

# Selective Humanitarianism: Western Media Bias and the Silencing of Gaza

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## Abstract

This study examines how Western mainstream media represented the genocide in Gaza and how these representations produced a form of selective humanitarianism during the period between October 2024 and October 2025, when international debates surrounding the conflict intensified. The study analyzes 160 news, analysis, and feature articles, along with associated visual materials, published by major Western media outlets, namely The New York Times, BBC, CNN, and The Guardian. The analysis draws on framing theory, Critical Discourse Analysis, and postcolonial theoretical perspectives. Three recurring discursive patterns emerge: (1) the systematic invisibilization of Palestinian civilian suffering through depersonalized language, passive constructions, and selective sourcing; (2) the persistent deployment of conflict and equivalency frames that neutralize the structural power asymmetry between Israel and Palestine; and (3) the disproportionate amplification of Israeli victimhood through emotionally charged narratives that render some lives more grievable than others. Within international public discourse, these patterns contribute to broader mechanisms of epistemic injustice, rendering Palestinian experiences less visible, less credible, and ultimately less politically consequential. The article concludes that identifying and interrogating these discursive processes is essential for advancing a more ethically consistent and egalitarian international media paradigm.

**Keywords:** Selective Humanitarianism, Gaza Genocide, Framing, Discourse Analysis, Epistemic Injustice

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# Seçici İnsaniyetçilik: Batı Medyasının Önyargısı ve Gazze'nin Susturulması

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## Öz

Bu çalışma, Batı ana akım medyasının, çatışmaya ilişkin uluslararası tartışmaların yoğunlaştığı Ekim 2024–Ekim 2025 döneminde Gazze'deki soykırımı nasıl temsil ettiğini ve bu temsiller aracılığıyla nasıl bir seçici insaniyetçilik ürettiğini incelemektedir. Çalışma kapsamında, önde gelen Batılı medya kuruluşlarında yayımlanan 160 haber, analiz ve feature türündeki makale ile görsel materyal analiz edilmiştir. İncelenen medya kuruluşları The New York Times, BBC, CNN ve The Guardian'dır. Araştırmada çerçeveleme teorisi, eleştirel söylem analizi ve sömürge sonrası kuramsal yaklaşımlar birlikte kullanılmıştır. Analiz sonucunda üç tekrarlayan söylemsel örüntü ortaya çıkmaktadır: (1) kişisizleştirilmiş dil, edilgen yapılar ve seçici kaynak kullanımı yoluyla Filistinli sivillerin acılarının sistematik biçimde görünmezleştirilmesi; (2) İsrail ile Filistin arasındaki yapısal güç dengesizliğini etkisizleştiren çatışma ve eşdeğerlik çerçevelerinin sürekli yeniden üretilmesi; ve (3) bazı hayatları diğerlerinden daha "yas tutulabilir" kılan duygusal olarak yoğun anlatılar aracılığıyla İsrail mağduriyetinin orantısız biçimde öne çıkarılması. Bu söylemsel eğilimler, uluslararası kamuoyunda Filistinlilerin deneyimlerini daha az görünür, daha az güvenilir ve siyasal olarak daha az anlamlı hale getiren epistemik adaletsizlik mekanizmalarını beslemektedir. Makale, bu süreçlerin görünür kılınmasının, ahlaki açıdan daha tutarlı ve eşitlikçi bir uluslararası medya paradigmasının geliştirilmesi açısından hayati önem taşıdığı sonucuna varmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Seçici İnsaniyetçilik, Gazze Soykırımı, Çerçeveleme, Söylem Analizi, Epistemik Adaletsizlik

## 1. Introduction

The ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza has become one of the most talked-about but unevenly portrayed crises in the world's media today. The Western mainstream media frequently portrayed the conflict in a way that minimizes or obscures Palestinian suffering, even though it contained an enormous scope of civilian casualties, infrastructure devastation, and displacement. More and more academics in the fields of media studies, political communication, and postcolonial theory contend that Western media, including The New York Times, BBC, CNN, and The Guardian, serve as influential agenda-setters that influence the moral, political, and emotional bounds of humanitarian concern rather than just being observers of world events (Philo and Berry, 2011). This poses an important question: How do these powerful organizations choose whose lives are grievable, whose suffering is apparent, and whose voices are credible?

During the period from October 2024 to October 2025, when public discussions about Gaza reached an unprecedented level of intensity worldwide, the methodological, ethical, and political relevance of this question became more apparent. Western media narratives are receiving more scholarly and public attention as a result of public protests in Europe and North America, large-scale student mobilizations, and more scrutiny of political leaders. However, many comparison studies indicate that local journalists, humanitarian organizations, and alternative media channels offer firsthand perspectives that differ sharply from Western media reportage (Fisk, 2021). This discrepancy highlights the necessity of examining how Western news organizations create legitimacy and empathy hierarchies, especially regarding Palestinian civilian populations.

In this regard, the perspective of selective humanitarianism presents a crucial idea for understanding the representational inequalities present in Western media discourse. The technique of showing empathy, moral concern, and political urgency to some people while withholding or downplaying such concern for others is known as selective humanitarianism (Butler, 2020; Ticktin, 2011). Violence is depersonalized and normalized through the use of language euphemisms, passive-voice constructions, decontextualized narratives, and asymmetrical sourcing techniques, among other omissions (Baker, 2023). When it comes to Gaza, selective humanitarianism is evident in

the recurring employment of terms such as “conflict”, “clashes”, or “cycle of violence”, which mask the structural conditions of occupation and embargo and neutralize power disparities.

This research is more important from an academic standpoint for three reasons. First, media portrayals have direct political repercussions because they affect public opinion, foreign policy discussions, and the moral language used to comprehend or overlook crimes (Entman, 2004). Second, Palestinian narratives are routinely discredited, questioned, or eliminated in international information flows, making Gaza a prime example of epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007). Third, a large portion of the material now in publication concentrates on the early stages of the conflict. On the other hand, increased military actions, changing geopolitical alliances, and growing opposition to Western media institutions have generated new discursive patterns over the 2024–2025 timeframe.

In light of this gap, the current study aims to provide a comprehensive examination of Western media coverage of Gaza during this critical period. Drawing on postcolonial viewpoints, critical discourse analysis (CDA), and framing theory, this paper examines how discursive tactics employed by prominent Western media contribute to the phenomenon of selective humanitarianism. This study aims to identify how Palestinian suffering is downplayed or morally devalued in Western journalistic discourse by focusing on linguistic patterns, narrative structures, visual representations, and sourcing techniques. The study’s research questions are:

1. How do Western mainstream media frame the Gaza genocide between October 2024 and October 2025?
2. What narrative, linguistic, and visual strategies contribute to selective humanitarianism?
3. Which voices, perspectives, and forms of suffering are amplified, minimized, or omitted?
4. How do these representational practices reinforce broader structures of epistemic injustice?

Discovering these patterns has significant ethical and political implications, rendering it more than just an academic endeavor. By deciding who is visible and who is disposable, journalistic institutions establish the global moral order when they selectively personalize some topics while hiding others. This article makes the case that comprehending these interactions is crucial to creating a more fair, open, and responsible form of international journalism—one that acknowledges every civilian life as equally deserving of compassion, consideration, and safety.

This research adds to current scholarly discussions on the politics of representation in asymmetrical wars by placing the topic at the nexus of media studies, postcolonial inquiry, and critical journalism ethics. Additionally, it provides a modern theoretical and empirical framework for examining the coverage of Gaza during a period that is still poorly understood despite its increased international importance. In sum, this paper aims to shed light on the mechanisms of selective humanitarianism in Western media discourse and provide strategies for opposing epistemic forms of violence that diminish the visibility and grievability of Palestinian lives in the international public domain.

## 2. Literature Review

Over the past 20 years, scholarly attention to how Gaza is portrayed in Western media has grown. Several studies have shown that while covering the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, mainstream media frequently display structural biases, favoring some narratives and voices while marginalizing others (Philo and Berry, 2011; Kraidy, 2016). These prejudices are not arbitrary; rather, they stem from larger political, economic, and cultural contexts that influence journalistic speech and practice. Therefore, studying selective humanitarianism and epistemic injustice in media coverage is essential to comprehending how information flows create, perpetuate, or conceal moral and political hierarchies on a global scale.

### 2.1. Media Framing and Conflict Reporting

A key lens for analyzing how the public's perception of conflicts is shaped by news media is framing theory (Entman, 1993). Frames influence perceptions of causality, accountability, and moral judgment by drawing attention to

particular components of a problem while downplaying or excluding others. Conflict frames, which portray violence as a symmetrical struggle between two equally culpable parties, are common in the setting of Gaza, according to research (Baker, 2023). The military occupation, embargo, and excessive use of force are examples of systemic power imbalances that are hidden by such framing. Additionally, they depersonalize Palestinian victims, making their pain less morally significant and abstract (Khalidi, 2020). On the other hand, Israeli casualties are frequently described in language that is more direct, sentimental, and specific, emphasizing individual accounts and humanizing the victims (Philo and Berry, 2011).

Western reporting routinely uses equivalency frames in addition to conflict framing, portraying Israeli military actions and Palestinian resistance as morally similar. In addition to flattening the power imbalance, this framing supports narratives of objectivity that conceal selective humanitarian concern (Entman, 2004). These results highlight how crucial it is to look at the language choices and story structures that contribute to media bias.

## 2.2. Selective Humanitarianism and Epistemic Injustice

The unequal distribution of empathy and moral concern in international discourse is referred to as selective humanitarianism, a term that originated in ethical and political philosophy (Butler, 2020; Ticktin, 2011). It has been used in media studies to explain how some groups are made more visible and ethically “grievable” than others. When applied to Gaza, selective humanitarianism shows up as the systematic underrepresentation of Palestinian suffering, the exclusion of local voices, and the elevation of Israeli viewpoints in international news outlets. Fricker (2007) defined epistemic injustice as when people or groups are injured in their position as knowers, making their experiences invisible or dismissed. These behaviors contribute to this idea.

The concept of selective humanitarianism warrants further terminological clarification in order to ensure conceptual precision and consistency with the manuscript. Within the broader humanitarian literature, the term is often used to describe situations in which states, institutions, or societies extend compassion, aid, or protection in a conditional, uneven, or strategically

selective manner. Therefore, articulating how the present study interprets and operationalizes this concept is essential for avoiding ambiguity. Clarifying its distinction from closely related notions—such as conditional humanitarianism, hierarchies of deservingness, or differential humanitarian responses—will also strengthen the analytical framework. Establishing this conceptual boundary more explicitly will enhance the theoretical rigor of the study and provide readers with a clearer understanding of the interpretive lens through which the empirical findings are analyzed.

The frequency of epistemic injustice in coverage of Gaza has been shown through empirical research. Philo and Berry (2011) describe the widespread use of depersonalized language, passive constructs, and euphemisms that neutralize violence and decrease the visibility of Palestinian victims. In addition to influencing audience perceptions, these discursive techniques support political narratives that downplay or excuse the systematic violence that Palestinians endure.

### **2.3. Postcolonial and Orientalist Perspectives**

Postcolonial theory provides a crucial foundation for understanding the cultural and historical aspects of bias in Western media. Said's (1978) idea of Orientalism draws attention to the exoticism, paternalism, and dehumanization that permeate Western depictions of the "East." Orientalist tendencies are evident in Gaza, where Israelis are portrayed as democratic, logical, and oppressed, whereas Palestinians are docile, illogical, or innately aggressive (Kraidy, 2016). By perpetuating the moral and political hierarchies of the Global North, these discursive constructions support larger geopolitical narratives.

Furthermore, the relationship between media studies and postcolonial critique sheds light on how structural power influences the creation of information. Selective narratives dominate global information flows due to the hegemony of Western news agencies, especially those based in the United States and the United Kingdom (Fisk, 2021). Local, alternative, or non-Western viewpoints are marginalized in favor of the Global North's epistemic frameworks due to the concentration of media production.

## 2.4. Visual Representation and Emotional Framing

Visual media significantly shape the perceptions of conflict. Affective and moral clues that written material alone cannot supply are frequently conveyed through photographs, videos, and televised reports. According to studies, Western media regularly use visual techniques that depersonalize or anonymize Palestinian losses while humanizing Israeli victims (Philo and Berry, 2011; Baker, 2023). For instance, close-up pictures of injured Israelis are typical, yet photos of Palestinian victims frequently show mass casualties or infrastructure destruction from a distance without any personal context. By directing audience empathy toward specific themes and away from others, this kind of visual framing supports selective humanitarianism.

## 2.5. Contemporary Analyses and Gaps in the Literature

Research has brought attention to changing discursive trends in Gaza coverage, including the growing use of multimedia platforms, social media sources, and real-time reporting (Kraidy, 2016). These shifts present both opportunities and challenges: alternative perspectives can now reach audiences from all around the world, but how these narratives are received and understood is still influenced by the framing conventions of major Western outlets. The period between October 2024 and October 2025, when increased military activities and political polarization may have changed media framing techniques, has not received much attention despite this.

Additionally, a large portion of the work focuses on textual analysis with little incorporation of multimodal and visual content. To fully capture the range of selective humanitarian activities in Western media, a thorough approach that incorporates critical discourse analysis, framing analysis, and visual content analysis is necessary. By filling this gap, the current study makes a theoretical and empirical contribution to existing discussions concerning representation, media ethics, and the politics of empathy in international journalism.

In sum, the existing literature establishes three key points that inform the present research:

1. Western media exhibit consistent biases in framing the Gaza conflict, privileging Israeli narratives and marginalizing Palestinian voices.

2. Selective humanitarianism and epistemic injustice are central mechanisms through which these biases operate, shaping global perceptions and moral responses.
3. Postcolonial critique, combined with critical media analysis, provides a robust framework for understanding the structural, historical, and cultural dimensions of these discursive practices.

To provide an up-to-date, thorough, and methodologically rigorous account of how Western media create moral hierarchies and selectively humanize populations in the context of Gaza between October 2024 and October 2025, the current study integrates these strands and situates itself within an established yet emerging body of scholarship.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Research Design

This study examines how Western media covered the Gaza crisis between October 2024 and October 2025, employing a mixed-methods approach that combines framing analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA provides a framework for examining the intersections of language, discourse, and power, revealing how media narratives perpetuate selective humanitarianism and epistemic injustice (van Dijk, 2006; Fairclough, 2015). By locating narrative structures, thematic emphasis, and moral judgments present in news texts, framing analysis enhances this strategy (Entman, 1993).

To enhance methodological transparency and respond to concerns regarding replicability, the research design was structured into four clearly defined stages: (1) data identification, (2) sampling and inclusion–exclusion procedures, (3) coding and analysis, and (4) triangulation across textual, framing, and visual dimensions.

This explicit sequencing allows the study to move systematically from data collection to interpretation, strengthening analytical rigor and enabling independent replication. When combined, these techniques enable the study to examine not only what is communicated but also how, why, and with what moral implications—particularly with relation to the disparate visibility of

Israeli and Palestinian suffering.

### 3.1.1. Conceptual and Ethical Positioning of the Term “Genocide”

In this study, the term “genocide” is employed not as a judicial determination but as an analytically and ethically grounded concept informed by interdisciplinary debates in international law, critical genocide studies, and media ethics. While the 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide defines genocide as acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group, this study does not claim legal adjudication of intent. Rather, it draws on critical scholarship that emphasizes patterns of mass civilian destruction, dehumanization, and the normalization of annihilatory violence as constitutive elements of genocidal processes (Lemkin, 1944; Shaw, 2007; Moses, 2021).

Within this framework, the concept of genocide is used to analyze how media discourse frames large-scale civilian suffering, moral hierarchies of life, and the visibility or erasure of victimhood. The study, therefore, approaches genocide as a discursive and ethical category, examining how its acknowledgment or denial in media narratives shapes epistemic justice, humanitarian empathy, and global moral accountability. This positioning allows the analysis to remain methodologically rigorous while engaging critically with ongoing international legal and ethical debates surrounding Gaza.

### 3.2. Selection of Media Outlets

The study focuses on four major Western media outlets: The New York Times, BBC, CNN, and The Guardian. These outlets were selected because they share several characteristics that make them ideal for examining selective humanitarianism. First, they are globally influential institutions that serve as agenda-setters, shaping both domestic and international news flows and public perceptions of conflict (Philo and Berry, 2011). Second, their editorial practices and online visibility ensure that their coverage reaches large, diverse audiences through multiple platforms, including websites, social media, and televised reports. Third, these outlets exhibit Western-centric journalistic norms and institutional cultures, providing a consistent lens through which to analyze discursive and framing patterns that may reproduce epistemic injustice.

The selection was further justified by their comparable editorial structures and professional classifications of journalistic genres (e.g., hard news, analysis, feature reporting), which enabled terminological consistency across outlets.

The selection was also theoretically grounded in their shared institutional characteristics, including Western journalistic norms, high cross-platform visibility, and well-documented influence on public opinion and foreign policy debates. Additionally, each outlet maintains comprehensive digital archives, which enable systematic access to articles published within the sampling period. This makes them an appropriate and consistent sample through which to examine selective humanitarianism and epistemic injustice in the context of Gaza coverage.

### 3.3. Sampling and Data Collection

Data collection involved identifying, screening, and selecting relevant news reports, editorials, and feature articles published during the designated period. Articles were sourced from official websites, online archives, and database searches using keywords such as “Gaza,” “Israel-Palestine conflict,” “civilian casualties,” and “military operations.” Non-relevant content, duplicates, and entertainment or opinion pieces unrelated to Gaza were excluded.

A total of 160 articles were selected, distributed evenly across the four outlets (40 articles per outlet), to ensure balanced institutional representation. Articles were selected through stratified sampling to ensure coverage across hard news, analyses, and feature stories, while excluding opinion pieces unrelated to the conflict.

For terminological clarity, “news” refers to time-sensitive, event-based reporting primarily focused on factual developments; “analysis” denotes interpretive or explanatory pieces authored by staff journalists that contextualize events through expert commentary or historical background; and “feature” articles include in-depth, human-interest-oriented reporting emphasizing personal experiences or narrative detail. Editorials and opinion columns, which explicitly present normative judgments or institutional viewpoints, were systematically excluded from the dataset to maintain genre consistency and analytical comparability.

Stratification was performed by dividing the October 2024–October 2025

time frame into quarterly segments and selecting proportional samples from each segment. All articles that failed to address civilian casualties, military operations, or humanitarian implications were excluded to ensure thematic relevance. Visual materials (images, video stills, and infographics) embedded in these articles were systematically extracted for visual analysis. This structured sampling enhances representativeness while maintaining analytical manageability.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

#### 3.4.1. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

CDA was conducted to van Dijk's (2006) and Fairclough's (2015) three-tier model, examining text, discursive practice, and social practice. Textual analysis focused on lexical choices, metaphors, agency, and sentence structures to identify patterns of depersonalization, euphemism, and moral privileging. Discursive practice analysis explored sourcing patterns, quotation practices, and intertextual references to understand how information is produced, circulated, and interpreted. Social practice analysis considered broader political, ethical, and ideological implications, particularly regarding epistemic injustice and selective humanitarianism.

To ensure analytic transparency, all textual excerpts cited in the Findings section were documented with full article metadata, including author, publication date, article title, outlet, and URL.

Special attention was given to identifying euphemistic constructions (e.g., "clashes," "escalation"), agent suppression (e.g., passive voice without perpetrators), and differential humanization of Palestinian and Israeli victims. The CDA process followed a multi-stage workflow: initial open coding, focused re-coding around emergent themes, comparative cross-outlet analysis, and synthesis of discursive patterns in relation to selective humanitarianism.

#### 3.4.2. Framing Analysis

Framing analysis categorized narrative patterns using established conflict-related frames, including conflict frames, equivalency frames, victim frames, responsibility frames, and solution frames (Entman, 1993). Two independent

coders were trained using a shared coding manual developed specifically for this study. The manual included definitions, inclusion/exclusion criteria, and sample coding excerpts.

Quantitative expressions such as “more frequent,” “disproportionate,” or “X times higher” were calculated based on frame occurrence counts across the dataset. Specifically, the number of articles in which a given frame appeared was divided by the total number of analyzed articles for each outlet. Comparisons were conducted between these proportional frequencies rather than absolute counts to ensure equivalence across media organizations with identical sample sizes (40 articles per outlet).

Following two pilot rounds, inter-coder reliability was assessed, yielding a Cohen’s kappa of 0.87, indicating strong agreement. Discrepancies were addressed through a structured reconciliation session in which coders reviewed disagreements, clarified definitions, and agreed on the final coded dataset. This ensured both rigor and consistency across the sample.

### 3.4.3. Visual Analysis

Visual content embedded in the selected articles was analyzed with principles from Rose (2016), Philo and Berry (2011). Images were coded for the depiction of victims (Palestinian vs. Israeli), emotional framing, and contextualization, including close-ups, expressions of distress, infrastructure damage, and military presence. This analysis examined alignment or divergence between textual and visual narratives and how these reinforce selective humanitarianism.

Visual findings were triangulated with textual and framing results and summarized in an integrative table presented in the Findings section. Images were coded using a complementary visual coding matrix designed for this study, evaluating whether subjects were photographed in close-up, mid-range, or wide shots; whether emotional distress was visible; and whether the setting emphasized destruction, domestic life, or militarized surroundings.

### 3.5. Ethical Considerations

All analyzed materials were publicly accessible, and no human subjects were directly involved. Visual materials depicting human suffering were used strictly for analytical purposes, following ethical guidelines on conflict imagery and ensuring no content was reproduced in ways that could sensationalize trauma.

### 3.6. Limitations

Limitations include the focus on four Western outlets, which restricts generalizability to other media contexts, and the temporal scope, which may be influenced by specific events during the October 2024–October 2025 period. Additionally, CDA involves interpretive judgment, which, despite rigorous coding and reliability measures, may introduce subjectivity. Additionally, while measures were taken to increase transparency and reduce subjectivity—such as coder training, reliability checks, and triangulation—CDA inherently involves interpretive judgment. Finally, temporal fluctuations in coverage due to sudden conflict escalations may influence frame distribution.

Nevertheless, transparency was strengthened through explicit coding protocols, inter-coder reliability testing, and multimodal triangulation, mitigating interpretive bias to the greatest extent possible.

## 4. Findings

The analysis of 160 news articles published between October 2024 and October 2025 reveals consistent discursive and framing patterns across Western media outlets. The dataset consisted of 40 articles from each outlet (The New York Times, BBC, CNN, and The Guardian), including hard news reports, analytical pieces, and feature stories; opinion/editorial texts were systematically excluded in accordance with the sampling criteria outlined in the Methodology section. These patterns demonstrate how selective humanitarianism and epistemic injustice are reproduced through differential visibility, moral weighting, and narrative asymmetry in representations of Israeli and Palestinian suffering.

To ensure methodological transparency, the findings below are organized in direct correspondence with the three analytical stages employed in this study:

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), framing analysis, and visual analysis. As summarized in Table 1, all four outlets display recurring patterns of selective humanitarianism, with notable variation in the degree of contextualization and emotional framing.

Media Outlet	Number of Articles (N)	Individualized Israeli Victims	Depersonalized Palestinian Victims	Passive Attribution of Israeli Agency	Emotional Framing of Israeli Suffering	Structural Context for Gaza
New York Times	40	High	High	Frequent	High	Limited
BBC	40	High	High	Frequent	Moderate–High	Limited
CNN	40	Moderate–High	High	Frequent	Moderate	Minimal
The Guardian	40	Moderate	Moderate	Occasional	Moderate	Relatively Higher
<b>Total</b>	<b>160</b>	—	—	—	—	—

**Table 1.** Distribution of Dominant Frames and Discursive Patterns Across Western Media Outlets (N = 160)

**Note.** “High,” “Moderate,” and “Limited” indicate relative frequency based on combined CDA, framing, and visual coding results rather than absolute counts.

#### 4.1. Differential Visibility and Humanization

Across all four outlets, Israeli suffering was consistently individualized and personalized, whereas Palestinian suffering was frequently abstracted and depersonalized. Paraphrased analysis of coverage from The New York Times, BBC, and CNN indicates that Israeli victims were commonly represented through personal identifiers such as names, family relations, and emotionally

specific narratives, while Palestinians were more often referred to through collective categories (e.g., “civilians,” “residents,” “people in Gaza”) without individual attribution. These patterns are reflected in the comparative overview presented in Table 1.

This pattern was most explicitly observable in The Guardian, where individualized Israeli narratives were foregrounded through detailed storytelling, while Palestinian experiences were framed in aggregated terms.

*“Nowhere is safe in Gaza,” displaced residents explained as repeated bombardments forced families to flee multiple times. “‘Nowhere is safe’: Gaza civilians describe life under bombardment.”* (The Guardian, 2025a).

Also, this pattern is illustrated by reporting in The New York Times, where Israeli experiences were foregrounded through personal storytelling, for example:

*“The family had gathered for what they thought would be a quiet evening before the missiles struck their home”* (Kingsley, 2025).

In contrast, coverage of Gaza frequently relied on depersonalized constructions, as in BBC reporting that emphasized destruction rather than individual lives:

*“Buildings collapsed across Gaza as casualties mounted”* (BBC News, 2025).

The CDA stage identified this divergence through repeated use of passive constructions and collective nouns in references to Palestinian casualties, contrasted with active, personalized constructions in Israeli narratives.

Visual analysis reinforced this pattern: images accompanying Israeli stories frequently employed close-up shots emphasizing facial expressions and emotional intimacy, whereas images from Gaza predominantly depicted wide-angle scenes of destruction, crowds, or damaged infrastructure. These patterns were identified through cross-outlet comparison of personalization markers (use of proper names, direct quotations, and individualized narratives), the aggregate distribution of which is summarized in Table 2.

## 4.2. Asymmetrical Attribution of Agency

Framing analysis revealed systematic asymmetries in the attribution of agency and responsibility. Paraphrased findings from BBC, CNN, and The New York Times coverage show that Israeli military actions were often described using passive or agentless constructions (e.g., “airstrikes were carried out,” “buildings were hit”), thereby obscuring direct responsibility.

In contrast, Palestinian armed actors were consistently described using active voice and explicit agency (e.g., “ Hamas launched rockets,” “militants carried out attacks”). These linguistic patterns were coded under responsibility frames and appeared with significantly higher frequency in references to Palestinian actions than Israeli ones.

For instance, CNN reported Israeli military actions as follows:

*“Airstrikes were conducted overnight across several neighborhoods in Gaza”* (CNN, 2025).

In contrast, Palestinian actions were framed with explicit agency, as illustrated in The Guardian’s reporting:

*“ Hamas fired a new barrage of rockets toward southern Israel”* (Christou, 2025).

Quantitative frame coding shows that explicit responsibility frames attributing agency to Palestinian actors appeared approximately 2.8 times more frequently than equivalent frames attributing responsibility to Israeli military actions when normalized by article count (see Table 2). This asymmetry was systematically identified in the textual analysis through comparative counts of active versus passive constructions across outlets and subsequently coded under responsibility frames, with proportional differences summarized in Table 2.

## 4.3. Emotional Framing and Moral Weighting

Emotional framing differed substantially between representations of Israeli and Palestinian suffering. Paraphrased analysis of NYT, BBC, and CNN reporting indicates that Israeli experiences were frequently narrated using emotionally charged language emphasizing fear, shock, and grief, whereas Palestinian suffering was more commonly framed through humanitarian

statistics, infrastructural damage, or abstract descriptions of crisis.

Israeli experiences were described with emotional specificity, including fear, grief, and shock, whereas Palestinian suffering was more often framed through aggregated statistics or humanitarian summaries.

BBC coverage of Israeli civilians frequently employed emotive language, such as:

*“Families huddled in panic as sirens wailed across the city”* (BBC News, 2025).

By contrast, Palestinian suffering was typically framed in generalized humanitarian terms, as reflected in The New York Times’ reporting on Gaza:

*“Casualty figures continue to rise as humanitarian conditions deteriorate”* (Kingsley, 2025).

Lexical coding conducted during the CDA stage indicates that adjectives associated with emotional vulnerability and innocence appeared 3.5 times more frequently in descriptions of Israeli victims than Palestinian victims (see Table 2). Visual analysis corroborated this pattern, with Israeli distress depicted through intimate scenes of fear or mourning, while Palestinian suffering was largely conveyed through images of destruction rather than emotion.

Visual findings aligned with this pattern: Israeli-focused images tended to depict moments of emotional intimacy, while Palestinian-focused images emphasized scale and devastation rather than individual affect.

#### **4.4. Structural Context and Historical Framing**

A further key finding concerns the unequal provision of political and historical context. Paraphrased coverage from CNN and The New York Times shows that Israeli suffering was frequently contextualized through references to prior attacks, security concerns, or geopolitical background, while Palestinian suffering was often presented as episodic or cyclical, with limited structural explanation.

Articles focusing on Israeli suffering frequently included references to prior attacks, security concerns, or geopolitical background. Palestinian suffering,

by contrast, was often presented as episodic and decontextualized, detached from structural or historical causes.

For example, The Guardian contextualized Israeli experiences by referencing broader security narratives:

*“Following years of cross-border tensions and repeated rocket attacks, communities remain on edge”* (Burke & Christou, 2025).

Coverage of Gaza, however, frequently lacked comparable contextualization, instead presenting destruction as ongoing, but it remained structurally unexplained (CNN, 2025). This disparity was particularly evident in intertextual analysis, where Israeli narratives drew upon policy discourse and historical framing, whereas Palestinian narratives were largely detached from broader political causality. These patterns are reflected in the comparative overview presented in Table 2.

#### **4.5. Selective Humanitarianism as a Discursive Outcome**

The combined results of CDA, framing analysis, and visual analysis demonstrate that selective humanitarianism operates through three interrelated mechanisms:

1. Individualized humanization versus collective abstraction,
2. Obscured versus explicit attribution of agency,
3. Emotional specificity versus emotional distance.

Taken together, these three mechanisms were not isolated observations but recurring patterns supported by aggregated textual, framing, and visual indicators (see Table 2).

These mechanisms were consistently identified across all four outlets and across analytical stages, indicating patterned rather than incidental representational practices.

This pattern is further illustrated in The Guardian’s reporting on humanitarian conditions in Gaza:

*“More than 60,000 Palestinians have been killed, the vast majority civilians, including over 18,000 children, while at least 79 people have died from hunger-related causes.” and “Gaza death toll rises as aid shortages worsen.”* (The Guardian, 2025b).

Humanitarian concern was explicitly personalized in coverage of Israeli victims, as in The New York Times reporting:

*“Communities remain shattered as families grapple with unimaginable loss”* (The New York Times, 2025).

In contrast, Gaza was commonly framed through administrative or logistical language, as in BBC reporting:

*“Aid organizations warn of shortages as infrastructure continues to deteriorate”* (BBC News, 2025).

Here, humanitarian concern is conveyed primarily through numerical aggregation rather than individualized narrative, reinforcing the abstract framing identified throughout the dataset.

To support these qualitative findings, Table 2 summarizes key quantitative indicators derived from framing and visual coding, including frame frequencies, agency attribution, and visual humanization patterns across outlets.

Analytical Category	Indicator	Israeli Subjects	Palestinian Subjects	Measurement Basis
<b>Corpus Composition</b>	Number of analyzed texts	80	80	160 total texts (40 per outlet); topic-based coding
<b>Article Type</b>	Hard news	54%	62%	Article genre classification
	Analysis	31%	26%	Excludes opinion/editorials

Analytical Category	Indicator	Israeli Subjects	Palestinian Subjects	Measurement Basis
	Feature	15%	12%	Human-interest framing
<b>Humanization</b>	Named individuals (name, age, family role)	68%	19%	Presence of personal identifiers
	Collective references only	22%	71%	Use of group labels (e.g., "civilians")
<b>Emotional Framing</b>	Emotionally specific descriptors (fear, grief, shock)	61%	17%	Lexical coding per article
	Statistical/humanitarian summaries	24%	69%	Aggregate casualty or aid-focused framing
<b>Agency Attribution</b>	Explicit agentive language	28%	79%	Active verb constructions
	Passive/impersonal constructions	64%	18%	Agent omission or neutral phrasing
<b>Responsibility Framing</b>	Explicit responsibility assigned	21%	59%	Attribution to actor or group
<b>Visual Representation</b>	Close-up images of victims	57%	14%	Image distance and focus
	Wide-angle destruction imagery	26%	68%	Rubble, infrastructure, crowds

Analytical Category	Indicator	Israeli Subjects	Palestinian Subjects	Measurement Basis
Contextualization	Historical/political background provided	63%	29%	Presence of contextual paragraphs

**Table 2.** Distribution of Frames, Agency Attribution and Visual Humanization Across Media Outlets

**Note.** Percentages are calculated based on the number of articles within each subject category and normalized by outlet size. Each article may include more than one frame; therefore, category totals may exceed 100%. News texts include hard news, staff-written analyses, and feature articles. Editorials and opinion columns were excluded from the corpus.

#### 4.6. Summary of Findings

Overall, the findings demonstrate that selective humanitarianism functions as a systemic discursive pattern in Western media coverage rather than as an isolated instance of bias. Through linguistic choices, framing strategies, and visual conventions, Israeli suffering is rendered more visible, emotionally resonant, and morally urgent, while Palestinian suffering is normalized, depersonalized, and rendered epistemically marginal.

These findings provide the empirical foundation for the discussion that follows, where their theoretical and ethical implications are examined in relation to epistemic injustice, moral hierarchies, and journalistic responsibility.

#### 5. Discussion

Building on the empirical patterns identified in the Findings section—particularly the recurrent depersonalization of Palestinians, the systematic individualization of Israeli subjects, the reliance on conflict-equivalency frames, and the visual marginalization of Palestinian civilian experiences—this Discussion section contextualizes these results within existing scholarship and theoretical debates. The study's conclusions highlight how selective

humanitarianism was systematically presented in Western media coverage of Gaza from October 2024 to October 2025. There are many significant similarities and differences between these findings and contemporary research, all of which support how moral hierarchies and epistemic injustices are perpetuated in international media discourse.

### **5.1. Selective Humanization and Epistemic Injustice: Confirming and Extending Recent Research**

As shown in the Findings section, Israeli suffering was consistently individualized while Palestinian harm was framed in abstract or collective terms. Our finding that Palestinian pain is mostly abstract, whereas Israeli suffering is constantly individualized (names, close-ups, emotive narratives) is in line with the trends found in recent empirical research. For instance, AlShebli et al. (2025) discovered that whereas Palestinian fatalities are frequently described in collective terms, Israeli victims are significantly more likely to be portrayed as identifiable individuals in over 14,000 Western media stories. The depersonalization of Palestinians through passive constructs, aggregated fatality statistics, and remote imagery is similar to our theme finding.

Additionally, our framing analysis is consistent with the mechanism of “false balance” described by AlShebli et al. in which coverage refers back to a single catastrophic event (such as October 7) to equate Israeli and Palestinian suffering even when new Israeli incidents are absent. This is especially true given the frequency of equivalency frames in our sample. This implies that the moral equivalency we have observed is not coincidental but rather a component of a larger structural bias in Western journalism.

These results also support the notion of epistemic injustice, which is the foundation of our theoretical framework. The patterns identified in the ‘Findings’ section—particularly the privileging of Israeli voices as authoritative sources—directly reflect testimonial inequality. Western media contribute to a worldwide epistemic framework that marginalizes Palestinian realities by consistently elevating Israeli voices, moral anguish, and credibility. This is exactly what Fricker (2007) cautions against: when some groups are denied the right to testify, their statements become less credible, less readable, and

less influential in politics. In the context of a recent conflict, our study puts this idea into practice.

## 5.2. Dehumanization, Gender, and Media Bias

Our Findings section indicated that Palestinian men were portrayed using neutralized or action-obscuring language; here, we theorize how such linguistic choices reproduce larger gendered forms of dehumanization. The function of dehumanization, particularly with relation to Palestinian men, is a significant theme in the new literature. For example, King and Baroudi (2025) offer a thorough analysis of more than 4,400 CNN and 265 BBC pieces from late 2023, showing how these media portray Palestinian men as “violent,” or “irrational,” dehumanizing them. Their research demonstrates that dehumanization in Western media involves more than just omissions; it also involves purposefully stigmatizing and gendered coding of Palestinians, particularly men.

This is supported by our own CDA findings that show neutralized language, passive voice, and depersonalization. Despite the differences between our period (2024–2025) and theirs period (2023), the consistency in discursive practices indicates that these are ingrained tendencies rather than transient failures. In particular, our multimodal analysis revealed that linguistic erasure was frequently reinforced visually, contributing to a layered process of dehumanization. Furthermore, our study expands on King and Baroudi’s findings by demonstrating that visual framing contributes to the depersonalization of Palestinians: dehumanizing tropes are reinforced by both language and multimodal techniques.

## 5.3. Institutional and Ideological Bias in Western Media

The findings demonstrated recurrent equivalency frames and passive constructions that obscured responsibility for Palestinian casualties; here, we connect these patterns to broader institutional critiques. Our understanding of moral hierarchy in coverage is also consistent with recent institutional analyses. The Al Jazeera Centre for Studies (2024) claims that by omitting, normalizing, and decontextualizing violence against Palestinians, numerous Western media outlets create discourse that supports ideological frameworks advantageous to Israeli geopolitical interests, thereby creating a “media

genocide” (studies.aljazeera.net). This criticism is supported by our findings of neutralizing responsibility and conflict-equivalency framing, which demonstrate that these discursive decisions are ideologically controlled rather than arbitrary.

In a similar vein, critics and media watchdogs have noted that Western coverage of Gaza frequently contains a great deal of bias. According to Anadolu Agency, analysts contend that terminology, platforming, and the marginalization of Palestinian perspectives are examples of “pro-Israeli bias” in UK media in particular (Bir, 2024). Our empirical analysis strengthens these critiques by showing precisely how such ideological bias materializes in language and sourcing practices.

#### **5.4. Silencing of Local Journalistic Voices**

As detailed in the findings, local Palestinian voices were largely absent as direct sources. The marginalization of Palestinian journalists themselves is another aspect of our conversation. Our sourcing analysis revealed a significant dependence on foreign organizations and non-local intermediaries rather than first-hand witnesses or local reporters, even though our study did not explicitly code for the presence or absence of Palestinian journalists by name. This is consistent with general criticisms about the suppression of Palestinian professional voices. In commentary, for example, journalists and academics have contended that Western media frequently elevate “foreign correspondents” while disparaging or ignoring Palestinian journalists who put their lives in danger to cover from Gaza (Baz Zi, 2025). Because Palestinian journalists are not regarded as legitimate knowers, these practices lead to both epistemic injustice and a moral hierarchy that obscures their pain and insights.

#### **5.5. Implications for Moral Hierarchies and Journalism Ethics**

The patterns identified in the Findings demonstrate a discursive environment in which some suffering is made morally legible while other suffering is obscured. The critical ethical concerns for international media are highlighted by our findings regarding the alignment with contemporary literature. As it appears in Western media, selective humanitarianism is a politically charged set of discursive strategies that create moral hierarchies rather than a neutral fault. Media sources contribute to a global moral economy where some lives

are valued more when one population's pain is rendered more "grievable" through narration and visuals, while the other's remains remote or abstract.

There are practical repercussions for this. Media framing affects foreign policy, public opinion, and humanitarian intervention (Entman, 2004). Western media run the risk of influencing public support for laws that disregard justice, accountability, or equal protection if they consistently underreport Palestinian victimhood or present it less compassionately. According to our research, more morally sound journalism necessitates structural adjustments, such as fair local voice sourcing, subtle contextual framing, and visual storytelling that humanizes all victims, regardless of their identity or nationality.

### 5.6. Contributions and Theoretical Implications

Through the integration of CDA, frame analysis, and visual analysis, our study offers a multimodal perspective that fills gaps in existing literature. Unlike many prior studies, our analysis explicitly demonstrates how linguistic and visual strategies interact to reproduce selective humanitarianism.

Through the integration of CDA, frame analysis, and visual analysis, our study provides a multimodal viewpoint that fills in the gaps in the body of current knowledge. Few studies have thoroughly investigated how language and visual tactics work together to promote selective humanitarianism, despite the fact that much research has concentrated on textual framing or bias (AIShebli et al., 2025; King and Baroudi, 2025). By empirically demonstrating how these injustices function across modalities and reinforce moral hierarchies in very political circumstances, our work contributes to the theoretical framework of epistemic injustice.

Furthermore, our research highlights the importance of postcolonial theory in media studies. The trends we experienced are indicative of a larger epistemic framework that favors institutions and viewpoints from the Global North rather than merely editorial bias. By connecting these discursive practices to geopolitical power, media institutional cultures, and ideological norms, we demonstrate that asymmetric global relations—rather than just individual journalistic shortcomings—are the source of epistemic injustice in news coverage.

### 5.7. Limitations and Future Research

As acknowledged in the findings, the reliance on four mainstream Western outlets limits representational diversity. This study has limitations despite its contributions. First, alternative or non-Western media platforms are underrepresented due to the emphasis on four big Western publications. Understanding representational disparities in the global information ecosystem would be enhanced by research contrasting Western media with non-Western, local, or alternative channels (e.g., Al Jazeera English, Palestinian independent media). Second, the time period covered by our analysis (October 2024–October 2025) may reveal discursive trends associated with specific military escalations or geopolitical changes. Studies that follow people over longer periods of time could look into whether these trends continue, get stronger, or change with time. Third, while our visual analysis provides valuable insights, it does not fully address all forms of multimedia (e.g., video, social media, interactive journalism), which are increasingly central in how audiences consume news. Future work could expand multimodal approaches to include these formats.

### 5.8. Practical and Ethical Recommendations

Several useful suggestions can be made to enhance the moral and fair reporting of conflicts in Western media based on the results and their consistency with current research. To portray impacted populations as reliable experts and active participants in their own stories, journalists should first make sure that Palestinian voices, local correspondents, and first-hand witnesses are included. Second, reporters and editors need to critically assess how disputes are framed, steering clear of euphemistic language or default equivalency frames that mask structural violence and unequal power relations. It is highly advised to use explanatory and contextual frameworks that draw attention to structural disparities.

Third, while avoiding depersonalized mass casualty imagery that reduces suffering to abstract statistics, especially for underrepresented people, visual editors should stress humanizing all victims through close-up images, personal narratives, and sympathetic surroundings. News organizations should also put in place training programs on media ethics, conflict reporting, and epistemic justice to make journalists more aware of how language,

imagery, and sourcing impact audience perception and moral assessment. In order to help consumers identify framing biases, omissions, and selective humanization in news coverage, educational programs and public efforts can also promote critical media literacy. Lastly, media companies should implement accountability and transparency measures such as diversity checks, editorial audits, and public reporting on representational equity in coverage.

By implementing these recommendations, Western media can move toward more just, equitable, and ethically responsible reporting, reducing the reproduction of moral hierarchies and epistemic injustices while providing audiences with a more accurate and humane representation of conflict realities.

## 6. Conclusion

This study examined the Western media coverage of the Gaza conflict between October 2024 and October 2025, focusing on the mechanisms of selective humanitarianism, moral hierarchies, and epistemic injustice. By integrating Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), framing analysis, and visual analysis, the research identified recurring patterns across four major Western outlets – The New York Times, BBC, CNN, and The Guardian.

The results show that Israeli victimhood is emphasized and humanized through personalized anecdotes, emotive narratives, and close-up photography. On the other hand, Palestinian suffering is persistently depersonalized and underrepresented, frequently expressed in aggregated or abstract ways. Equivalency frames, which portray hostilities as symmetrical despite the inequality of force and casualties, were widely used in conflict coverage. Textual biases were reinforced by visual strategies: Israeli victims were shown in intimate, relevant, and morally appealing situations, while Palestinian victims were depersonalized.

By showing how linguistic and visual modalities contribute to moral hierarchies in media representation, these discursive and visual patterns expand the theoretical framework of epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007) and validate earlier research on selective humanitarianism (AlShebli et al., 2025; King and Baroudi, 2025). The study also demonstrates how editorial

procedures, sourcing, and institutional standards perpetuate worldwide disparities in visibility, credibility, and humanization, highlighting the structural and ideological foundations of bias in Western media.

Overall, this study emphasizes the need for critical thought in journalism by showing that moral responsibility and fair depiction are just as important to ethical reporting as truth. The study advances both the practical issue of journalism ethics in conflict reporting and scientific knowledge of media bias by finding systemic trends.

All things considered, the study's discursive patterns and visual methods reveal pervasive biases in Western media coverage of Gaza, biases that are both structurally ingrained and ethically relevant. Our findings, when considered in the context of current research, indicate a media ecosystem that upholds moral hierarchies and epistemic inequities, elevating Israeli victimhood through humanizing tales while reducing Palestinian suffering to statistical abstraction. Both actual reform and theoretical attention are required to address these disparities. Journalism can only contribute to a more equitable and compassionate global public discourse by reconsidering how we tell stories of war, including who gets to speak, how their suffering is framed, and how their humanity is portrayed.

### Çıkar Çatışması Beyanı

Makale yazarı herhangi bir çıkar çatışması olmadığını beyan etmiştir.

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