, in particular the basic forum in which factual and factual social structural theory is challenged. The most significant developments resulting from these theoretical debates are the "security theory" developed by **Barry Buzan** and **Olé Weaver** and their assistants at the Copenhagen School.

The securitization theory must be understood as a rhetorical act, not as an illustrative social doctrine, and in this way the securitization theory is directly linked to the recent exploration of the argument, the act and the morality of constructive theories in international relations, when these factors are taken into account, the theory of security is immune from criticism directed against it. (stritjle, 2007)

3. War in Gaza and foreign media coverage

3.1- Bias and Misrepresentation in Western Media Coverage of the Gaza War

The war in Gaza has been extensively covered by various media outlets worldwide, with a diverse range of perspectives and narratives. However, there have been concerns about the media coverage's fairness and accuracy, particularly in the UK and US.

In the UK, a report by the Muslim Council of Britain's Centre of Media Monitoring (CfMM) analyzed the media coverage of the war in Gaza and Israel, focusing on the largest statistical analysis of the media coverage of the atrocities committed in Israel on October 7 and Israel's genocidal campaign against the Palestinian people in the first month of the war. (Harb, 2024) The investigation discovered that Israeli narratives, voices, and grievances were given precedence over Palestinian voices, narratives, and grievances in the media. Israeli rights were prioritized, frequently resulting in the exclusion and erasure of Palestinian rights. Emotional language was frequently utilized for Israeli victims of violence, but not so much for Palestinians. Representatives and fans of Israel were allowed to dehumanize Palestinians on television, with little pushback from news anchors and talk show hosts. The research also revealed numerous Islamophobic features of the coverage, such as presenting pro-Palestine protests and support as inherently dangerous and related to "a terror threat," frequently due to the presence of Muslims among them. (Harb, 2024)

A quantitative investigation by The Intercept in the US found significant distortion in media coverage of Israel's conflict in Gaza. The investigation looked at over 1000 items from three major American newspapers: The Washington Post, The New York Times, and The Los Angeles Times. The analysis found considerable differences in the American mainstream media's coverage of Israel's war on Gaza, revealing multiple violations of basic journalistic principles. The analysis revealed a consistent pattern in how these leading publications have covered key aspects of the ongoing Gaza war, such as disproportionate coverage of death, shifts in language and victimization, neglect of child and Palestinian journalist victims, and disparities in hate coverage in the United States.

Furthermore, Israel requires that all international journalists covering the war from Gaza be accompanied by Israeli military escorts and allow the military to review their materials and footage prior to publication, raising concerns about the independence and impartiality of the media coverage. (Zoran, 2023)

The media coverage of the conflict in Gaza and Israel has been varied, but there have been questions about the fairness and veracity of the coverage, particularly in the United Kingdom and the United States. Israeli narratives, perspectives, and concerns have received more media attention than Palestinian ones, frequently leading to the marginalization and

erasure of Palestinian rights. The coverage has also been condemned for utilizing emotive language for Israeli victims of violence but not for Palestinians, allowing Israel's spokespersons and fans to dehumanize Palestinians on air, and propagating false information and propaganda.

3.2- Shifts in media coverage of the war on Gaza

The media's portrayal of the Gaza war has changed over time, reflecting numerous biases and alterations in narrative. Initially, Western media coverage was closely aligned with the Israeli narrative, with journalists embedding themselves with the Israeli army and subscribing to military censorship and the official Israeli attitude. (Review, 2024)

This resulted in disproportionate coverage of mortality, language shifts favoring the Israeli side, ignoring of child and Palestinian journalist victims, and a disparity in coverage of hate crimes in the United States.

The media frequently employed emotionally charged terms and descriptions that favored the Israeli position, resulting in a biased depiction of the conflict. (Review, 2024)

As the crisis progressed, there were growing complaints about the fairness and accuracy of media coverage, particularly in the United Kingdom and the United States. Reports emphasized how pro-Palestinian views were misrepresented, and misinformation through deliberate omission was widespread in British media channels. (Harb, 2024)

The media frequently ignored the context of Israeli persecution of Palestinians and portrayed the conflict in a way that favored Israeli narratives, overlooking the decades-long occupation and brutality faced by Palestinians.

Additionally, the media's failure to offer thorough coverage of the situation in Gaza and the number of Palestinian casualties highlighted the skewed nature of the reporting. (Bernas, 2024)

The coverage of the Gaza war has been criticized for preserving colonial power, language, and ideologies. Western news agencies have been accused of undermining international institutions such as the United Nations and making Palestinian tales irrelevant. The media's role in justifying Israel's violations of international law and protecting it from scrutiny has been highlighted, exposing a pattern of selective reporting and glossing over bloodshed to fit the Israeli narrative. (Krishnan, 2024)

Overall, media coverage of the Gaza war has moved from initially supporting the Israeli perspective to being criticized for bias, misrepresentation of facts, and perpetuation of colonial myths. The trajectory of coverage reveals a complex interaction of political, social, and ethical factors that have influenced how the conflict has been portrayed in the media.

3.3- The distorted media image of the war in Gaza: The failure of the western speech-act against war on Gaza

Here are some examples of misleading media coverage of the Gaza war:

Disproportionate Death Coverage:

Major American publications such as The New York Times, The Washington Post, and The Los Angeles Times have a significantly higher frequency of references to "Israeli" or "Israel" than to "Palestinian" or its derivatives. Despite the fact that Palestinian casualties much outnumber Israeli casualties, each Palestinian death receives just one mention, while each Israeli death receives eight, resulting in a 16-fold increase in the number of references per death. (Mehdi, 2024)

Shifts in Language and Humanization of Victims:

The media coverage has been biased in favor of Israel, using emotionally charged language and descriptions. Terms such as "massacre," "slaughter," and "horrificing" are overused to describe Israeli actions, resulting in an emotionally imbalanced narrative that benefits Israel. For example, the term "slaughter" was used 60 times to describe operations on

October 7, compared to just one occasion in Gaza. Similarly, the phrase "massacre" was used with a ratio of 125:2, and the adjective "horrifying" was primarily reserved for Israeli casualties. (Mehdi, 2024)

Neglect of Child and Palestinian Journalist Victims:

The media has openly failed to mention Israeli crimes against children and Palestinian journalists. Despite an unprecedented number of confirmed child casualties in Gaza, around 10,000 youngsters, and a significant number of journalists slain or assassinated, the three newspapers reviewed paid little attention to the calamity that befell these two categories of citizens. (Mehdi, 2024)

Differences in Hate Coverage in the United States:

Major American newspapers report anti-Semitic incidents differently than they do crimes against Muslims. Despite a large increase in crimes against Muslims in the United States, they garnered less attention than offenses classified as anti-Semitic. The media coverage has displayed a bias in spotlighting specific hate crimes above others, contributing to a skewed depiction of events. (Krishnan, 2024)

3.4- Consequences of distorted media coverage of the war in Gaza

Some of the repercussions of misleading media coverage of the war in Gaza are:

Misrepresentation and undermining pro-Palestinian voices:

Distorted media coverage frequently misrepresents and denigrates pro-Palestinian voices, reinforcing negative stereotypes and undermining the credibility of genuine advocacy initiatives. This can discredit pro-Palestine activists and their cause, limiting their ability to raise awareness and campaign for justice. (Hanif, 2024)

Biased Framing of Events: Biased media coverage tends to favor "Israel's right" to defend itself, overshadowing Palestinian rights by a significant ratio. This biased framing distorts the portrayal of the conflict, reinforcing narratives that prioritize Israeli perspectives over Palestinian voices. Such biased framing can perpetuate a skewed understanding of the situation and contribute to the perpetuation of unjust power dynamics. (Hanif, 2024)

Emotive Language Disparities:

The use of emotive language that disproportionately highlights Israeli suffering while downplaying Palestinian casualties can shape public perception and sympathy. This disparity in language usage can influence how audiences perceive the conflict, leading to a lack of empathy and understanding towards the plight of Palestinians and reinforcing biased perspectives. (Hanif, 2024)

Undermining Objectivity and Fairness:

The systematic undermining of basic journalistic principles, such as objectivity, avoidance of bias, and adherence to standards of fairness and accuracy, erodes the credibility of media outlets. This erosion of journalistic integrity can lead to a loss of trust in the media and hinder the public's ability to access accurate and unbiased information about the war in Gaza. (Saad, 2014)

Misrepresentation of Pro-Palestinian Voices

Distorted media coverage frequently misrepresents and vilifies pro-Palestinian voices, reinforcing negative stereotypes and harming legitimate advocacy efforts. This can undermine the credibility of pro-Palestine activists and their cause, limiting their ability to raise awareness and campaign for justice. (Saad, 2014)

Feist (2001) asserted that the "CNN effect" reflects the effectiveness of television and imagery in conveying humanitarian crises to the audience. For Feist, images serve as a stimulus for policymakers, particularly in the United States, to intervene in ways that align with American interests. Similarly, Schorr (1998) noted that the impact of television imagery through breaking news can extend to altering foreign policy decisions. Conversely,

Livingston and Eachus (1995) emphasized that the influence of images in international relations can reach the point where decision-makers lose political control over the media. According to Seib (2002), the CNN effect encapsulates the dynamic tension between live television news and policymakers. Neuman (1996) expanded on this by addressing the impact of media coverage on initial intervention decisions as well as subsequent stages, including long-term deployment and withdrawal. Visual depictions of human suffering, broadcasted via television, evoke an emotional outcry from the public, compelling political leaders to take risks. Television can pressure policymakers to intervene militarily in humanitarian crises on the one hand, while on the other, it can force them to withdraw when military forces face casualties and humiliation. (Saad, 2014)

Researchers agree that the CNN effect on international relations is evident in the following points:

- **Impact of Geopolitical Changes:** Geopolitical transformations that emerged prominently reshaped global politics. These included the end of the Cold War, the absence of a strategic rival, and the shift to the war on terror, which left U.S. foreign policy more anxious and confused, particularly in New York and Washington after September 11. This resulted in wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and threats to combat any regime supporting terrorist organizations and movements.
- **Impact of Technological Advances:** Numerous studies have shown that the effectiveness of CNN in the 1990s was limited due to the high costs of covering humanitarian crises and dispatching correspondents to remote areas. Today, however, advancements in communication technology have significantly reduced the costs of covering distant locations.
- **Influence of Imagery on Intervention Decisions:** CNN has demonstrated the ability to influence intervention decisions and the resolution of military conflicts through its impact on political decision-making by policymakers.
- **Direct Effects of Media Coverage on Policymakers:** Research by several scholars has highlighted the triangular relationship between media coverage, public opinion, and policymakers, illustrating the direct impact of media on decision-making.
- **Global Imagery's Influence on Policymakers:** Visual representations affect policymakers' decisions in various fields, including economics, the environment, culture, health, and more.
- **Western Bias in Media Coverage:** Media coverage often reflects a Western bias, with significant attention and expressive imagery dedicated to political repression against pro-democracy movements in China, while neglecting to adequately depict massacres in the Balkans and human rights violations in Africa.
- **Impact on Journalists and Editors:** Global television networks can influence journalists' and editors' ideas and orientations. In many cases, journalists are pressured to send images to television networks without verifying the adequacy and accuracy of the information for publication. (Hanif, 2024)

Conclusion

- The role of media imagery in shaping public perception and international relationships is profound, as demonstrated by the war on Gaza. The concept of image, long explored in academic literature, takes on a powerful function within media, where it acts as both a reflection and a construction of reality. In the media context, images are not neutral; they serve as perception makers, shaping how audiences understand conflicts, actors, and victims.

- The impact of media imagery on public opinion is particularly significant, as visual representation can either humanize or dehumanize subjects, influencing attitudes toward the "Other." Depending on how an image is framed, it can act as a catalyst for public awareness and empathy or, conversely, as a tool for reinforcing stereotypes, misinformation, and ideological divides. This dynamic is especially relevant in international relations, where Securitization Theory highlights how images contribute to framing threats, legitimizing policies, and shaping security narratives. The shift from language to imagery as a discursive act in the securitization process underscores the growing power of visuals in shaping political and security discourses.
- The war on Gaza exemplifies these dynamics, as foreign media coverage has shifted over time, reflecting changing political agendas and public sentiments. Distorted media portrayals have often influenced global reactions, reinforcing biased narratives while obscuring the lived realities of those affected by the conflict. The evolving role of media imagery in conflicts like Gaza underscores the need for critical media literacy, ensuring that audiences engage with visual narratives responsibly, question sources, and recognize the broader implications of mediated images.
- Ultimately, the power of media imagery extends beyond mere representation—it constructs perceptions, defines relationships, and influences international political outcomes. A critical and informed approach to visual media is essential in fostering a more just, ethical, and comprehensive understanding of global conflicts.

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