



A MULTIMODAL CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF REPORTING THROUGH IMAGES BY INTERNATIONAL PRINT MEDIA FOR REPRESENTING ISRAEL-PALESTINE (2023-2025) WAR

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Abstract

Since 1948, Israel-Gaza conflict has been the point of discussion for international print media. International press, not only in the form of texts but also images, has always portrayed these regional issues of unprecedented and unprovoked attacks, hostages, sufferings of civilians and refugees crisis to capture the attention of international readers or viewers. Both of the sides, Israel and Palestine, have been found blaming each other for political and armed escalations. However, much research has not been done on the narratives propagated by both sides during the crisis, which have left state of Israel alarmed and Palestine helpless. International press with the help of images, which are provided to them from the war zones, propagates the Palestinian and Israeli narratives to cover the hidden realities. For the study, equal number of images have been taken from international press to unmask the narratives of both sides. Kress and Van Leeuwen's Multimodal discourse analysis model has been used to analyze the images presented by international print media. The result shows that Israel propagates a negative image of Palestinians by portraying them as terrorists. On the other hand, Israeli forces are portrayed as butchers killing innocent Palestinian men, women and innocent children not only by bombarding their residential areas but also by preventing the aid and forcing them to evacuate their homes.

Key Words: War, Gaza, Israel, Discourse, Print Media, Multimodality, Civilians, Crisis, Killing

Introduction

The ongoing conflict in the Middle East between Gaza and Israel started on 7th October 2023 and has presently left the state of Gaza as an example of devastation. During the conflict, abductions have been observed from both sides, which has left the question of civilians safety unanswered for the international media (Mckinzea, 2023). This was the first time when the attack from Hamas on Israel live streamed and the videos of capturing the hostages were shared on media. The images shared from both of the sides mixed the opinion about the conflict at international level. The usage of images and visual supports, in the modern day communication strategies, helps in completing the meaning. This study aims to analyze the images from Gaza and Israel through Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006).

Keeping in view the point, that world has been made a global village by media updates, which people receive from every corner of the world. Kress (2006) states that it is almost impossible to create meaning without the support of visual images to the texts. Various modes of communication are studied if we want to analyze that how and in what context different meanings are constructed. Similarly, the context in which the meaning is produced is studied in the combination of communicative act (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006). Multimodal discourse analysis helps in studying the co-occurrence of various modes, which are used to create meaningful texts by the print media. Halliday (1994) was the first linguist who introduced that



meaning is constructed on ideational, interpersonal and textual level. These levels help in pointing out the possible meaning beyond the text and include other modes, which act in constructing meaning for media outlets. Mestre (2015) claims that after Halliday, all the approaches to MDA or CMDA follow the same patterns of analyzing meaning as introduced by him. This helps in understanding that to analyze the representation of war in international print media, many images used by print media are necessary to be analyzed to unmask the narratives used by different journalists. This study will also be helpful to unearth the different ideologies of Gaza and Israel which are presented by print media through images of war and help better understand that how war is reported in the context of these ideologies.

Problem Statement

Since 7th October 2023, both Gaza and Israel are involved in unconventional war which is observed by international press. Singh (2023) claims that both of the sides have been using media to dominate their narrative against the other. The difference of narratives has divided the public opinion at global level, which has left an unfulfilled gap between the world and the Middle East (Laure & Conboye, 2023). Footages have been printed by the media from both sides proving that they are not responsible for starting or flaring up the conflict. Media is portraying both of the parties as if they are fighting for their rights and only targeting the terrorist groups who are the very responsible for the ongoing crisis. The analysis of images will help us to unmask the reality and provide a support to the viewer or readers of the images to understand the intensity of the conflict.

Research Objectives

- i. To explore the war narratives from both Palestine and Israel with the help images analyzed with the use of MDA.
- ii. To unmask the condition of civilians who are suffering the aggression from both of the sides.
- iii. To explore that how the print media with the help of war images create meaning.

Research Questions

- i. How does print media portray Gaza as a place of civilian crisis to call for the global leaders to contribute for peace agreement?
- ii. How does print media represent Israel fighting for the peace against the terrorists of Hamas?

Significance of the Study

International print media has been broadcasting Gaza and Israel based on their personal ideologies and affiliations with both of the countries. The issues of Israeli hostages and the Palestinian children dying of hunger had been mixed and the real effects of war have not been highlighted so far. The analysis of images from both sides will help better understand the crisis and the need of required actions from the international leaders, who with their influence can stop the war and the save the people of both states.

Literature Review

On October 7 2023, militants from Palestinian territory launched a full-scale attack on Israel by using a gigantic volley of rockets fired from Gaza Strip with armed militiamen breaking the Israeli security barriers. This sudden attack took place almost the same day when



50 years ago, in the same fashion, the Egyptian and Syrian armies launched a combined attack on Israel during the Jewish national holiday of Yom Kippur. Karmon (2023) challenges that the goal of Hamas in its unified attack on Israel was the disturbance of the peace talks between Saudi Arabia and Israel and the failing of the Fatah-led Palestinian power in the West Bank.

Rauf (2023) states that after October 7 attack from Hamas, Prime Minister of Israel, officially opened war on militant groups of Hamas hiding in Gaza on 8 October 2023, and the war began. The first phase was noticeable with mass airstrikes, for targeting terrorist shelters, mainly concerted in Gaza. The targeted terrorist installations were the weapons manufacturing plants, Hamas Headquarters, and rocket launcher locations. Additionally, IDF mobilized 300,000 reserved forces for full-scale attack. According to the Israeli PM's office, the goals of the "Operation Iron Sword" were the demolition of the military and administrative abilities of Hamas and the Palestinian Jihadi groups.

In the case of Israel-Gaza war, both of the parties have made a good use of media to represent their stance to the world. Arackal (2015) states that media typically symbolizes books, journals, radio, television, newspaper and online sources of information. Semiotic analysis of these resources of information helps in unearthing the meaning, which the media aims to share with the people. For analyzing the sources of information, multimodality is a method, which helps in analyzing that how the data taken from media creates meaning by using images and other semiotic resources (Bouzida, 2014). The quality of presenting a complete meaning to the audience with the help of semiotic resources has made media the most powerful tool of communication. Coskun (2015, p. 42) challenges that images are used to convey those messages to the public which cannot be delivered through language.

The concept of multimodality combines with semiotics or signs, and it is the usage of different modes in the same examples of communicative acts such as photos, images, videos and sounds in connection with language for meaning making (Paltridge, 2012). On the other hand, the concept is mainly concerned with how the arrangement of multimodal texts occurs and how various semiotic resources such as color, position of objects, and framing donate to meaning-making in the multimodal texts. Language is an assemblage of modes: gaze, attitudes, and photos that contribute to meaning-making process and enhance the meaning of the texts produced for communication (Jewitt, 2009). These modes are combined as per the interests of the users in a communication, and the social norms can effect the meanings produced because of using various multiple modes. Thus, the concept of multimodality can be observed in almost every source of communication, including the everyday life talks among people.

However, multimodal linguistic analysis deals with the examination that enables language users to know that how different levels of meanings are created through several tools, what kind of meanings are generated, and how it is formed by the context in which it is produced (Kress, 2010). In addition, it searches for the role of each semiotic source in the meaning production in multimodal texts and provides a vision into their position too. A similar idea in this context is also discussed by Machin (2007) that multimodality provides an idea of the character of various modes in meaning making in a certain communication. It is often viewed that different visual sources work together to form a combined meaningful whole in multimodal communications or texts. Hence, it delivers multiple modes to help meaning's creation in a text (Bezemer & Kress, 2016). The role of contexts in this procedure is undisputable (Halliday, 1978), and the base of multimodality is observed in writing and speech (Jewitt, 2008). For Leeuwen (2005), multimodality syndicates different semiotic tools such as



color fullness, salience, placing of elements and framing. The visual capitals comprise of writing, speech, signs, still and movement of images or videos (Adami, 2016).

Research Methodology

Research Design

The study applies Kress and Leeuwen's (2006) multi-modal approach to evaluate the images used by international media to represent Isreal-Gaza war. The analysis uncovers that how international press to win a certain public opinion promotes different stances.

Data

The data for the study are the images taken from four international newspapers. These images have been printed in the context of their own perspective, which they want to be accepted by their international readers.

Data Analysis

The procedure adopted for the data analysis is qualitative which follows Kress and Leeuwen's Multimodal Discourse Analysis. For analysis, the images have been selected from Aljazeera and New York times. Kress and Van Leeuwen's MDA framework selected for the data analysis has been shown in the following diagram.

Table 1: Selected Categories of Kress and Leeuwen's MDA

Metafunctions	Semiotic Mode	Visual Resources
Representation	Narrative	Action Relational
	Conceptual	Analytical Symbolic
Interaction	Contact (Gaze)	Demand Offer
	Social Distance	Close Shot Medium Shot Long Shot
	Attitude	Horizontal Angle Vertical Angle
	Information	Left/Right Top/Bottom
Composition (Textual)	Value	Center Margin
	Salience	Fore ground Background Color Contrast

Data Analysis



Image: 1 (Palestinian mother with her child migrating)

This image has been taken from Aljazeera newspaper showing the Palestinians leaving their homeland due to war crisis. In terms of Representational structure, the participants are a number of Palestinians. The participants can be seen with their children and luggage. In the image, the actors are the Palestinians and the vectors are the children and the luggage. Standing on the road is their goal. The other vector in the picture are the eyes of the Palestinians, which leads to the interactive analysis of the image. One of participants is directly looking towards the camera and the others are looking here and there. The image motivates the viewers to see the pain of the people migrating from their homeland. As per the social distance, this image is a medium shot as the main participant of the picture can be seen in the center. This medium shot is considered as a close distance between the participant and the viewer. In compositional terms, the image uses the information value system e.g., center system. The focus of the image is on the vector that leads to a mother holding her child and the child holding the mother tightly.



Image: 02 (Palestinian Mother with her child hiding from Israeli attack)

This image has been taken from Aljazeera newspaper. In Representational structure, there are two main participants, a mother and her child. In the image, the actor is the mother and the vector is the child she is holding in her hands. This is a transactional process as the mother is holding the child and the child can be seen hidden in her lap. In this image, the mother is directly looking towards the camera and the child is looking towards the mother. According to the social distance, the image is a medium shot as both of the participants are in the center of the image. This medium shot is considered as close distance between the participants and the viewers. This image shows that how Aljazeera is sympathizing with the innocent civilians of Palestine to point out that the actions of IDF are so harsh with them.



Image: 03 (Palestinians searching for dead bodies after attack)

The Palestinians are looking for the dead bodies from a site hit by a rocket fired from Israeli territory. In the image, there are two different kinds of participants, one are the citizens from Palestine and other are the destructed buildings. On interaction level, none of the participants is looking towards the viewer, which gives an idea of information that how the Palestinian residential areas have been damaged, and people have been left helpless and homeless. The people are near the devastated buildings, which leads to attitude that the image is horizontal and taken from the front side that gives a sense of involvement for the viewer, and feel the pain of common citizens. At conceptual level, the man with the white beard is the nucleus of the image and become the focus of the image. The man with a white cap is in foreground and the rest of the people are in background or out of focus.



Image: 04 (Israeli's hiding from rockets fired from Palestine)

The following image has been taken from New York Time. The picture shows that the Israelis are hiding from the rockets fired from the Palestinian territory. There are five men in the picture and all are in the same position. The first kind of participant in the picture is the number of people and the second kind of participant is the area, which is under the target from Hamas. None of the participants is looking at the viewer, which can be categorized as 'offer' to the viewers of the newspaper as it gives information about the interaction between the participants. This image has been taken in horizontal level which given the sense of involvement to the viewer. The conceptual level analysis shows that the image utilizes the center/margin scheme of information value. The people and their actions are the nucleus of information while the area shown in picture is the subservient.



Image: 05 (US President and Israeli PM meet after the attack)

The following picture has been taken from New York Times in which the meeting between Israel representatives and US have been shown. The participants of the picture are smiling to one another providing the messages of strong ties between Israel and US. With regards to interactional level, none of the participants look at the viewer. So, this image can be categorized as 'offer' to the viewer. The images has been taken vertically and creates no power play between the viewer and the participant. This propagates the newspaper's narrative of Israel's close relations with effective global leaders. At conceptual level, the image utilizes the center/margin scheme of information value. The leaders have been placed in the center so are the nucleus of information.



Image: 06 (Israelis mourn over the sudden attack from Palestine)

This image shows the Israeli reaction after the unprecedented attack from Palestinians in which almost 1200 people were killed and more than 240 were taken as hostages. The black color in the image forms the background which has a significant value for the message gloomy situation in Israel. The woman in the picture is the nucleus as she is presented in the center/margin. She becomes the focus of the viewer. The other people in the picture are subservient to the lady in the picture. On interactional level, none of the participants is looking towards the viewers which creates the idea of offering information to viewer about the condition of the people in Israel when they have lost their loved ones in a sudden and unprovoked attack. The image has been taken from horizontal level and side angle that creates a sense of involvement for the viewer.



Image: 07 (Hamas militants attacking Israeli Army basis)

The following image has been taken from The Guardian which is printed in UK. The image shows the Palestinian young men celebrating the occupation of Israeli tanks. The actors in the image are the Palestinians and the vector is the burning tank. At symbolic level the signs of celebration over a burning tank gives a message of clear intention from the Palestinians that they are charges to harm Israel especially in terms of military powers.

This image has been taken from “The Guardian” in which the Palestinians, involved in the attack on Israel. According the representational analysis, there are two participants in the image: people and the burning tank behind them. The people are the actor and the tank is the goal. The goal in the image is used by the newspaper to propagate two narratives; declaring Hamas as a terrorist group with the support of Palestinians and they are damaging Israeli properties. On the interactional level, the eyes of the people are directed towards the viewers of the photo. On interactional level, one participant looks at the viewer and offers the information of achieving something by showing the sign of the victory. With regards to the conceptual level, the young man is the nucleus of the image. That is why he becomes the focus of the viewer. The other people are the subservient to the young man in front. The burning tank is the foreground. The rest of the scene in the picture is the background.



Image: 08 (Israelis looking the area after attack from Hamas)

This image has also been taken from The Guardian. The image shows the time after the sudden attack on Israel from Palestinian territory. The burning vehicles and fire bridges can be seen responding to the sudden attack on Israeli residential areas. As for representational level, the picture two kinds of participants; people and the vehicles on fire. People can be identified as local residents who are sad on the loss of their properties. The people can be seen coming out of their homes to save themselves from the rockets which are being fired from Palestinians territory. On interactional level, none of the participant looks towards the viewer which gives a message of offering information about the bad times of people at the hands of Hamas. There are burning vehicles in the background and the image is vertical taken at frontal angle that creates a feeling of involvement for the viewer. In terms of conceptual level, the Israeli resident is at the center of the picture and is in the focus of the viewer. The other people and the burning vehicles are the scene in the background or out of focus.



Image: 09 (Israeli residential area after Hamas attack)

This image has been taken from The Guardian. The image shows the aftermath of Hamas attack on Israel in which burning vehicles can be seen. The image has been taken from far side which covers the area where people's properties are on fire. There are two participants in the image; people and the burning vehicles. The white building creates a vector that leads to the burning vehicles. On interactional level, none of the participants is looking towards the viewer which the gives the idea of people's condition after the attack. The image creates a sense of involvement from the participant. On conceptual level, the burning car is the center of the attention for the viewer. The rest of the scene is the background of the image.



Image: 10 (Palestinian father caring his dead child)

The image has been taken from The Express Tribune, which is printed in Pakistan. The image shows the condition of people after the escalation from IDF. At representational level, there are three participants in the image; the dead child, the father and the people on the street. The father holding his child creates a vector. The people who are following the father create the other vector. The white shirt of the child and his face with blood creates a feeling of misery which is faced by the innocent Palestinians as a result of escalation from IDF. On interactional level, the father with his child is center of picture who is looking towards the viewer offering the idea that what these attacks have done to the lives of the people. Another point is, the image is horizontally taken at frontal angle that creates a sense of involvement for the viewer. At conceptual level, the little child is the nucleus of the image and becomes the focus of the viewer. The other people in the background are out of focus.



Image: 11 (Palestinian mother caring her dead child)

This image has also been taken from Express Tribune in which a mother can be seen crying for her dead child died in an attack from IDF. In the image, there are two participants, the mother and the child. The only vector in the picture is that the mother can be seen holding her dead child which gives the message of mother's pain. The white cover on the child creates a vector of a dead child. The image creates a narrative that how IDF is killing the innocent children who are not the part of any terrorist attack at all. On interactional level, none of the participants is looking towards the viewer creating an idea of information about the adverse time on the participants. The image has been taken on a close shot and from horizontal angle that creates a sense of viewers involvement in the occasion.



Image: 12 (Palestinian families with injured children)

The following image has been taken from The Express Tribune in the condition of civilians has been shown after the attack from IDF. At the representational level, the image has two kinds of participants; the family and the people in surrounding. The first vector is the father holding his child who has got badly scared and injured after the attack. The homes of the civilians have been destroyed by the aerial attacks of IDF and the people have been left in bad condition. As for interactional structure, only one participant is looking toward the viewer offering the idea the condition of the innocent children is getting worse day by day. In regard to the conceptual level, the children in the picture and the center. The image has been taken from horizontal angle that creates a sense of viewer's involvement.

Conclusion

New York Times has presented Israelis as the victim of attack which has forced the international leaders to stand shoulder to shoulder with them. They have been presented innocent and unaware of any possible attack. The print media has used the pictures from Israel in way in which they are shown hoping friendly ties with Palestine but left heart broken by the sudden and unprovoked attack. On the other hand, the Palestinians are presented as homeless and helpless after the attack from IDF. The mothers are shown looking for shelter with their young children in their laps and finding no way to hide. People are shown searching for their loved ones under the badly damaged homes. Their faces can show their grief and call for the international leaves to come for the their help. So, the propagation of narratives from both sides



can be observed with the help of a critical analysis using Kress and Leeuwen's (2006) multimodal analysis.

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