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# Deconstructing Narratives: An Analysis of Dehumanization Techniques in the U.S. Media Representation of Palestinians at the Onset of the War on Gaza

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## **Abstract**

This research critically examines the representation of Palestinians in the U.S. media, focusing on dehumanization techniques employed by The New York Times and The Washington Post during the initial seven weeks of the 2023 War on Gaza. Drawing on the Duplex Theory of Hate, and adopting a qualitative content analysis, the study investigates media techniques that contribute to the dehumanization of Palestinians. These included impersonality, emotional distance, hostile language, fear, and anger-inducing language, animalistic and mechanistic representation, consistent negative portraying, in addition to derogation and moral exclusion. Furthermore, notable differences exist in the way Israeli and Palestinian people are portrayed. Stories presenting Israelis frequently include details that humanize their experiences, while Palestinians are represented collectively and their hardships are downplayed or justified. These findings contribute to the existing literature on media bias in conflict reporting, highlighting how the U.S. media influences opinions and reinforces unbalanced power dynamics. The study calls for more objective and humane media coverage that upholds ethical standards and human dignity.

**Keywords:** Dehumanization, Media Representation, Palestinian Representation, Media Bias, Israeli Palestinian Conflict, Gaza War, Duplex Theory of Hate, U.S. Media, Hate Speech, Conflict reporting.

## Introduction

The war on Gaza, reignited in October 2023, has garnered global attention not only due to its political and humanitarian implications, but also regarding its representation in the media. Throughout conflicts, the media has always been instrumental in shaping public opinion, influencing political decisions or even affecting the dynamics of the conflict itself. Amidst this highly-tensed context, how the involved parties are portrayed, whether shown as human or dehumanized by media, can tilt sentiments, legitimize actions and potentially realign collective decisions made by international actors.

On October 7th, 2023, Hamas, short for Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya (Islamic Resistance Movement), and other Palestinian militant groups carried out a surprise attack on Israel, which resulted in 1,200 deaths and around 240 individuals being taken hostage. Immediately after the attack, Western leaders and institutions, followed by large Western media outlets rallied around Israel's defense, using the most gruesome accusation of terrorism against attackers of Israeli civilians. Doing this also involved circulating disinformation created by Israel, linking Hamas to "beheading babies" or "raping women", thus reinforcing the dangerous myth that is often used to depict Arab men as violent, hypersexualized creatures.

In response, Israel started what has been described as the deadliest war (based on daily death rate) ever seen in 21st century to date (Oxfam International, 2024). The Lancet medical journal reported on July 7th, 2024 that the death toll in Gaza had surpassed 186,000 since the start of the war, constituting approximately 7.9 percent of Gaza's population (Aldroubi & Tollast, 2024). These victims include those killed by bombings on homes, schools and hospitals; those who have died out of diseases exacerbated by war; hundreds of journalists and health care professionals murdered due to their professions; and those who died from starvation while facing harsh circumstances of displacement.

Also throughout this period, dehumanization was a recurring theme found in Israeli officials' statements concerning Palestinians. Gazan Palestinians were referred to as "human animals" by the Minister for Defense, Yoav Gallant (MEE Staff, 2023), Deputy Mayor Arie King branded them as 'subhuman' (The New Arab Staff, 2023), Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called Palestinian children "children of darkness" against whom should be compared "Israel's children of light" (The New Arab Staff, 2023). According to the Israeli President "there are no innocent citizens in Gaza" (MEE Staff, 2023).

Mainstream media coverage of this war in the West, including the U.S. media, has been criticized by lack of verification, often regurgitating falsified news or disinformation, excessive bias towards Israeli narratives, and framing the Israeli

war crimes as “self-defense”. Even in comparison to its age long pro-Israeli bias, the behavior of Western media during this period was appalling and grossly negligent, disregarding basic professional and ethical journalistic principles (Middle East Monitor, 2024). Such biased journalism turns mainstream media into a mouthpiece for Israeli military propaganda, thus enabling further dehumanization of Palestinians while legitimizing continued massacres (Tweissi, 2023). According to an editorial by the New Humanity Network, “Palestinians are depicted as less deserving of our sympathy because they are seen as less than human” (The New Humanitarian, 2023).

Through examining the representation of Palestinians during an active war in two globally recognized US media outlets, The New York Times and The Washington Post, this study aims to shed light on the powerful role of media narratives that dehumanize Palestinians in paving the way for a “clear-cut genocide” against them.

### **Problem statement**

Despite increasing scholarly attention to media framing in conflict zones, there remains a pressing need to interrogate how elite media narratives implicitly reproduce hierarchies of human worth during moments of intensified violence. The primary issue this study addresses is how mainstream U.S. media—specifically The New York Times and The Washington Post—employ specific techniques of dehumanization in their portrayal of Palestinians during the initial seven weeks of the 2023 war on Gaza. It also investigates the broader implications of such portrayals on public perception and the normalization of violence.

### **Research objectives**

- To analyze the specific dehumanization techniques employed in the representations of Palestinians in the New York Times and The Washington Post during the first seven weeks of the 2023 ongoing war on Gaza.
- To examine how language choices and narrative structures reflect or perpetuate forms of dehumanization against Palestinians.
- To explore the representation of Israeli and Palestinian actors within the same coverage and evaluate the use of differential personalization.
- To assess the ethical implications of these portrayals, particularly in light of international humanitarian law and media responsibility in conflict zones.

### Significance of the study

The significance of this study lies in providing critical insight into the role of Western media in influencing public understanding of major geopolitical conflicts. Considering all the research that has studied the media bias over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this study contributes to the literature by systematically dissecting the dehumanizing techniques employed by prominent U.S. newspapers while depicting Palestinians during the war on Gaza that started in October 2023.

The ethical and political implications of this research are just as significant as its academic contribution. Through in-depth analysis of dehumanization techniques in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*—two of the most influential U.S. outlets—the study provides a media literacy tool that enables readers, journalists, and scholars to critically examine how narratives of violence and suffering are created—and who they ultimately serve or silence. This focus also brings to light the call for more impartial, compassionate, and ethically responsible journalism during times of conflict.

### Dehumanization in Focus: Media Representations in Conflict and Crisis

Dehumanization is defined as denying others their full humanity and excluding them from the human species ((Bar-Tal, 2000; Haslam, 2006; Haslam, Loughnan, & Kashima, 2008). This extreme reaction towards different individuals or groups removes them from the moral considerations that typically regulate our interactions with others (Opatow, 1995). In his research “Dehumanization; An Integrated Review”, Haslam (2006) suggests two types of this concept which are animalistic and mechanistic dehumanization. Animalistic dehumanization rejects higher cognitive abilities and moral sensitivity by comparing individuals with animals, while mechanistic dehumanization denies qualities that define human nature such as emotional warmth or cognitive adaptability by likening individuals to objects or machines.

Prior studies have explored dehumanization through different specific dimensions. According to what Leyens et al., argue, one way of doing so is by denying outgroups’ ability to feel complex secondary emotions (Delgado, Rodríguez-Pérez, Vaes, Leyens, & Betancor, 2009; Leyens et al., 2000). People who are ‘infra-humanized’ can experience primary emotions, like pleasure or fear, but not those considered secondary emotions unique only to humans, such as hope or remorse, which are typical for animals too.

Another indicator of dehumanization was proposed by Schwartz et al. According to these authors’ views, we perceive other people’s humanity levels based on our judgment of their value systems versus whether they have managed “to go

beyond being merely an animal into becoming truly human” (Schwartz & Struch, p.155). This explains why some groups may be seen as less human if they lack certain prosocial values, such as equality, helpfulness, and forgiveness. Such values reflect an individual’s awareness of the importance of contributing to bettering other people’s welfare (Schwartz & Struch, p.155).

Some scholars include the ‘dehumanization’ in their definition of hate speech; Kovács et al. & Pasaribu defines hate speech as the language that attacks, dehumanizes or encourages violence or bias, against people or communities based on factors such as their race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation or other personal attributes (Kovács et al., 2021; Pasaribu, 2021). Other scholars classify ‘dehumanization’ as a form of hate speech, as they categorize hate speech into three levels: (1) ‘early warning,’ characterized by expressions of disagreement, negative traits, and unfavorable behavior; (2) dehumanization and demonization, involving language that degrades dignity by comparing individuals to animals, devils, or demons; and (3) violence and intent, where hate speech aims to incite violence and murder” (Fortuna et al., 2019; Mulki et al., 2019; Wich et al., 2020).

A significant body of research has highlighted the dehumanization of ‘the other’ by the media during conflicts and crisis times, with a noteworthy focus on Arabs and Muslims. Daoud Kuttub’s study titled “The media and Iraq: a blood bath for and gross dehumanization of Iraqis” examined how media coverage impacts public perception during times of conflict. Focusing specifically on media portrayals of Iraqis, the study suggests coverage often fails to humanize victims, instead reducing them to mere statistics. Kuttub also argues dehumanization is a common media pitfall when reporting on casualties in war zones, and is not unique to Iraq (Kuttub, 2007).

Similarly, Steuter, E., & Wills’s explored the Canadian newspapers coverage of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Their study demonstrated that during these conflicts, many Canadian papers used dehumanizing language, not only when referring to enemy leaders, but also towards Muslim-Arab citizens at large. According to them, such dehumanization involves likening foes to animals or diseases via metaphor thereby creating a perception of them being less than human — more like vermin or viruses that could be eliminated without remorse (Steuter & Wills, 2009).

In their study, “The Road to Slaughter”, Alqurainy, S. H., Hamed, A., & Abubakar, A. U. (2019) explored how ISIS used Twitter (now known as X) to spread messages that mentally prepare its members for violence. They mainly focused on

Arabic language campaigns executed from January 2014 to July 2018. The results revealed that ISIS constructed narratives to dehumanize their enemies and justify violence against them. This included defaming clerics who, in their view, violated the Islamic teachings. Importantly, the study emphasizes the significance of utilitarian justifications in garnering support for terrorist activities. Normative justifications were linked to political beliefs while utilitarian justifications involved weighing the benefits of cruelty, against its costs based on values.

Haji, McKeown, Matthews and Platten's (2021) research critically examined how media can either encourage trust or foster distrust and dehumanization, applying on the representations of Muslims in UK Newspapers during two crucial periods: immediately after the 7/7 London bombings that occurred in 2005 and ten years later, on the anniversary of these bombings. The researchers who analyzed articles from two newspapers with divergent political leanings; namely right-leaning Daily Mail and left-leaning Guardian found that in both newspapers, there were significantly more dehumanizing and distrusting narratives than humanizing and trusting ones. Nevertheless, this was more pronounced in the Daily Mail where dehumanization and a lack of trust were particularly evident. According to their arguments, the dehumanizing portrayal of Muslims by British media has far-reaching consequences on public perceptions, social bonds and intergroup trust.

A particularly striking doctoral dissertation takes a critical step further in highlighting the media's role in dehumanizing opponents and contributing to the horrifying reality of genocide. In this dissertation, Jorgensen, C. (2016) analyzed the impact of dehumanization on the tragic genocides that occurred in Rwanda, where approximately 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were killed in 1994, and Darfur, Sudan where 450,000 lives have been lost since 2004. According to the study, dehumanization was not simply psychological, but was deeply embedded into structural violence and political strategies adopted by different regimes. This study details some of the mechanisms for dehumanization used in Darfur, most importantly, the racial superiority and derogatory terms promoted by the militias (Janjaweed) leading to systematic dehumanization of Fur, Zaghawa and Masalit ethnic groups (Jorgensen, 2023).

The immigration crisis that followed the Arab uprisings inevitably led to a significant increase of international media coverage of refugees who escaped their countries, shaping public perceptions through their depictions. Gema Alcaraz-Mármol and Jorge Soto-Almela's study "Refugees' Dehumanization in the Spanish Media: A Corpus-Assisted Study through the Semantic Preference Framework" showed how Spanish media construct dehumanizing representations



about refugees from its news articles. The researchers discovered derogatory collocates of the term “refugiado” by looking at 1.8 million words of *El Mundo* and *El País*. During 2010-2016, references like numbers or quantities (quantification), things or objects (objectification), money (economic burden) and wildness or disorderliness (out-of-control phenomena) were most frequent when discussing refugees due to Syrian civil war and other Middle-Eastern conflicts. The analysis shows that representing refugees as “problems” or “numbers” can trigger social biasness and political rhetoric.

In the same light, David M. Markowitz and Paul Slovic’s study “Why we dehumanize illegal immigrants: A US mixed-methods study” delves into factors behind the dehumanization of illegal immigrants and how particular survey measurement formats affect ratings on dehumanization. To investigate these phenomena, the authors used a mixed-methods approach involving 672 participants. The researchers tested three main hypotheses: The less than human hypothesis, the virtuous violence hypothesis, and the affect heuristic hypothesis. According to the less than human hypothesis, people consider immigrant communities as inferior or less human beings. Virtuous violence theory further asserts that individuals remove humanity from migrants in order to justify punishment against them by labeling it morally right. On top of that, affect heuristic hypothesis reveals that feelings and emotions towards immigrants are vital for their dehumanization. The study also pointed out that demographic, psychological and social factors influence perceptions of other groups as less human or valuable than their own group, such as perceiving outsiders as a threat, believing that they are more primitive, and belong to conservative political beliefs.

Another research by Aristeia Protonotariou and Charalampos Tsitlakidis - Charisiadis investigated the portrayal of refugees and migrants within a wide range of media outlets which represent different political ideologies and readership demographics, namely *The Guardian* and *The Daily Mail* from UK, *The German Bild*, *The French Le Monde* and *Kathimerini* from Greece. According to their content analysis, most media outlets use language that highlights crisis, threat and burden when reporting about migrants or refugees; they frequently refer to them as “illegal aliens,” “invaders” and the narrative often revolved around an “invasion.” Such descriptions dehumanize these people by treating them all like dangerous outsiders who share nothing other than fleeing from persecution and seeking safety.

Moreover, it was discovered that negative representations correlate with increased public antipathy toward asylum seekers: surveys conducted during this research project indicate that individuals exposed to hostile portrayals harbored



higher levels of xenophobic views and were more likely to support stricter immigration controls. Additionally, media portrayals may influence how political actions are perceived (particularly their legitimacy) – those backed up by ‘bad press’ tend to justify harsher policies against migrants/refugees.

Interestingly enough, after analyzing over 2500 news images, and comparing the portrayal of Afghani and Ukrainian refugees in the media of the UK, US and China, Xu and Zhang (2023) uncovered notable variations in visual framings of both parties. The study revealed that Western media (UK and US) often depicts Ukrainian refugees as victims deserving of compassion and support. On the hand, Afghan refugees are typically framed through lenses of politics, legality and security, highlighting issues of massification and perceived threats. In contrast, Chinese media frequently employ framing for both crises focusing on vulnerability without emphasizing aspects like compassion or unity.

The authors of all four aforementioned studies converged on a common recommendation, which is a more in-depth coverage, and more compassionate language used in reporting on displaced people, in order to counteract widespread dehumanization and better serve truth and accountability.

### **The Representation of Palestinians in Western Media**

Despite the valuable insights from prior research, exploring the media representations of Palestinians remains crucial, given the prolonged Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with Israelis holding a significant influence over international media narratives.

An early study by Greg Philo and Mike Berry (2004) titled “Bad News from Israel,” the researchers analyzed around 200 news programs and interviewed over 800 people to reveal that quoting Israelis more than twice as often as Palestinians in BBC One and ITV News, coupled with the differential language used to describe the deeds and causalities of each side tended to influence the viewers’ understanding of the conflict in favor of Israel. Many viewers confirmed limited awareness of the historical context, including the Palestinian displacement in 1948 and the subsequent Israeli military occupation of Palestinian territories in 1967.

Almost 20 years later, Jamila Owais critically analyzed the Canadian media portrayal of Palestinians that is primarily in the context of conflict and suffering, reinforcing a simplistic, constant representation of Palestinian people as victims or targets of oppression. The article specifically the prevalence of dehumanization in the media coverage of the October 7<sup>th</sup> War on Gaza, as their deaths are presented in aggregate numbers, ignoring personal experiences and humanizing details. This approach reflects broader issues of negative stereotyping and accusations

of violent actions that ‘implicitly justifies’ the rigorous military responses from Israel (Owais, 2023).

A quantitative analysis conducted by The Intercept, following the eruption of the Gaza war in 2023, looked into how Palestinians were depicted in the U.S. newspapers during the first six weeks of Israel’s war on Gaza to uncover a clear bias in how Israelis and Palestinians were presented in the media. The research examined more than 1,000 articles from The New York Times, The Washington Post and The Los Angeles Times. It found that for every two Palestinian deaths mentioned, Israeli deaths were discussed eight times, resulting in Israelis receiving 16 times more media coverage per death compared to Palestinians. Additionally, emotive language was used when describing Israeli casualties while downplaying the number of Palestinian fatalities and the rise of anti-Muslim prejudice following the October 7, 2023 escalation. On the contrary, incidents of antisemitism in the U.S. received extensive coverage (Johnson & Ali, 2024).

Deprez (2023) study shed light on an aspect that hasn’t always been thoroughly explored in researching representation; the portrayal of refugees through the concept of necro-politics. Necro-politics, a term coined by Achille Mbembe delves into the power structures that dictate who gets to survive and who must die. The study focuses on how media representations of refugees are shaped and reinforced by these dynamics, ultimately contributing to the dehumanization of refugees.

The author tackles how global distribution telegenic images showing suffering and dying Palestinians have been prevented, through inflicting bodily harm, whether by means like strategic blinding with a laser pointer or intentional shooting through head area, without causing death by Israeli forces. He further discusses control over funerals through holding back the dead bodies of killed Palestinians, imposing strict burial restrictions, and preventing public mourning. This aimed at reducing visibility through international media, hence controlling perceptions about conflict where Palestinians are depicted as sub-humans who cannot feel pain nor die according to human beings’ standards.

The literature also delved into the persistent and disturbing bias in Western media’s portrayal of Palestinian men compared to women and children. Maya Mikdashi’s 2014 article, “Can Palestinian Men be Victims?” sheds light on this issue by pointing out how Western media tends to treat women and children differently from men when it comes to mourning their losses. This gendered, orientalist narrative fails to acknowledge men as victims often downplaying or even justifying their deaths (Mikdashi, 2023).

Barnett (2023) argues that the U.S. media have long portrayed Arab and Palestinian men as bloodthirsty and sexually violent ‘others’ especially since the 9/11 attacks. This portrayal helps Israel and the U.S. justify killing or ethnically cleansing all Palestinian men because, in their logic of dehumanization, all Palestinian men are terrorists.

Additionally, Margherita Cordellini’s article featured in the Berkeley Political Review (2024) underscores how this gendered bias is reflected in the coverage of casualties, in the ongoing (2023) war on Gaza. Western media often focuses on the number of women and children killed, overshadowing the deaths of men. Cordellini suggests that the selective mourning practice reinforces the dehumanization of men by depicting them as dangerous. The concept of “women and children” as first introduced by Cynthia Enloe lumps them together as a group while also implying that male Palestinians, young boys could pose future threats (Cordellini, 2024; Enloe, 1990). Consequently, the deaths of men are under-reported or framed as ‘normal’, perpetuating their dehumanization and supporting a narrative that rationalizes violence against them.

In this discussion, recent instances have also contributed to the continued dehumanization and unequal treatment of men in media, creating a view of Palestinian men as violent misogynists at best and dangerous predatory rapists and murderers at worst. A notable example is the interview conducted by TalkTV host Julia Hartley Brewer with Palestinian lawmaker Dr. Mustafa Barghouti. Hartley Brewers disrespectfully accused Barghouti of misogyny for interrupting her, saying: “Maybe you’re not used to women talking,” (Middle East Eye, 2024). Likewise, the story of Palestinian journalist Ahmed Alnaouq, who tragically lost 21 family members in an airstrike, illustrates how the sorrow and frustration of men are often marginalized in Western media. Despite being given a platform to share his experience, Alnaouq was swiftly steered towards discussing the actions of Hamas showing a biased narrative prevalent, in media coverage (TalkTV, 2023).

Other poignant instances are the widely circulated yet unfounded allegations against Hamas fighters during the October 7, 2023 attacks on Israelis. Initial reports accused them of ‘beheading babies and raping women’, which were rapidly amplified by influential Western media outlets, such as CNN, France24, and The Independent, and political figures including President Joe Biden (Swann, 2023). These allegations were subsequently debunked by thorough investigations conducted by numerous sources like the Associated Press, TRT World, and Haaretz, revealing how such falsified information was exploited for political benefits through demonizing Hamas fighters, and swaying sentiment to accept or back IDF’s violence against all Palestinians under the label of ‘self-defense’ (Goldenberg & Frankel 2024; TRT World, 2024; Haaretz, 2024).

In contrast, documented violations against Palestinian men rarely make headlines in the same mainstream Western media outlets. A study by Daniel J.N. Weishut in 2015 uncovered 'systemic sexual torture of Palestinian men by Israeli security forces,' highlighting a serious bias in media coverage of these occurrences that skew public's perception of the conflict (Weishut, 2015). A UN Report on the conditions of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons on the occasion of Palestinian Prisoners' Day in 2015 exposed that they were denied their basic rights, like family visits and proper medical care- fact that often overlooked by Western media (United Nations, 2015). This issue was revisited in 2023 by The New Arab that published about the "800,000 detainees" who live in dire conditions (Asi, 2023).

Furthermore, since October 7 attacks, numerous testimonials have emerged detailing torture and abuse inflicted upon Palestinian men and boys. Euro Med Human Rights Monitor shed light on Israeli soldiers' cruel treatment against Palestinians during home raids, forced evacuations and detentions in Gaza Strip, events that are also noticeably absent from Western media narratives (ReliefWeb, 2024). The discrepancy between sensationalized reports of violence and underreported instances of abuses Palestinian men suffer showcases a significant ethical failure in media coverage.

Studies also pointed out to several attempts from Palestinians to rehumanize themselves in media. Lloyd (2017) highlighted how, during the 2014 conflict, groups like 'Humanize Palestine' sought to acknowledge and honor the lives lost, distinct from reporting death tolls as some media outlets did. The project 'Humanize Palestine' aimed to bring the humanity often erased when Palestinians are reduced to numbers and casualties. By giving names to those who died, they aimed to make people see them as individuals of mourning than faceless statistics.

Another study by Heywood, E. & Goodman, S. (2019) delved into the strategies used by Palestinian students in the West Bank to challenge how Palestinians are portrayed in the media, specifically in the context of Israeli Palestinian conflict, and reaffirm their humanity. Such strategies discussed through focus groups included, clearly labeling Palestinians as 'humans' in the media, disputing depictions that devalue their humanity, and humanizing their perceived enemies 'Israelis' through focusing on shared human traits and distinguishing the inhumane Israeli government from its citizens. The study underscores the role of language in spreading dehumanization and in combating it, highlighting how marginalized groups can use discourse to assert themselves and reclaim their humanity amidst conflict narratives.

### Research Questions

Based on the problem statement and primary objective of the study, the following research questions were formed:

1. How are Palestinians represented in “The New York Times” and “The Washington Post” at the onset of the war on Gaza, specifically from October 7th to November 30th, 2023?
2. What specific dehumanization techniques employed to portray Palestinians in The New York Times and The Washington Post, and what is the prevalence and intensity of these techniques?
3. How do The New York Times and The Washington Post differ in their personalization of Israeli and Palestinian individuals,, and what impact does this differential personalization have on the narrative and public understanding of the conflict?
4. How do the selected newspapers discuss allegations of human rights violations and genocide in their coverage of the war?

### Theoretical Framework: The Duplex Theory of Hate

Sternberg’s Duplex Theory of Hate developed in 2003 offers a comprehensive framework, for comprehending the mechanisms and roots of dehumanization serving as a suitable theoretical foundation for this study. According to this theory, hate is comprised of three primary elements: negation of intimacy, passion, and decision-commitment. Negation of intimacy involves establishing distance between the ingroup and the targeted-out group by portraying the latter as less than human or devoid of humanity, incapable of experiencing or showing warmth, empathy or respect. Passion manifests through intense negative emotions like anger and fear triggered by perceived threats. Commitment to Disparage includes processes that devalue and belittle the targeted group reinforcing lasting attitudes of disdain and animosity (Sternberg, 2003).

Sternberg (2003) developed his theory based on Allports (1954) definition of hate as a dislike or aggressive feelings, towards a person or group. Fromm (1973/1992) differentiated between ‘reason-based’ hate and ‘character-conditioned’ hate, the latter being more perilous and involves singling out groups as targets of hatred and aggression.

Applying the Duplex Theory of Hate to massacres, genocide and terrorism offers a framework to comprehend the mechanisms underlying these extreme acts of violence. The theory suggests that the three components of hate interact to create a motivational drive that can propel individuals and groups towards committing acts of terrorism and genocide (Sternberg & Sternberg 2008). For example,

the theory explains the motivations of Mohamed Atta, the mastermind, behind the events of September 11. It pointed out his aversion to culture (rejecting intimacy) feelings of anger and fear towards Western influence (passion) and a strong dedication to his cause (commitment). Similarly, the Khmer Rouge's genocide in Cambodia was fueled by how the regime dehumanized their enemies and fostered an environment of fear and suspicion within society.

Naimark (2001) tackled into the concept of hate as a driver behind mass violence deliberately nurtured and molded to achieve objectives. This "flame of animosity" can spark acts of terrorism, massacres and genocides fueled by propaganda that stoke hatred that culminates in violence or rationalizes acts against targeted groups.

Governments, individuals and organizations frequently employ established tactics to fuel animosity and establish an atmosphere conducive to violence and genocide. Such hate propaganda typically serves three purposes; distancing oneself emotionally from the entity, generating emotions and fostering unwavering belief, in false ideologies by implanting flawed assumptions and undermining people's critical thinking skills (Zajonc, 2000). These narratives often center on themes that accentuate differences and dehumanize the group by portraying them as outsiders, impure beings, manipulators or corrupt individuals, justifying hate and violence against them.

Historical instances offer insights into how planned and sustained propaganda efforts have culminated in violence and genocide; scholars have emphasized that the tragedies of Holocaust, Rwandan genocide, and the mass killing in Iraq were not eruptions of violence. These tragedies rather meticulously orchestrated through the prolonged dissemination of hate fueled propaganda, a key element in the dehumanization process – a critical stage in the path towards genocide (Stanton, 1996). Nazi propaganda portrayed Jews as "pests", "rats", and existential dangers to the race rationalizing their extermination (Naimark, 2001; Inbar, and Shamir, 2014). Likewise in Rwanda, the Hutu majority was encouraged through radio broadcasts to slaughter Tutsis by dehumanizing them as "cockroaches" (Gourevitch, 1998). In Iraq, America's claims about the presence of weapons of mass destruction, an existential threat to civilization and modernity, led to the killing of one million Iraqis.

In the same light, Hanif (2021) highlighted a phenomenon identified by researchers in the United States as "presumptively antisemitic", illustrating how Islamophobic stereotypes are used to fuel accusations of antisemitism. This narrative allows certain media platforms to shift blame onto Palestinians depicting their actions as efforts to "purge the land of Jews" (Hanif, 2021). Recently, the repetitive portrayal of Palestinians as 'bloodthirsty monsters' and 'subhuman creatures' fuels pervasive anti-Palestinian prejudice (Zine, 2023).

In studies on genocide, dehumanization – both direct and subtle – is recognized as a crucial step towards mass violence; it enables actions in the present while also rationalizing and downplaying violence after it occurs, through preparing public opinion to accept mass atrocities, including genocide (Haslam, 2019). The huge proliferation of means of communication amplified the possibility of dehumanizing entire groups of people on an unprecedented scale on an unprecedented scale (Matulewska & Gwiazdowicz, 2021).

The Duplex Theory of Hate proves relevant in analyzing how the U.S. Media depicts Palestinians during the Gaza conflict as it provides a framework for understanding the construction and dissemination of hate narratives. This theory facilitates an in-depth examination of the techniques employed in media narratives to achieve dehumanization. By applying this theory, the research can methodically analyze how media outlets, such as The New York Times and The Washington Post, use these techniques, aiding in a grasp of the media's role in shaping public opinion and the promoting hate.

## **Methodological procedures**

### **Research Design**

This study adopts a qualitative content analysis approach to examine media representations of Palestinians in The New York Times and The Washington Post during the first seven weeks of the ongoing war on Gaza. The researcher aim was to identify and analyze the prevalence and intensity of dehumanization techniques employed, framed within Sternberg's Duplex Theory of Hate. This approach allows for a systematic assessment of both overt and subtle forms of dehumanization in the chosen US media outlets.

### **Sample Selection and Rationale**

#### **Sample Description**

This study inclusively analyzed various forms of content—news stories, reports, investigations, feature stories and opinion pieces—published by The New York Times and The Washington Post websites from October 7 to November 30, 2023. “Guest essays” and “Letters to the editor” were the only pieces excluded, as focusing on staff-written articles, which typically undergo more rigorous editorial processes compared to guest essays, help better analyze mainstream media narratives and how professional journalists represent Palestinians and frame the issues surrounding them.

The period chosen captures the first seven weeks of the War on Gaza, starting with the Hamas-led attacks and concluding with the weeklong truce



that facilitated hostage exchanges. The breadth of content types guarantees a comprehensive evaluation of the narratives surrounding the conflict (Lacy, Watson, & Riffe, 1996).

### Reasons for Sample Selection

**Time Frame:** The designated timeframe is critical as it allows for an examination of the immediate and evolving responses of these newspapers, and the dehumanization techniques employed during the escalation of violence post October 7<sup>th</sup> attacks, which can have long- lasting effects on public opinion and policy decisions (Herman & Chomsky, 2002).

**Choice of Newspapers:** The New York Times and The Washington Post were chosen for their global reach, wide readership and distinct political alignments. The New York Times is recognized for its readership and reputation for shaping global news agendas, with its articles frequently referenced by media outlets worldwide. Similarly, The Washington Post enjoys a substantial international presence, particularly in political reporting and contributing to global discussions on key issues. Moreover, analyzing The New York Times, generally leaning center-left and The Washington Post often perceived as center-right, allows a more comprehensive examination of how Palestinians are represented across the American press spectrum.

### Data Collection

The articles for analysis were selected based on their relevance to the War on Gaza, focusing on those featuring or depicting Palestinian individuals or groups. Articles were sourced from online archives of The New York Times and The Washington Post using the following keywords: 'Palestinians,' 'Gaza,' 'Gazans,' 'Israel,' 'Gaza war,' 'hostages,' ' Hamas,' 'October 7,' and 'truce'. Each article was recorded with its title, author, date of publication, and URL for referencing and retrieval.

### Coding Process

The analysis was conducted using a coding sheet that was developed specifically for this study. The coding sheet includes predefined categories and subcategories based on Sternberg's theory of Hate, alongside definitions, for evaluating the presence and intensity for each dehumanization technique;

The coding will utilize a scale of 0-3 (**0 = Not Present:** No instances observed, **1 = Slightly Present:** Indirectly or subtly mentioned, **2 = Moderately Present:** Clearly mentioned more than once, **3 = Highly Present:** A dominant feature or repeatedly emphasized).

A. Negation of Intimacy was assessed through subcategories of impersonality and emotional distance. Impersonality captured instances where Palestinians were referred to impersonally or as statistics without personal stories. Emotional distance pointed out descriptions that seemed distant or indifferent lacking any emotional connection. Instances of animalistic or mechanistic representation, as well as words and phrases that provoked repulsion and disgust were also recorded, and their possible effect on dehumanizing Palestinians was examined.

B. Passion included subcategories like hostile language, fear-inducing language, and anger and disgust. Hostile language documented words or phrases that communicated animosity towards Palestinians, like “terrorists” or “extremists.” Fear-inducing language noted phrases that depicted Palestinians as a threat, using terms like “dangerous” or “threatening” or directed anger towards them. Each instance of these types of language was meticulously documented, with attention paid to the surrounding context to grasp how they contributed to hate.

C. Commitment to Disparage involved examining how negative portrayals and derogatory remarks were made, along with instances of moral exclusion. Statements that undermined the dignity of Palestinians or justified causing harm to them were identified and their potential impact on public perception was discussed.

Additionally, the study examined differential detailing of individuals, by comparing the personalization depth between Palestinians and Israelis. This involved assessing the level of detail (such as names, ages, and occupations) provided for each group. The study also looked at stark differences in imagery used to depict Palestinians compared to Israelis.

An essential aspect examined was ethical framing, investigating how the media treated serious allegations like human rights abuses and genocide. Articles were scrutinized for their framing and its impact, on either reducing or intensifying dehumanization.

Every article was systematically analyzed by pinpointing sentences or paragraphs containing dehumanizing techniques. Observations were recorded on how these techniques could influence reader perceptions ensuring a nuanced comprehension and evaluation of how Palestinians were portrayed by “The New York Times” and “The Washington Post” in the given timeframe.

### **Inter-coder Reliability Assessment**

To assess intercoder reliability, I analyzed 10 percent of The New York Times articles (37 in total) well as 10 percent of The Washington Post articles (15 in total) following the established coding categories. Afterwards I cross

checked my findings with another researcher who independently coded the same set of articles to ensure consistency and accuracy in my results\*\*. We calculated inter-coder agreement using Krippendorff's alpha. The agreement score was found to be 0.76, indicating a substantial level of inter-coder reliability.

It's important to note that a larger sample size and/or engaging more than one independent coder for the task would've provided a stronger reliability assessment.

## Results

### Descriptive Findings

The descriptive analysis highlights the extent and intensity of dehumanization techniques employed by The New York Times and The Washington Post in their representation of Palestinians during the initial seven weeks of the ongoing war on Gaza.

The New York Times exhibited a significant presence of dehumanization techniques, with impersonality being the most frequently noted. This technique had a high presence (score of 3) in 21 instances and a moderate presence (score of 2) in 149 instances. Emotional Distance followed closely, with moderate presence in 123 cases and a high presence in 65 cases. Both techniques reinforced the narrative of detachment in the representation of Palestinians.

Fear-inducing language and anger were also prominently employed, with high scores in 96 instances and moderate presence in 80, suggesting a significant use of language that promotes fear and anger. Hostile language was prevalent as well, with a high presence in 61 cases and a moderate presence in 74, highlighting a consistent pattern of antagonistic rhetoric.

Consistency of negative portrayal showed a high score in 83 instances, reflecting a persistent negative depiction of Palestinians. Additionally, derogation and moral exclusion were highly present in 84 instances, emphasizing exclusionary and morally dismissive narratives. Techniques such as repulsion and disgust were scored highly in 31 instances, further illustrating the negative framing of Palestinians.

In The Washington Post, dehumanization techniques were also widely observed, even though with some differences in intensity compared to The New York Times. Impersonality was highly present in 32 instances and moderately present in 47, indicating a similarly detached style of reporting. Emotional distance was moderately observed in 41 cases and highly present in 38 cases, continuing the theme of emotional detachment.

Fear-inducing language and anger scored high in 30 cases and moderate in another 30, reflecting a consistent use of panic-provoking language. Hostile language had a more evenly distributed presence, with 22 instances each scoring moderate and high, suggesting a slightly less intense but still a considerable use of hostile rhetoric compared to The New York Times.

Consistency of negative portrayal was notable, with a moderate and a high presence in 63 and 33 cases, respectively, demonstrating a strong negative portrayal pattern. Derogation and moral exclusion were frequently observed, with a high presence in 26 cases, emphasizing exclusion and negative framing of Palestinians.

Overall, the data from both outlets emphasize a significant application of dehumanization techniques, with The New York Times showing a slightly more intense use of hostile and fear-inducing language, while The Washington Post maintained a balanced but still considerable presence of these techniques.

The New York Times exhibited significant differential detailing of individuals between Palestinians and Israelis. Out of the instances analyzed, 154 articles provided detailed personal information about Israelis, while only 32 articles offered similar details for Palestinians. This stark difference highlights a tendency to humanize Israelis more frequently than Palestinians through personalized storytelling.

The Washington Post also demonstrated differential detailing of individuals, though with slightly different patterns. In 81 articles, detailed personal information was provided for Israelis, compared to just 29 articles that for Palestinians.

Regarding visual representation, an apparent disparity was observed from the analysis of 281 photos and videos from The New York Times and 120 photos and videos from The Washington Post, highlighting differences in the nature of the imagery used for Israelis and Palestinians. However, 166 instances in The New York Times and 36 in The Washington Post did not show significant differences.

A further analysis of ethical framing looked at how the media covered human rights violations against Palestinians. In The New York Times, just 49 out of 371 articles (13.2%) exhibited clear ethical framing, leaving a significant majority of 322 articles without serious condemnation of abuses practiced towards Palestinians. For The Washington Post, only 29 out of 155 articles (18.75%) tackled Israeli breaches of human rights, while 126 articles did not.

## Qualitative Findings

### A. Negation of Intimacy

One of the most prevalent dehumanization techniques found in both The New York Times and The Washington Post during the first seven weeks of the war on Gaza is the **impersonality**. This technique eliminates personal information in favor of broad, generic terminology that dehumanizes people and reduces them to numbers.

Palestinians are commonly presented en masse, using phrases like “scores of civilians killed in airstrikes”, “thousands displaced”, “hundreds dead in a hospital bombing,” or “An Israeli airstrike hit near the entrance of Al Shifa Hospital in Gaza City on Friday killing multiple people.” Such people are rendered nameless and faceless, their identities reduced to mere statistics in a much larger narrative. Their suffering is acknowledged, but it is tackled as a collective experience, rather than through personal stories that would evoke the readers’ empathy.

The articles tend to focus heavily on military operations, highlighting the Israeli political or military objectives for these acts. The Washington Post, for instance, reported on an airstrike in which “Five Israeli airstrikes ripped through the marketplace in the Jabaliya refugee camp,” focusing on the scale of damage without sharing stories of those impacted. The suffering of the people during a tragic experience was also minimized in a New York Times report on the Gaza displacement crisis, which stated that “six days of Israeli airstrikes have left more than 300,000 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip homeless.” The report placed the incident within the frame of political decisions and logistical difficulties, minimizing the human suffering to a “humanitarian cost” of the conflict.

One New York Times headline that is particularly impersonalized and degrading is “A Disfigured Woman Whose Case Has Become Well-Known is Among the Palestinians Released.” This headline reduces Israa Jaabees’ identity to her physical deformity. Her humanity is overshadowed by the focus on her disfigurement, and her name is also missing from the headline, depriving her of her identification and making her seem more like an anonymous character than a real person with a name, history, and backstory. The headline is even more dehumanizing given that her disfigurement was the consequence of years of detention and abuse in Israeli prisons.

The **Emotional distance technique** was also found to be instrumental in the dehumanization of the Palestinians. A clear manifestation of emotional distance in both news websites is **the clear disparity in language use**. Highly-emotive terms such as “slaughter”, ‘massacre’, ‘terrorism’, ‘assault’, and ‘murder’ were exclusively used to describe Hamas attacks on Israelis during

the October 7. In contrast, Palestinian deaths were referred to in more passive or neutral terms; for instance, the bombings of Al-Ahli and Al-Shifa hospitals were described as “explosions” and “blasts”.

One typical headline from the New York Times about the October 7 attack reads, “They Ran into a Bomb Shelter for Safety. Instead, They Were Slaughtered,” highlighting how viciously Israeli civilians were attacked. Similarly, a headline in the Washington Post highlights the emotionally charged content of the videos by Hamas detainees by calling them “cruel, manipulative, and revealing”. Another report published on October 8, 2023 explored “How a night of dancing and revelry in Israel turned into a massacre,” using harsh language to recount the tragic events.

On the other hand, the emotional terms are notably absent when reporting on the deaths of Palestinians. In a story about how Israel’s siege and bombing had killed one in 200 Palestinians in the first month of the war, neither “massacre” nor similarly strong terms were used to describe the killing. Subsequent Israeli attacks on hospitals, mosques, refugee camps, schools, and churches which resulted in significant civilian casualties were described as ‘military actions’, ‘military campaigns’ or ‘airstrikes’.

The emotional distance is further reinforced by the passive representation of Palestinian deaths. Israeli casualties are often described with active verbs, such as “killed” or “murdered,” while Palestinians simply “die” as a result of the unfortunate circumstances of the war.

**The imbalance in how the emotional and psychological impacts of the war are tackled** is evidence that both outlets are complicit in dehumanizing Palestinians. For example, The New York Times emphasizes experiences of the Israeli captives in the article titled “Freed Israeli hostages return to tragedy and joys,” underlining both the suffering and the hope for their release. On the other hand, headlines about malnutrition, misery, bombs suffered by Palestinian residents under the Israeli blockade, and others about pre-mature babies who among the thousands inside al-Shifa as Israeli troops close in, and doctors who had performed surgeries without anesthesia, are significantly less emotive.

Likewise, the selective framing of suffering in The Washington Post contributes to the perception that Israelis lives are more valuable and deserving of sympathy than Palestinian lives. In an article titled “Thin Rations, Heavy Bombing: Israel’s Hostages Start Sharing Their Stories”, it highlights the sufferings of Israeli hostages being in the center of a war. In another article titled “My Children Are Being Held Hostage by Hamas. Take Me to Gaza to See them,” it conveys an

Israeli mother's desperation and cry for help, which directly appeal to the reader's empathy. Meanwhile, Palestinian suffering, such as the widespread deprivation and use of starvation tactics during the war, while acknowledged, is not given equivalent, sensitive coverage in headlines, reinforcing emotional distance from the Palestinian experience.

**The factual and clinical tone when covering tragic events** is another form of the **emotional distance technique** employed by the both websites. In a report titled "Israel Gave Gazans another Four-Hour Window to Move South", The New York Times focuses on the operational aspects of the "Israeli military facilitating the movement of civilians", while briefly touches on the fear and reluctance of some Palestinians to evacuate. The Washington Post similarly maintains a detached tone when mentioning "three babies born premature who died as a direct result of the lack of electricity" without exploring the emotional toll on the families and medical staff. The use of the term "leveling" in the article "Israel's leveling of entire neighborhoods in Gaza" in the New York Times depersonalizes the suffering of the residents.

The dispassionate language extends to the captions accompanying emotionally charged images. In one New York Times article, a photo of a grieving woman and child mourning the loss of their loved ones is captioned: "The Hamas-run Gazan health ministry says Israeli strikes have killed more than 6,500 people. That number could not be independently verified." This focus on the political situation and casting doubt on the reported numbers obviously diverts the attention away from the human suffering depicted.

Reports on mass tragedies, like the 111 unidentified Palestinian dead buried in a mass grave in Khan Younis, follow the same emotional detachment pattern. The horrific event is reduced by the New York Times to a sterile process description rather than a time of shared sadness and suffering. Attention was drawn to the color of the bags and the logistics of transportation, overshadowing the significant human loss involved.

In coverage of the temporary one-week ceasefire that took place on 24 November 2023, Israeli hostages are described in more sympathetic, humanizing terms. One sentence from The New York Times subtly reinforces the idea that Palestinian imprisonment is a norm, stating, "105 hostages were freed in exchange for the release of 240 Palestinians from Israeli jails." This perspective suggests that Palestinian detention was the standard rather than the outcome of the long-standing occupation, while empathizing with the plight of Israeli hostages. The selective empathy is also evident in a Washington Post headline that reads, "Negotiators push to extend pause in Gaza fighting as hostage return continues."



This implies that the negotiations are primarily motivated by the desire to secure the release of Israelis, minimizing the urgent need for a long ceasefire to address the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza.

The **Prioritization of Israel's Military Objectives over the Humanitarian Crisis and Loss of Palestinian Lives** further demonstrates the **emotional distance** in some opinion pieces. An instance of this can be seen in David Ignatius article, "A fraught battlespace awaits Israel after the pause." The article discussed the road to winning the war through dismantling Hamas influence and infrastructure, while reducing the agony of the Palestinian people to brief remarks like, "Israel will allow delivery of fuel and other essentials to Palestinians who have been battered during a war that devastated civilian areas of the Gaza Strip during the four-day pause." This chilled-blooded statement minimizes the scale of the humanitarian catastrophe and the psychological cost on Palestinians.

Similarly, in the article "Israel says it will end Hamas rule in Gaza as casualties soar," The New York Times prioritizes Israel's military goals over Palestinians lives lost at a "historic pace," as mentioned in an article by Lauren Leatherby, published by the same outlet on November 25, 2023. Another article by Thomas L. Friedman argues that Israel's is "acting this way" to counter Hamas, the force that is obstructing its strategic plans in the region, particularly normalizing relations with the Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia.

For some writers, the mass killing of Palestinians was discussed in terms of the harm it might inflict on Israel and U.S. political interests, rather than being unethical or inhumane. In The New York Times article "Why a Gaza Invasion and 'Once and for All' Thinking Are Wrong for Israel," Friedman claims that a Gaza invasion could "blow up the Abraham Accords, further destabilize two of America's most important allies (Egypt and Jordan), and make normalization with Saudi Arabia impossible — huge strategic setbacks." By the same token, The Washington Post article by David Ignatius, "A war that must be waged with an eye toward what comes after," raises the concern that excessive civilian deaths hinder Israel's goal to negotiate future peace agreements.

One of the less frequently employed dehumanization strategies in The New York Times and The Washington Post is the **Animalistic/Mechanistic Representation** of Palestinians, particularly Hamas militants. Both newspapers uncritically quoted Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant's reference to Palestinians as 'human animals,' and an Israeli soldier asking "With these animals?" when questioned by an Israeli activist about the possibility of peace. The term 'animals' reinforces the notion that these individuals are beyond moral redemption, making inhumane treatment against them acceptable.

The **Mechanistic Representation** of Palestinians often appears in the way they are described as passive tools or targets within the conflict; both newspapers reported that Hamas uses Shifa Hospital as a military command center, where patients are being used as ‘human shields’.

Throughout the coverage of the October 7th attack, both The New York Times and The Washington Post use disturbing, graphic descriptions to illustrate the violence committed by Hamas, which helped to provoke feelings of **repulsion and disgust**. Some reports describe the “bodies being ferried in earthmovers and mutilated corpses piled up by the entrance to towns,” others recall the “stench of death” in the aftermath of the attack in which “militants murdered anyone that they found.”

Accounts on how of how women, children and elderly were treated are also meant to stir revulsion. The New York Times shares a story about videos that reveal “brutalized young women, one of them naked,” while The Washington Post reported on Israel’s claims that Hamas employed rape as a “weapon of war”; it showed an incident where a woman was raped by two Palestinian militants before being shot in the head. It also included stories that emphasize the vulnerability of the captives, such as of a “9-year-old who spent his birthday in captivity, a 10-month-old baby, not yet eating solid foods, and an 85-year-old grandmother.”

Descriptions of the harm inflicted on hostages are another key element that evokes repulsion. For example, The Washington Post reported that the “hostages were held in “spiderwebs of damp tunnels,” ‘shirtless’, ‘immobile’, ‘beaten’, and ‘bloodied’. The use of such details reinforces the portrayal of their captors as cruel and inhumane.

The initial reports suggesting that Hamas militants were beheading babies after the October 7th incident were also mentioned by both the New York Times and The Washington Post. However, detailed investigations later revealed that there was no evidence to support these allegations. While admitting the lack of proof, neither publication criticized Israel for promoting these highly charged accusations, which contributed to demonizing Palestinians.

### **B. Passion**

Both The New York Times and The Washington Post used extremely **hostile language** to portray Hamas; they labelled the group as aggressive executors of dreadful war crimes, including rape, torture, and murder. Through such language, the newspapers reinforce the perception that Hamas militants are terrorists.

Terms like ‘evil’, ‘abhorrent’, ‘extremist’ and ‘cruel’ are used to describe Hamas’s actions, particularly the attack on October 7th. The New York Times recounted moments where individuals armed with guns acted like “crazy maniacs” as victims fell in succession.

In the article titled, “*Hamas Bears the Blame for Every Death in This War*”, the New York Times supports this idea by asserting that Hamas intentionally puts civilians at risk as ‘shields,’ triggering violent responses from Israel in return. This portrayal of Hamas as cunning and merciless deepens the view of them as an organization to sacrifice innocent lives for their agenda. Another article referred to Hamas’ ability to sustain conflict without help or resupply for up to three to four months – a group estimated to have 35,000 to 40,000 members– at a time when Palestinian civilians who are enduring hardship to access their basic needs. It’s noteworthy that there is no evidence of similar hostile language directed toward the Palestinian people.

In discussions of Israel’s military strategies, Hamas was referred to as a top priority for elimination; The language used includes phrases like “killing them” and “smash their strongholds” which convey the intensity of the military operations targeting Hamas, and “wiping them from the face of the Earth.”

Articles frequently compare between Hamas and other extremist groups, likening their violence to those of the Islamic State, and calling it ‘barbaric’ and ‘savage’ with New York Times stating that Hamas must have “butchered the people there all the same,” suggesting their actions are beyond reason and deliberately caused “the maximum amount of harm and brutality possible to civilians.”

Both publications use inflammatory language when reporting on Hamas October 7<sup>th</sup> attacks and the subsequent war. Through vivid descriptions of the fear experienced by the Israelis during the attack and their anticipation for additional attacks from Hamas, they contribute to more dehumanizing portrayals of the attackers. In a Washington Post article, for example, survivors share their emotions upon witnessing their loved ones being held captive and frantically shutting doors to block out the attackers. Similarly, The New York Times called the “the worst massacre of Jewish people since the Holocaust,” emphasizing the sheer inhumanity of the Palestinian militants who horrified civilians.

Descriptions of hostages being beaten, dragged, and tortured, and execution threats contribute to a sense of dread and anger toward their captors. Additionally, the focus on vulnerable groups among hostages, particularly children, appears purposed. The New York Times, for instance, describes how child hostages faced gun threats when they cried and were forced to stay silent, and how some of them witnessed their parents being murdered. It details how children are waking up shouting, “We’re going to die, we’re going to die,” emphasizing how traumatized they’ve become. The New York Times also focuses on the fear of families, particularly whose relatives suffer pre-existing medical conditions, and how their cases can deteriorate without their medications.

“Nerve-racking day of delays” and a “fragile deal” were The Washington Post’s descriptions for the negotiation days. Their emphasis on the uncertainty over the fate of the hostages also triggers feelings of anxiety among the audience.

Both newspapers also use fear-inducing language when tackling the broader strategic threat posed by Hamas. They draw parallels between the October 7th attack and historical incidents such as 9/11 and Pearl Harbor. This strengthens the portrayal of Hamas as brutal enemy that not only threatens Israel but also global security. They referred to tunnels filled with Hamas weapons and thousands of fighters. The potential for future assaults is also highlighted, with references to Hamas’s vow to carry out similar attacks with the goal of destroying Israel. The New York Times further underscores how Hamas has “has tunneled fear into many Israeli heads far from the Gaza border,” highlighting the psychological warfare being employed.

### C. Commitment to Disparage

The portrayal of both Palestinians and Hamas shows a **consistent pattern of negative portrayal** in both publications; Palestinians in Gaza are often represented even as passive individuals trapped in a disordered setting where they lack control over their circumstances, or aggressors associated with Hamas’s violence. Articles tend to highlight Palestinian suffering while downplaying their ability to influence the conflict dynamics, which subtly devalue their humanity.

The portrayal of Hamas is far more direct and constantly negative. Articles from both The New York Times and The Washington Post depicted Hamas as a violent, destructive force with no political legitimacy, focused solely on causing harm. For example, a New York Times article from November 10, 2023, states, “Hamas’s goal is only secondarily political. Fundamentally, it’s homicidal: to end Israel as a state by slaughtering every Jew within it.”

Hamas fighters are often referred to as “Hamas terrorists.” This focus on Hamas’s role as a ruthless enemy further distances it from any moral or political complexity, presenting them solely as violent aggressors.

The portrayal of Hamas as dangerous not only to Israelis but also to Palestinians is a consistent feature in the coverage. It even cites instances of Arab-Israeli citizens, such as paramedic Awad Darawsheh, being targeted by Hamas. The quote: ‘What national pride? What religion? The people who came to shoot and kill — they know nothing of religion’ further reinforces the arguments that Palestinians too, suffer because of what Hamas does. Other articles such as “Palestinian Driver at Israeli Music Festival Feared Taken Hostage by Hamas” and “Israel’s Hidden Victims: Arab Bedouins Were Attacked by Hamas Too” add evidence to this by suggesting that Hamas performs its activities against other third parties that are non-Jewish.

Several patterns of **derogation and moral exclusion** are apparent in how Palestinians and Hamas are represented in The New York Times and The Washington Post. Once a group is morally excluded, harm towards that group becomes justified or even essential.

**Decontextualization of the conflict and promoting the lie of Israeli self-defense** are found to be prominent tools for moral exclusion of Palestinians. Many reports from both publications, like most Western media outlets, frame the October 7, 2023, Hamas attacks on Israelis in Kfar Aza as ‘ground zero.’ They refrain from acknowledging the 75 years of occupation and violence against Palestinians that preceded it, including the Israeli blockade of Gaza since 2005. This biased narrative reinforces the perception of Palestinians as aggressors, which contributes to their exclusion from public empathy.

Additionally, the term “self-defense” has been frequently invoked to support Israel’s actions involving damage and casualties, among civilians, as unavoidable. Such approach positions Palestinians as bystanders in a necessary military campaign aimed at “neutralizing” Hamas. Articles stating that “Israel has continued to pound Gaza with punishing airstrikes” and “Israel’s retaliatory airstrike campaign,” strip Palestinian suffering of its historical and moral context, reducing their plight to collateral damage in Israel’s fight against terrorism.

Even when few articles in The Washington Post offer insights into the enduring conflict and trauma experienced by both parties involved in the conflict, such as “Between Israel and Gaza: A Deep History of Trauma and Violence” by Ishaan Tharoor, and Lisa Beyer’s “How Israel and the Palestinians Went From Peacemaking to War,” they still fall short of highlighting a critical aspect: Israel’s position, as an occupying power and the Palestinians’ justified resistance.

The Washington Post article titled, “The Media Navigates a War of Words for Reporting on Gaza and Israel” downplays the occupation by implying that the term “occupation” is controversial because Israel pulled out its troops and settlements from Gaza in 2005. Reducing the acknowledgment of occupation in media coverage of Israeli-Palestinian conflict raises concerns about whether Palestinians are still seen as having legitimate reasons to resist the Israeli occupation.

One significant means of derogation and moral exclusion involves **the accusation that Hamas utilizes hospitals, schools and places of worship, like churches and mosques for military purposes**. The narrative paints these locations as targets, for military strikes serving to dehumanize the Palestinian residents who occupy them. For example, in a report titled “Israeli Troops Scoured a Gaza Hospital for Signs of Hamas”, the term ‘scoured’ implies an intrusive military operation, framing the destruction as essential and righteous, regardless of its impact on innocent civilians.

Another report justifies the attack on the Greek Orthodox Church Compound in Gaza City on October 19, 2023, by its proximity to “terrorist hotbeds” in Shajaiye neighborhood. Similarly, the headline “Early U.S. and Israeli Intelligence Says Palestinian Group Caused Hospital Blast” primes readers to accept the complicity of a Palestinian group in killing Palestinians, supporting the notion that violence against Palestinians acceptable, in the name of terrorism efforts despite conflicting evidence being present.

Furthermore, headlines like “Infants Moved from ‘Death Zone’ Hospital That Israel Says Was Hamas Hideout” evoke a sense of danger, supporting the notion that any military action in these areas is required to protect civilians, particularly infants and other vulnerable groups. This narrative ignores the humanitarian effects on the larger Palestinian community in favor of portraying Israel’s military actions as protective, even sympathetic.

A notable matter found in media representation of Palestinians is the **lack of agency**; the separation between Hamas and the Palestinian people is often done in a way that deprives Palestinians of their agency to act independently or determine their own destinies. This framing suggests that most Palestinians, other than those associated with Hamas do not object to the occupation or Israeli actions and that their hardships primarily stem from Hamas’s rule and its misuse of resources — like allocating money for tunnel construction instead of prioritizing the well-being of the population.

Representing Palestinians as victims of Hamas’s actions, without acknowledging their role in resisting the occupation themselves, denies their agency and suggests their need for intervention from external powers to save them and shape their future. In Bobby Ghosh Washington Post’s article, “No, Palestinians Can’t Just Leave Gaza,” Palestinian people are portrayed as trapped not just by the siege but by Hamas as well. The reluctance of Palestinians to flee is attributed to both the physical dangers and the control Hamas exerts over their decision.

Another article titled, “There’s Only One Way Forward After Gaza” discusses the post-war Gaza future, where Palestinians can live peacefully ‘without Hamas’, suggesting that resolving the conflict hinges upon Israel’s willingness to embrace changes. This approach undermines the ability of Palestinians to take control over their future by suggesting that their political and social structures are only legitimate if they meet the standards set by U.S. and Israel.

**Skepticism about Palestinian Narratives and Sources** is another theme contributing to the moral exclusion and derogation of Palestinians. In a New York Times report that covered Al Ahli Arab Hospital bombing in Gaza, the phrase “Palestinian militants were most likely responsible” reflects and reinforces the

Western consensus favoring Israeli claims, while casting doubt on Palestinian accounts that accuse Israel of the bombing. The Times even apologized for initially relying on Palestinian Civil Defense information before later adopting the Israeli narrative without sufficiently verifying its accuracy.

Katie Robertson's article in the Washington Post "After Hospital Blast, Headlines Shift with Changing Claims" attributes the changing narratives to the difficulties media outlets face when trying in verifying reports in war zones. However, she fails to mention that Israel has been restricting the access of journalists to the Gaza strip since the beginning of the war, making it difficult to gather or verify accurate information. Patrick Kingsley confirms this in his article, "Israel Says It Has Destroyed a Tunnel Underneath Al-Shifa Hospital" in the New York Times, when he noted that journalists were not able to visit the site to independently assess Israel's claims of having destroyed a tunnel connected to Hamas.

This pattern extends to the reporting of death tolls from Gaza. Following the bombing of Al Ahly hospital on October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2023, onwards, both publications began to undermine the credibility of casualty figures released by the Gaza Health Ministry by labeling it as "Hamas-run/ Hamas-controlled." Even in an article covering the ministry's release of names of 6747 people killed in Israeli strikes, ages, genders, and ID numbers, the New York Times stated that "The Hamas-controlled Gaza Health Ministry read a statement about names they say killed," suggesting potential bias or unreliability. The skepticism around Palestinian casualty reports becomes a focal point, despite the validation of these numbers, by international organizations, including the United Nations.

Another tool to morally exclude Hamas was likening it to groups that are well-known to readers for their extreme acts of brutality, such as Nazis, Al Qaeda, or ISIS. The article, in The New York Times titled "Holocaust Survivors in Israel Faced Fresh Horror When Hamas Attacked" draws a parallel between Hamas and the Nazis by detailing the hardships faced by Holocaust survivors during the attacks on October 7<sup>th</sup>. A survivor in the article mentions how "On Oct. 7, Palestinian gunmen succeeded where even the Nazis could not." The Times also compares Hamas to Al Qaeda and ISIS in terms of effectively used media to advance their agenda. Such comparisons aim to distance them from any standards and legitimizing harsh military interventions against them.

Israeli military actions were compared in the Times to past U.S. wars, such as U.S. bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as battles in Falluja and Mosul, which resulted in huge toll of civilian deaths. This comparison suggests that Palestinian civilian deaths, like those in these historical conflicts, should be viewed as tragic but inevitable aspect of warfare.



One subtle yet powerful dehumanizing tactic that is employed in the articles is **‘un-childing Palestinian children’**. This term was coined by Professor Nadera Shalhoub Kevorkian; it involves the transformation and construction of “colonized children as dangerous others, enabling their eviction from the realm of childhood itself” (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2019). In other words, Palestinian children are classified as adults to justify violence committed against them.

In discussions of prisoners’ exchange during the temporary ceasefire, The Washington Post mentioned “Israeli children hostages” while describing Palestinian as “young people”. The New York Times also reinforced this differentiation when it mentioned “Palestinian women and minors” in contrast to “Israeli women and children” during a prisoner exchange report.

The act of ‘un-childing’ extends beyond mere semantics; it plays a role in portraying children as security detainees, justifying their detention and harsh treatment, and excluding them from full empathy and protection typically afforded to children.

### **Differential Detailing of Individuals:**

#### **• Individual Israeli Stories vs. Collective Palestinian Suffering**

The disparity in how Israeli and Palestinian individuals are portrayed in The New York Times and The Washington Post is indicative of a pattern of differential detailing that can influence reader’s perception of each group’s humanity. The focus of both publications on personalizing Israeli experiences, during and after the October 7th attacks, contrasting with their depiction of Palestinian suffering more collectively, with less attention given to their personal stories.

When covering Israeli experiences, the newspapers present in-depth, first-person accounts that humanize the individuals involved, making their stories more relatable to readers. Articles such as: “Israel’s Attackers Took about 240 Hostages. Here’s what to Know about Them” and “The Aftermath of the Hamas Attack: Portraits of Survivors,” provide a thorough and sympathetic description of the captives held by Hamas. They offer comprehensive information about the hostages’ names, ages, occupations, health conditions, familial histories and even hobbies, besides poignant insights into the trauma their families endure while awaiting their release.

This approach to detailing is consistent across all content covering the Israeli hostages, and is further highlighted by the Washington Post’s exclusive focus on covering the Israeli hostages during the hostages-detainees exchange, in addition to the Times daily coverages, like “Here’s What We Know About the Hostages Released on Monday,” and similar pieces published on subsequent days throughout the week.”

Further examples of this pattern are found in articles like “The Aftermath of the Hamas Attack: Portraits of Survivors,” which features stories of individuals who have been, through traumatic experiences of fear, hunger and illness, during captivity and the challenges they faced upon their release. Similarly, “A mom, her girls and festival-goers: The captives Hamas took to Gaza,” which highlights the emotional turmoil of hostages’ families. With rich descriptions of “civilians, soldiers, mothers, people with disabilities, children, grandparents, and peace activists,” each individual is humanized through their personal story.

In stark contrast, Palestinians are often portrayed in a more collective manner; placing less focus on personal narratives. For instance, in the article “240 Palestinians from Israeli Jails,” the Palestinian detainees,” the focus remains on the group as a whole without highlighting individual identities like names, backgrounds, or family ties. This standardized method diminishes the humanity of prisoners by portraying them as anonymous members of a larger group rather than as individuals with distinct narratives and life encounters.

Even when articles present details of Palestinians, the amount of information provided is noticeably lower in comparison to Israelis. For instance; in the article titled piece “Israelis and Gazans Flee amid Clashes and Warnings of Wider Regional War,” there are references to individuals like Amani Abu Odeh, struggling financially to relocate southwards and Yasser Shaban opting to remain in Gaza City. These narratives are concise and do not capture the emotional nuances evident in the Israeli accounts.

One of the strongest aspects of differential detailing found in the coverage is that Israelis are frequently shown in the context of their past normal lives—smiling, living happily in a peaceful setting, whereas Palestinians are almost exclusively depicted as suffering in war-torn environments. This discrepancy fortifies a perception of Israelis as individuals leading fulfilling lives disrupted by the conflict, while locking Palestinians in continued violence and anguish.

In numerous articles, The New York Times and The Washington Post often feature Israelis enjoying everyday activities, such as working in fun jobs like fitness training or playing music, spending time with family, pursuing hobbies, or participating in community events.

Conversely, Palestinians are almost solely represented within a cycle of violence, either as victims or aggressors, with little to no detail about their lives outside this context. In the article “Deadly Strike Rocks a Hospital in Gaza Where Few Are Still Working,” the account of a nurse named Mohamad is limited to his immediate suffering in the aftermath of the strike, with no insights into his life before that. Likewise, the article titled, “Hundreds die in an explosion at a Gaza

hospital, Palestinian officials say,” present individuals such as Walaa Tanji and Rawan Abu Ziadeh, as casualties without referring to what they do in life. Another example is about a 23-year-old from Gaza City, who is portrayed as a faceless victim of deprivation, saying, “We barely eat, barely drink, and barely live.”

Furthermore, both publications focused on the basic needs, physical injuries and death tolls when portraying Palestinians, meanwhile it primes the complex emotional experiences and psychological traumas of the Israelis. For example, in the Washington Post article titled, “Israel pounds Gaza from air and land; Biden presses for more aid,” individuals’ distress during the communication blackout is discussed, without delving deeply into the emotional toll of the ongoing war on them. Similarly, the article “Israeli Forces Detained the Head of Al-Shifa Hospital as He Was Evacuating to the South,” in the New York Times concentrates exclusively on the physical violence and logistical details of the military operation, without exploring the psychological impact on these professionals who were obliged to leave their patients and faced detention.

On the other hand, articles like “Freed Israeli Hostages Feel Cycles of Emotion after Captivity, Families Say” and “They survived Hamas’s attack on a trance party. An ad hoc center with art and music is helping them heal” emphasize the psychological struggles faced by Israeli hostages, as well as discuss therapeutic methods used by them to overcome the trauma. This differential detailing creates a representation imbalance, where Israelis are fully humanized, while Palestinians are reduced to statistics of physical suffering.

This doesn’t deny that there are some exceptions to the dehumanization of Palestinians, where their stories are presented with detail and depth. For example, The New York Times article “34 hours of fear: the blackout that cut Gaza off from the world” tells the stories of people such as journalist Fathi Sabbah and civil servant Ahmed Yousef who felt lost and isolated during the period of the communication blackout. In another example, The Washington Post’s “Gazan Families Face Agonizing Choices as They Search for Safety” recounts Mohammed Ahmed Abu Rukbeh’s heartbreaking experience of his son traumatized by bombings that he lost the ability to walk.

Other notable exceptions include the New York Times piece titled “Mothers, in Gaza Face Challenges during War” sheds light on the situations faced by mothers such as Wajiha al Abyad and Noor Hammad as they gave birth amidst the chaos of bombings in Gaza. Another example is the report “A Palestinian Family Hopes the Deal Will Bring 3 Teenage Boys Home,” which shares the emotional ordeal of the Salaymeh family eagerly anticipating the return of their sons held captive by Israeli authorities. Through stories of Palestinians like Hala Mufid Abu

Saada, a 14-year-old who loved drawing and dancing, and Khalil Rafiq Al-Sharif, a health worker who dreamed of starting a family, the Washington Post report on “more than 11,100 killed in Gaza. That’s one out of every 200 people,” cherished the lives and dreams of people who lost their lives in the war. These articles humanized Palestinians by showcasing their experiences and feelings, presenting a perspective that contrasts with the usual broad and impersonal view of Palestinian hardship.

The disparity in the **visual representation** is another significant aspect of the differential detailing of individuals. Israeli individuals are often portrayed through large, high-quality photos with detailed captions, either depicting happy times before the war, or in a state of anxiety of trauma due to the war conditions. Several photos also show Israeli soldiers in action. As for Palestinians, they are often shown retrieving bodies from rubble, grieving over the dead, or struggling in survival mode, enduring living conditions or dealing with displacement.

#### **Addressing Human Rights Violations against Palestinians:**

The media coverage of the Gaza war in The New York Times and the Washington Post largely emphasize the dire conditions and severe humanitarian crisis in Gaza. While the majority of articles highlight the huge loss of life, the displacement of more than a million civilians, and the destruction of infrastructure, they often avoid addressing through a legal lens or investigate claims of war crimes or genocide from the international law perspective.

For instance, The New York Times reported on November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2023 that as a result of the relentless bombardment, “thousands have been killed in Gaza with entire families wiped out” and neighborhoods “reduced to expanses of rubble.” It describes how children are being treated in dimly lit hospitals without anesthesia due to power outages. In another piece, it quotes the United Nations officials who call the conditions in Gaza ‘horrific’, warns that “all 2.2 million people in Gaza are at risk of starvation,” and describe Gaza as a ‘living nightmare’ or a ‘graveyard for children,’ adding that Al Shifa—Gaza’s largest hospital has become a “death zone,” with patients and civilians trapped in life-threatening conditions. The newspaper, however, doesn’t classify all these actions by Israel as crimes against humanity.

Similarly, The Washington Post’s article “See how Israel’s siege has plunged Gaza into darkness and isolation,” elaborates on the catastrophic effects of the Israeli blockade on Gaza. While it vividly describes the hardships faced by the people to access their basic life necessities, it does not clearly state that restricting essential resources like fuel and electricity from reaching civilians, as a form of ‘collective punishment’ breaches the Fourth Geneva

Convention. Another article titled, “Some of the Most Devastating Strikes Israel Has Carried Out in Gaza,” provides an overview on the death toll and destruction in Gaza, without referring to the legally-prohibited ‘disproportionate harm to civilians and civilian properties’.

While the U.N., Human Rights Watch and other international organizations have described Israeli actions in Palestine using terms like ‘ethnic cleansing’ and ‘genocide,’ such clear language has not made their way to the headlines of the analyzed articles. The humanitarian bodies’ concerns were raised, but are often presented as secondary to the main narrative.

There is a noticeable tendency in the media coverage of both publications to refrain from fully holding Israel accountable for violating human rights principles, and causing the severe humanitarian crisis in Gaza. This is evident in using passive verbs and euphemistic descriptions of violence. For example, a headline in The New York Times that reads “‘300,000 homeless in battered Gaza as food runs low,” portraying the crisis as a passive development rather than a direct result of the Israeli blockade. Furthermore, it continues to describe how “hospitals are overwhelmed and fuel is scarce,” without criticizing Israel’s complicity in that. Likewise, the Washington Post’s headline, “Limited fuel to be allowed into Gaza,” presents Israel decision as a positive gesture, without acknowledging the blockade that led to the shortage in the first place. Such framing misleads the readers and reduces their understanding of the intentionality of the humanitarian catastrophe.

The pattern persists with news titles like “Israel gave Gazans another four-hour window to move south,” and “Patients and Workers Leave Gaza Hospital Days After Israeli Raid,” where the act of displacement is portrayed as voluntary through the use of words, like “move” and “leave” instead of more precise terms such, as “forced displacement” or “evacuation.” This clearly deceives readers about the coercive nature of the event. Other language choices such as “caught in fighting” in reference to hospitals under bombardment, “explosion” or “blast”, instead of “bombing” or “strike” also deflect responsibility, and save Israel from being questioned by the public opinion about their violations.

The media’s coverage of journalists killed by Israeli airstrikes often fails to frame their deaths as clear violations of Article 79 of the Geneva Conventions, which recognizes journalists engaged in dangerous missions in conflict zones as civilians, granting them full protection. For example, in the article “The War Has Led to the Deadliest Month for Journalists in at Least Three Decades,” the New York Times documented the killing of “at least 40 journalists, even though it didn’t explicitly blame Israel for that. Similarly, in coverage of the killing of journalist Saeed Al-Taweel, and the family

members of Al Jazeera's Wael al-Dahdouh, both outlets' focus is on the personal tragedy but stopped short of framing the airstrike as a violation of human rights.

What's more, some writers went on to justify Israel's actions by referencing international law in media coverage of its military operations, particularly regarding hospitals and civilian infrastructure. For instance, A piece from The Washington Post clarifies that "Hospitals have protected status under international humanitarian law, losing it only in circumstances where a facility is used by a warring party," detailing how Israel justified its raid on Gaza's al-Shifa Hospital by claiming that Hamas uses it for military purposes. However, the article fails to verify whether Israel provided sufficient evidence for its claims.

The concept of collective punishment is also explored within the scope of international law while subtly downplaying the harm to civilians in Gaza. One article in the New York Times noted that "Not all attacks on civilians violate that rule. Acts done with another purpose, or simply with careless disregard for civilian lives, wouldn't qualify." This approach suggests that some level of civilian suffering may be acceptable and lawful if it serves larger military goals.

In contrast to the neutral language used when reporting on Israeli attacks on Palestinians, both publications' language is definitive and morally charged when describing Hamas' actions. In headlines like: "What happened to Israel was not just a war crime but 'a crime against humanity,'" and "It's Not a War or a Battlefield. It's a Massacre," the October 7 attack is described with language that evokes strong emotions, in addition to highlighting the severity of the violent actions and the importance of holding individuals accountable for them.

Different from the majority of the coverage, there are some exceptions where violations against Palestinians are discussed from a humanitarian perspective. One such impactful piece by Kyle Rempfer in the Washington Post draws parallels between the events during the 1948 Nakba and the ongoing forced displacements in Gaza, shedding light upon the lasting fears ingrained within Palestinians about reliving these traumatic events and raising concerns about serious human rights violation linked to ethnic cleansing. The Washington Post also highlights the humanitarian implications in articles like "In the Israel-Gaza Crisis, Whose Lives Matter?" that questions the U.S. government's disproportionate support for Israel, stating, "Weapons for one side, Band-Aids for the other: How can the United States be trusted on human rights and peace-building when it is giving more money for bombs than for cease-fire solutions?"

Moreover, the issue of Israel's use of administrative detention, particularly the case of Ahd Tamimi, is addressed in The New York Times, specifically criticized for its prolonged detainment without formal charges – an act deemed a violation

of international laws. “With all eyes on Gaza, violence is quietly mounting in the West Bank,” is another example from The Washington Post that clearly presents the Israeli settlers in the West Bank as aggressors, when discussing the escalating violence there since the war erupted in Gaza.

It’s worth mentioning that The Washington Post frequently uses active voice and direct language to emphasize the severity of the situation and point out Israel’s responsibility, as found in the headlines, “Israel pounds Gaza from air and land; Biden presses for more aid,” and “The carnage must stop. Time for a ceasefire in Gaza,” while The New York Times has a tendency to use milder language as seen in the shift from “Israeli Strike Kills Hundreds in Hospital” to “Hundreds Dead in Blast at Gaza Hospital,” a headline that reduces the sense of accountability, and downplays the atrocities experienced by Palestinians.

### Discussion

When compared to previous studies, several findings of this research align with the existing literature regarding how media depicts “the other” in times of conflict, particularly Palestinians. The research results are consistent, with the studies by Leyens et al. (2009) and Delgado et al. (2009) suggesting that out-groups are frequently perceived as lacking the capacity for nuanced emotions, being instead associated with basic needs and primitive feelings like fear and hunger. In this study, Palestinians are mainly represented through stories of hardship, displacement and survival, while Israelis were depicted with a wealth of emotions and personal stories. This simplification of Palestinian individuals contributes directly to their dehumanization.

Further agreement is found with Kovács et al. (2021) and Pasaribu (2021), who classified dehumanization as a form of hate speech. Through this study’s findings, it is evident that dehumanization can serve as a means to promote hatred; the language used in both newspapers tends to depict Palestinians in a hostile light, often dehumanizing or brutalizing them. The findings also reinforced the conclusion of Heywood & Goodman (2019) about the crucial role of language in perpetuating dehumanization.

Additionally, Fromm’s (1973/1992) distinction between hate rooted in reason versus character-conditioned hate is applicable here. The research indicates that how the media depicts Palestinians as part of an enduring conflict than a reaction to recent incidents, illustrates a deeply ingrained animosity that goes beyond just the current situation.

Echoing the work of Jorgensen (2016) and Haslam (2019) along with Matulewska and Gwiazdowicz in 2021, this study confirms that dehumanization



paves the way for genocidal practices, by conditioning the public opinion to accept extreme measures taken against specific groups. The research results also agree with Naimark's analysis from 2001 on how dehumanization and hate propaganda contribute to large scale violence by drawing comparisons, to the genocide in Rwanda and Darfur. In both cases, and in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, persistent dehumanizing narratives place Palestinian victims of violence at the bottom of the victim hierarchy. As a result, their suffering is often taken less seriously, making genocidal actions by the Israeli government seem more justifiable or inevitable.

In accordance with Hanif (2021)'s research which supports the idea that Islamophobic stereotypes contribute to allegations of antisemitism and manipulate media narratives, this study highlights how Palestinians' actions are frequently portrayed as anti-Semitism or racialized violence. The media particularly tends to characterize Hamas's objectives as inherently homicidal and extremist, with the goal of killing all Jews.

In line with this, the current research resonates with the notion proposed by Cordellini (2024), Barnett (2023), and Enloe (1990) that Arab and Palestinian men have been systematically portrayed as 'dangerous others' in U.S. media, while Palestinian boys are also framed as 'future threats.' Even during the hostages' exchange truce, as covered in this study, both The New York Times and The Washington Post largely ignored documenting numerous testimonies that have emerged detailing the various forms of torture the Palestinian detainees endured during their imprisonment, in addition to photos that showed these individuals appearing frail and weakened.

Incorporating the findings of Barnett (2023), this study reinforces the notion that this dehumanizing portrayal positions Palestinian men as violent, sexually predatory, and inherently threatening, reinforces a narrative that justifies extreme measures against them, including ethnic cleansing and military violence.

While most findings align with previous studies, some points of discrepancy emerged. For instance, while Haji et al. (2021) found a correlation between conservative political leanings of the newspaper and higher levels of dehumanization, this study did not observe such a stark divide based on political affiliations. In fact, The Washington Post (typically center-right) displayed an inclination to attribute responsibility to Israel and provide a bit of historical context than The New York Times (center-left). This indicates that how U.S. media portray Palestinians is less about political bias and more about the broader framing of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where Palestinian narratives are systematically sidelined.

This behavior can be understood in light of the fact that major international

media outlets, following the October 7<sup>th</sup> attack and its subsequent events reported Israeli soldiers and officials' accounts on the course of the war. Steve Hendrix, Jerusalem bureau chief for The Washington Post told Voice of America on February 2024 that the only way for journalists to enter the Gaza Strip is by embedding with the Israel Defense Forces, which curtails the freedom of the press, as reporters could not fact-check or explain the incidents adequately (VOA, 2023). Philip P. Pan and Patrick Kingsley are two New York Times journalists who also mentioned their "controlled visit" to Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City, raising questions about the validity of the military's claims about Hamas using the hospital as a command center and ammunitions depot (Reiss & Kingsley, 2023).

This study's results on visual representation also diverge from Deprez's (2023) findings on the visual framing of conflict. Deprez argued that Palestinian suffering was visually minimized by controlling the media's access to telegenic images of death and mourning. This study, however, notes an increase in explicit images and videos of Palestinian corpses, mass graves, destroyed infrastructure, and individuals searching for their beloved ones under rubble.

Sternberg's Duplex Theory of Hate provided a robust framework for understanding how dehumanization unfolded in the media's portrayal of Palestinians. Within such a framework, the outcomes of the study conformed to the theory's three components of negation of intimacy, passion, and commitment to disparage. Negation of intimacy is evident in the lack of personal detail and emotional distance, reducing Palestinians to collective narratives. Passion is articulated through the use of hostile and fear/anger-inducing language, particularly when describing the October 7<sup>th</sup> Hamas attacks, depicting Palestinians as instigators of aggression. Finally, commitment to disparage is reflected through employing derogatory language and moral exclusion to downplay the Palestinians suffering or legitimize it.

## Conclusion

This research examines the dehumanization techniques employed in the representation of Palestinians in The New York Times and The Washington Post during the first seven weeks of the war on Gaza that began in October 2023. It analyzes how these newspapers framed the conflict and the extent to which Palestinians were dehumanized in comparison to Israelis, highlighting the broader implications for public opinion and media ethics.

The analysis, based on Sternberg's Duplex Theory of Hate, reveals extensive use of dehumanization techniques in both The New York Times and The Washington Post during the initial weeks of the war. In both newspapers, Palestinians are represented impersonally, often reduced to faceless victims or aggressors, with

minimal attention given to their motives, personal stories or emotional experiences. Emotional distance, fear-inducing language, anger, hostility, and repulsion and disgust were also prevalent, with The New York Times exhibiting a slightly more intense use of these techniques than The Washington Post. Both outlets consistently portrayed Palestinians, particularly Hamas fighters, negatively, often through moral exclusion and derogatory language, which strip them of their humanity. Animalistic and mechanistic representations of Palestinians, though present, they appeared less frequently compared to other forms of dehumanization.

A clear disparity in differential detailing of Palestinians and Israelis is also evident. Palestinians are primarily shown through collective narratives, often portrayed exclusively within the context of war and hardship, whereas Israelis are depicted through intimate portrayals with detailed personal stories and sympathetic imagery. Regarding human rights violations, both outlets address the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, but often refrain from directly holding Israel accountable for potential war crimes. Evaluating human rights violations ethically is not a practice in both newspapers, with a hesitation to critique Israel's military operations that targets civilian facilities and neighborhoods as breaches of international law.

The implications of this research lie in its contribution to understanding how media narratives shape public perceptions of conflict and human rights. Through the process of dehumanizing Palestinians, the U.S. media perpetuate skewed perspectives which at best do nothing to improve the public understanding of the dynamics in play, and more dangerously, foster unethical practices that protect unjust institutions. The selective reporting on individuals from both sides of the conflict, coupled with selective empathy, paints Palestinians as either worthy of harm or as collateral damage in the broader conflict, while Israeli acts are depicted as defensive and justifiable.

This research emphasizes the need for more balanced and compassionate media representation, that acknowledge the humanity of those affected by violence, and hold all parties accountable, irrespective of the conflict. It also raises critical questions regarding how the media can be held accountable for ethical reporting that uphold human dignity and adhere to professional standards. Future studies could explore how media in different regions frames conflicts, how audiences perceive these narratives, and how alternative media, such as independent journalism, and social media platforms challenge dehumanizing narratives disseminated by mainstream outlets.

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\* As stated by the Center for Constitutional Rights, Raz Segal, the Holocaust scholar and hundreds of other scholars. Craig Mokhiber, a top UN official, who resigned in protest of Israel's war on Gaza.

\*\* The coding was conducted by Eman Essam, PhD, College of Language and Communication AAST



