

Stories Within Stories: Reading the Unfinished War in Gaza

Hikâye İçinde Hikâyeler: Gazze'deki Yarım Kalmış Savaşı Okumak

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Abstract

This paper argues against critics' tendency to prematurely impose definitive judgements in the ongoing Gaza conflict. The paper maintains that premature analytical finality constitutes a significant methodological error. By applying tools from literary theory and narratology onto international relations, the study examines the conflict as an 'unfinished narrative' currently operating in a state of in medias res. Utilizing Gerald Prince's concepts of the 'disnarrated' and 'unnarratable,' alongside Marie-Laure Ryan's notions of 'Minimal and Maximal Departure,' the analysis touches on how undercover intelligence operations and 'Spy-Fi' style technological warfare (such as the weaponization of mobile devices) create a storyworld that deviates radically from conventional military expectations. Furthermore, the paper applies Graham Harman's Object-Oriented Ontology to frame primary combatants as 'hyperobjects'—complex, multifaceted entities whose total agency remains partially withdrawn from immediate observation. By highlighting the polyphonic and often contradictory media perspectives that shape public perception, the research warns against 'interpretive finality.' It concludes that just as a literary work cannot be judged before its final chapter, the Gaza narrative requires a postponement of academic judgment until its trajectory reaches a conclusion, allowing for a more rigorous, retrospectively informed evaluation of its historical and geopolitical impact.

Keywords: Political Narratology, Gaza Conflict, unfinished narratives, International Relations, postponed judgment.

Özet

Bu makale, eleştirmenlerin devam eden Gazze çatışmasında vaktinden önce kesin yargılarda bulunma eğilimine karşı çıkmaktadır. Çalışma, analitik sonuçlandırmada acele etmenin ciddi bir metodolojik hata olduğunu savunmaktadır. Edebiyat kuramı ve anlatıbilim (narratology) araçlarını uluslararası ilişkilere uygulayan bu çalışma, çatışmayı halihazırda in medias res (olayların ortasında) devam eden bir 'tamamlanmamış anlatı' olarak incelemektedir. Gerald Prince'in 'anlatılmamış' (disnarrated) ve 'anlatılamaz' (unnarratable) kavramlarının yanı sıra Marie-Laure Ryan'ın 'Minimal ve Maksimal Sapma' (Minimal and Maximal Departure) ilkelerinden yararlanan analiz; gizli istihbarat operasyonlarının ve 'Spy-Fi' tarzı teknolojik savaşın (mobil cihazların silah haline getirilmesi gibi) geleneksel askeri beklentilerden radikal biçimde sapan bir hikaye dünyası (storyworld) yarattığına değinmektedir. Ayrıca makale, ana muharip tarafları 'hiper-nesneler' (hyperobjects)—toplam eylemlilikleri doğrudan gözlemden kısmen geri çekilmiş, karmaşık ve çok yönlü varlıklar—olarak çerçevelemek için Graham Harman'ın Nesne Yönelimli Ontolojisini

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uygulamaktadır. Araştırma, kamuoyu algısını şekillendiren çok sesli ve genellikle çelişkili medya perspektiflerini vurgulayarak 'yorumsal kesinlik' konusunda uyarıda bulunur. Tıpkı bir edebi eserin son bölümü okunmadan yargılanamayacağı gibi, Gazze anlatısının da tarihsel ve jeopolitik etkisinin daha titiz ve geriye dönük olarak bilgilendirilmiş bir değerlendirmesine imkan tanımak adına, akademik yargının olay akışı bir sonuca ulaşana dek ertelenmesi gerektiği sonucuna varır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Siyasi Anlatıbilim, Gazze Çatışması, tamamlanmamış anlatılar, Uluslararası İlişkiler, ertelenmiş yargı.

1. Introduction

The current conflict in Gaza, badly reawakened by the events of October 7, 2023, poses a great challenge to contemporary analysis not only because it is still going on, but also because it is constantly subjected to premature and definitive analyses and judgments in the political, academic and public discourses. In comparison with writing about literature, writing about current international relations crises is more problematic due to the ambivalent natures of the unfinished or unsettled events. By contrast, the structured, self-contained and above all completed narratives typically examined by literary and art critics—where the beginning, middle, and end of the work guide and inform interpretation—the Gaza conflict is still a story in its formative stages, with an uncertain outcome.

Like International Relations, Literary analysis generally draws on a broad and constantly evolving range of theories and critical tools. These tools range from the basic classical insights into mimesis and writings offered by Aristotle, Plato, Isocrates and other ancient classics, to the sophisticated modernist and post-modernist approaches of more recent intellectuals such as Heidegger, Barthes, Baudrillard, Bhabha, Derrida, Foucault, Said, among myriads of others. All these varied theoretical tools provide the literary critic with a subtle and sophisticated framework for understanding how a narrative is constructed, received, and interpreted. Literary critics can go so far as applying an odd theory, emanating from the womb of philosophy, like Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO), on literary texts without doing any harm to any character in the literary text. After all, such ontology at best challenges the prevalent anthropocentric viewpoints, placing value on the agency of all entities, human and non-human actors alike. At its worst, when a critic fails to read a text, no physical harm befalls the reader, the critic, or the text being critiqued. Thus, there is a major critical distinction between applying such tools in literary studies and their current use in international affairs: literary critics adhere strictly to the principle of analyzing only completed works.

As already established, in the world of literature, art, and cinema, scholars examine a text not only with full knowledge of its entirety, but additionally they are usually familiar with other works that orbit in that text's sphere. No critic would embark, let's say, on an analysis of Shakespeare's Othello without having read the play from its opening lines to its tragic end. The full curve of the narrative, from Othello's initial triumph to his devastating fall, is essential for any informed assessment of the play's themes, characters, or outcomes. It goes without saying, that critics may choose to focus on a particular scene, character, thematic element, or even a short phrase in the text, but this selection is always made against the backdrop of the completed work. However, this basic principle is always transgressed when dealing with real world crises. In the current frenetic world of international relations, and especially in war contexts, we observe an accelerating trend: scholars, critics, and commentators frequently offer definitive analyses and declare victories or defeats of one side or another while the events are still very much in progress. This paper suggests that the discourses of such premature conclusions not only mediate understanding but also risk establishing biases, thus hindering the potential for proper future re-evaluation when all the chapters of the story are eventually written. Our aim here is not to pass judgment on the actors within the conflict itself, nor to side with any faction, but rather to critically examine the act of judgment when applied to a narrative still in its chaotic, unfolding state.

From the very start of the Israeli retaliation attack, we begin to observe a persistent impulse to impose closure to a story of a war still in its initials. For instance, a bibliometric review of scholarly publications from the conflict's first year (Ennouri et al., 2023-24) appears to list academic articles actively engaged in conclusive readings, employing specific lexical terms such as "genocide" and "collective punishment" to describe the Israeli actions, or equally, echoing Israeli responses through terms like "self-defense" and citing "October 7" as the one and only fundamental event justifying military action. Similarly, Boisen (2024) cites prominent political theorists like Michael Walzer having applied 'Just War Theory' principles to the ongoing conflict, proposing interesting assessments on proportionality: "if there were almost 10,000 Hamas fighters among the 30,000 Palestinians killed, it's not a bad ratio for such a war on urban terrain" (p. 8), thus justifying extensive civilian destruction through concepts like "supreme emergency" (p. 7), and "permanent security" (p. 8). Furthermore, many other scholars, law experts, and official Israeli sources have already, in Boisen's words, labelled the October 7th attack as a "crime of genocide" (16) or defined Israel's subsequent actions as "genocide prevention" or a "punitive war" (p. 22).

This impulse to impose conclusive legal or strategic framings, often drawing on deeply rooted, often unstated, historical justifications for punitive warfare—where the concept of the 'enemy of humankind' can tragically suspend the category of 'innocent' civilians (Boisen, 2024, p. 5) underscores this paper's central argument: that ongoing wars, conflicts, and events, unlike completed works of art, resist coherent, unified readings. This is also valid for the so-called empirical studies attempting to capture the conflict's evolving dynamics from within or without. For instance, Atran et al. (2025), conducted, amidst the war, a survey of Gaza's population showing what appear to be definitive assertions about future trajectories. The survey, interestingly and may be unrealistically, details a hardening of "maximalist political goals for elimination of Israel," (p. 1) noting a significant decline in Hamas's popular support alongside a persistent "leadership vacuum," (p. 6) and eventually, emphasizes Gazans' enduring "strong core values related to national and religious identity and attachment to the land" (p. 1) which they intend to maintain despite significant personal cost. Yet, much like Othello asserting eternal love for Desdemona until old age, unaware of his imminent tragic end, such 'conclusive' readings of an ongoing, fluid conflict—whether from academic analyses or empirical surveys of present sentiment—risk becoming part of the 'disnarrated' truth. They represent a state of being or an anticipated future that the unpredictable unfolding of the narrative may tragically negate.

Such unpredictability is virtually there in the unnarratable fragments that are in essence part and parcel of the whole story when it unfolds completely, if it ever does. In Gerald Prince's (1988) theory of narrativity, the 'unnarratable' refers to elements or information in any story or narrative that are deliberately concealed. In Prince's words the unnarratable is "that which, according to a given narrative, cannot be narrated ... because it transgresses a law (social, authorial, generic, formal) or because it defies the powers of a particular narrator" (p. 1). In this case, the clandestine operations, and behind-the-scenes decision-making, periodically surfacing through leaks, fragment any attempt at definitive interpretation. For instance, Muaddi (2024) reporting the arrest of an Israeli official working in Prime Minister Netanyahu's office for allegedly "leaking and falsifying classified documents" to sabotage ceasefire negotiations shows how significant plot points are obscured or modified. While such obscured events profoundly shape the narrative, they remain outside of immediate public or analytical reach. This effect is further amplified by the strategic deployment of terms like the "Dahiya Doctrine" (Boisen, 2024, p. 16) and similar rhetoric that denies the humanity of a population. Such surfacing of concealed realities speak to the evasive outcome noted by Jean-Pierre Filiu (2014, p. 59), who writes, "Such tragedy is by no means destined but rather the product of this twelve-war cycle inflicted on Gaza, which came full circle with the elusive conclusion of Operation Protective Edge". Filiu's perspective aligns with this paper's argument. Indeed, the Gaza conflict is not a singular rupture but part of a long, cumulative, and still-unfinished narrative. 'Operation Protective Edge' is not a conclusion as such, or anywhere near a conclusion. Thus, any

attempt at concluding a meaning while the narrative is still ongoing is as methodologically flawed as judging a tragedy or a book by its opening act or chapter.

2. The Unfinished Narrative: Literary Theory as a Lens for Ongoing Conflict

The way we understand stories through our careful readings of what is narrated and unnarrated, to understand what is going on between Israel and Hamas, we have to look at the history that happened long before the current events. For a great part of the story, the non-narrated part, takes place off-stage. This is to say, that the most important causes of the conflict are hidden from immediate view. Just as a play or a novel has a backstory that happens before the actors/characters appear on the stage, this conflict has roots that were planted decades and centuries ago. These so-called off-stage elements are extremely important and should not be ignored the way we cannot ignore the mythological and historical foundations that precede the main events of an epic. For instance, in Homer's *Iliad*, the abduction of Helen, which triggers the Trojan War, is the culmination of deep divine manipulations, ancient prophecies, and long-standing grievances that should not be overlooked when examining the Trojan conflict. Similarly, the Israel-Hamas narrative is deeply rooted in late 19th and early 20th-century European history, particularly with the rise of Nazism, as well as in historical narratives of dispossession and return, and indeed, in grand narratives attributed to divine providence, such as the myth of the promised land. This phenomenon is not unique to the Middle East. The narrative of the EU-Ukraine-Russia relationship also began 'offstage,' rooted in the 20th-century history of Europe—the rise of communism, the consolidation of the Soviet Union, and its eventual collapse in December 1991.² The fragmentation of this once-mighty empire left unresolved territorial disputes over regions like Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, and especially Crimea, setting the stage for today's geopolitical tensions. Such background forces or off-stage contexts, whether based on historical claims or mythologized narratives, create a predetermined backdrop for the story, influencing the actions of its characters and the plot's direction. The Israeli national narrative, in particular, demonstrates this reliance on a mythologized 'offstage' framing.

Scholars in the field of critical Israel studies, such as Pappé (2017), generally argue that this national narrative is heavily mythologized through a framing that maintains and justifies the ongoing conflict. This framing thrives on foundational narratives of existential threat, thereby reinforcing a teleological structure that makes the current conflict seem tragically inevitable. Within this logic, war is viewed as an inevitable destiny rather than a series of avoidable choices, with the consequence of pluralistic thinking and the search for alternative solutions being discouraged. Indeed, such a mode of narrative mirrors classical tragic fate more than open-ended political realities, where outcomes are genuinely subject to political agency and negotiation.

In the realm of literary theory, any event within a narrative is generally measured by its impact or consequence on the complete work. This totality of the narrative shapes our understanding and judgment of literary texts and its fictitious events. The tragedy of *Othello*, for instance, demonstrates this powerfully: an observer who only witnesses the initial events of the play will perceive a man who has achieved immense success; but this 'in medias res' (in the middle of the action) judgment would belie and contradict the play's devastating conclusion. The same principle applies to narratives across languages and cultures. Looking at *Oedipus*, in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, only after his off-stage neutralization of the sphinx and his subsequent coronation in Thebes would suggest a story of triumphant leadership. Yet, the eventual revelation of *Oedipus*'s killing his father and his incestuous relationship with his mother reverses this initial perception. Conversely, an early glimpse into *Cinderella*'s initial life of hardship, for example, would suggest a narrative of failure. But when we

² For a detailed discussion on the intersection of narrative polyphony and geopolitical conflict, see Visam Mansur, "Polyphonic Narratives of Conflict: Dialogic, Unnatural and Slipstream Perspectives on European Union–Ukraine–Russia Dynamics," *Global Discourse* 15, no. 1 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.1332/20437897Y2025D000000062>.

look at the full tale, we see a conclusion that celebrates her transformation and triumph. These randomly mentioned literary examples demonstrate how the outcome of a narrative can reshape the interpretation of preceding events, rendering any early judgment inherently unreliable or, at best, incomplete.

In medias res, and in an extremely violent way, the 7th October 2023 Hamas attack has added only a passage to the still unfinished Gaza story. Sadly, what followed immediately was a bloody and tragically added passage among a series of, sometimes less, and at times more, intensely written passages with widespread deaths and hostage-taking. “According to Israeli sources, more than 1,200 Israelis and foreign nationals have been killed, including children, and nearly 5,500 have been injured” (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [OCHA], 2024). Additionally, around 250 individuals were abducted and taken hostage to Gaza (OCHA, 2024). Yet, as with any unfolding storyline, this was only a brutal beginning, not anywhere near an end. Media thrives on such tales of horror, adding, deleting, twisting and reshaping the narrative. The initial reports from the international press, albeit through diverse framings and perspectives, quickly conveyed the deep shock and stressed the unprecedented nature of the assault. For example, Al Jazeera (2023) immediately described it as a “surprise” and “unprecedented attack” that commenced with a massive “barrage of rockets” that quickly escalated to a “multipronged infiltration” by ground, “powered parachutes”, and motorboats, presenting the event as if it is a virtual scene from a Hollywood war movie, thus playing on the sentiment of a segment of readers’ craving some taste of victory. Simultaneously, Israeli reports, such as those from government sources, described the event as a “deliberate and systematic act of genocide,” underlining the systematic targeting of civilians and the immediate perpetration of “atrocities” in border communities that include “widespread torture, mutilation, sexual violence, and desecration of bodies” (Magen David Adom, 2023; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel, 2023). Adding to these horrifying accounts, recent reports from outlets like the BBC further shaped the deeply disturbing narratives that emerged immediately after the event, playing on the sentiment of those who like to appear as victims in front of an international audience. For instance, in a BBC article, Gritten (2024) details accusations by Israeli experts that “Hamas used sexual violence as ‘part of a deliberate genocidal strategy’” during the October attacks.

This moment—the attack as both a text and an action within an extended plot—regardless of narrative perspective, clearly challenged conventional expectations, functioning as an event, narrativity scholars like Jan Alber and Brian Richardson (2020) might term “unnatural” due to what logically looks its antimimetic structure and progression. For real-time wars, like complex postmodern fiction, are not beholden to Aristotelian unities or classical resolutions, their structures more than often mirror chaos and contingency rather than order and closure. As Alber and Richardson argue, a purely mimetic (realist) model of narrative “cannot comprehend antimimetic works that violate the rules of mimetic representation,” thus, necessitating an expanded theoretical framework to understand stories that deviate from conventional realism and linearity (p. 6). Alber and Richardson decline to provide such alternative models that capture such a radical departure from conventional diegesis or what is known as storyworlds.

The events following October 7 also entail what Gerald Prince (1988) refers to as unnarratability—aspects of a story that, while crucial to its overall context, are not overtly narrated or are deliberately left unstated. Here, the expected Israeli retaliation, which was immediate and forcefully overwhelming, rapidly reshaped the unfolding narrative while great details of it remained unnarratable. The main players and their unnarrated and unnarratable plots in this evolving narrative may be better understood when seen as hyperobjects: a term Graham Harman (2017, p. 232) defines as entities “massively distributed in time and space” whose reality is partially withdrawn from comprehension. This perspective emphasizes the role of the predominant system made of myriad human and non-human elements, rather than the actions or intentions of isolated individuals like a specific prime minister or commander. Thus, what truly defines and drives these entities is not simply one element or one person. Israel, for instance, is not simply a country in the conventional sense. It

functions as a complex, multifaceted hyper object comprising its military, its formidable technological might (e.g., guided and unguided bombs, rockets, the Iron Dome missile defense system), and its thousands of well-equipped and highly trained military personnel. These, separately, and in their totality, are ‘objects with great agency,’ backed by significant Western powers. Yet as all objects their true essence remains constantly withdrawn. This is partly translated in narrativity terms as the unnarratable essence. In this sense, the combatants in this conflict are way far from the solitary, chivalrous journeys of a Sir Gawain or Lancelot traversing a wilderness; nor is it akin to Moses, whose ancient path lacked the precision of modern GPS navigation or satellite communication—an amusing anachronism that underscores the shift in the nature of power and agency over millennia.

Similarly, the next significant player, the Islamic Resistance Movement or Hamas, also operates as a hyperobject. While backed by other regional hyperobjects, its conventional military capabilities hardly weigh in comparison to those of Israel. The nature of these external relationships, particularly between Hamas and its regional supporters, can be illuminated through Prince’s categorizations of narrativity. Their alliances are often governed by what Prince (1988) terms as the disnarrated and the unnarratable. For Prince the disnarrated, on the one hand, comprises events that are mentioned in the narrative as not happening, thereby implicitly revealing possibilities or expectations that are then denied. On the other hand, the unnarratable comprises all events that, for various reasons, cannot or will not be narrated within a specific narrative framework. We know they are there, but remain hidden. In their absence they become subjects of speculation. The unnarratable in essence is totally different from the unnarrated and may stand in stark opposition to it. The unnarrated explicitly indicates events and details that simply are not told but could be understood from the context. It is within this dynamic—Prince’s Narratology—that we can see how the relations of the players materialize, dematerialize, yield what is hoped for, expected or just merely remain unrealized projects.

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In this conflict, observations formed in real-time often take on the appearance of definitive readings to different audiences, thus generating a momentary illusion of victories and defeats. This happens because various media organs and news outlets offer radically divergent narrative perspectives. For instance, CNN (2023) reported on Israeli claims of striking over 320 Hamas and Islamic Jihad “terror targets,” while Al Jazeera (2025) accused Israel of waging a systematic thirst war—killing hundreds of people waiting for water and destroying vital infrastructure like water wells. These are two varied examples among thousands of such continual divergent additions to the details of the conflict. Such discrepancy disseminated through competing voices exemplifies what narratologists term polyphony or multivocality—where multiple voices, often with contradictory implications, coexist within the same narrative space.

It is indeed the multiplicity of the speculative claims and premature assertive readings about the conflict’s outcomes that inform and nourish this polyphonic phenomenon. For example, a Lt. Col. Jonathan Conricus, only sixteen days into the war, publicly speculating on the war’s end, suggested it would “end if Hamas surrenders and releases their hostages” (Radio New Zealand, 2023). Such an assertion does exemplify the flawed tendency to project narrative closure without or before a resolution is there. As we see today, almost a year after the release of all hostages, the war is still raging and the conflict is still in progress. Meanwhile, the responses of the Palestinian Authority reflected what reads like internal narrative tensions. As noted by Blanchard et al (2023, p. 8), the Palestinian Authority could neither endorse Hamas nor fully condemn the attacks without alienating a considerable portion of its own population. These undercurrents that infiltrate and plague the narrative show not only the instability of interpretation but also its vanity while the plot remains unresolved.

By simply looking at the interplay between the declared goals and the actual outcomes, not only one can see how the reading of events is becoming unstable, but also one can note how narrativity

advances rapidly into the realm of the unreliable. For example, while we hear Israeli military leadership announcing its aim to destroy the military capacity and government of Hamas altogether labelling them as terrorist organization, observers have questioned the feasibility of this goal and the vagueness of what would follow. This shows how the attempts of the official discourse to impose a teleology on a story still in flux may not yield the desired conclusion. Similarly, as Shaath & Owda (2023) noted, by initiating and escalating the conflict Hamas's leadership had multiple aims—including sparking uprisings in the West Bank or influencing regional alliances—that have only partially and shyly materialized.

Eventually, the disnarrated dynamics are explicitly reflected in the presence of these conflicting goals and narrative paths, especially those that are aborted and never materialize. For the disnarrated is especially significant in understanding the narrative status of failed or hypothetical operations, like the expansion of Hamas's resistance strategy across regional fronts. These unfulfilled plotlines remain part of the narrative consciousness, hovering in Prince's (1988, p. 4) term as "what might be". For Prince's narrativity theory tells us that such goals and paths generally turn to be based on "hopes, desires, imaginings and ponderings, unreasonable expectations and incorrect beliefs" (p. 4). In sum, this section reaffirms that the structure of the narratives of conflict resists authoritative summarization and proposes the postponement of judgement until the narrative path becomes clear.

3. Narrative Potentiality: Minimal vs. Maximal Departure in Live Geopolitical Conflict

As the Gaza conflict is still in motion months after the Trump-signed cease-fire deal in October 2025, we can look into the unfolding events for potential directions, assuming sudden, unpredictable twists happening any time before a final conclusion. For within a storyworld, indeed, anything can happen, especially when considering Marie-Laure Ryan's (2021) conceptualization of narrative representation, which includes concepts she labels as Minimal Departure (MD), Maximal Departure (MxD), and Optimal Departure (OD). In her paper titled "In Defense of Minimal Departure," Ryan directly addresses the concepts of MD, MxD, and OD pointing out that only MD potentially serves as a baseline, allowing us to import knowledge from the real world into a fictional one, with the text having "the last word" if it clashes or contradicts reality (p. 99). Conversely, she critiques MxD, arguing that it is a "futile move" that "does not provide standards of comparison for the reader's act of imagination" (p. 97) and works only as a "vague expectation that relates only to specific genres" (p. 100). For Ryan, MD helps conceptualize a "flying horse" (like a real horse but with flight), while MxD offers no clear guide, potentially leading to wildly arbitrary interpretations (p. 100). She similarly dismisses OD, questioning its added value given that MD already implies keeping departures to a minimum for optimality (p. 101). Now, when looking at the constantly changing dynamics of the Gaza conflict, we observe a close similarity between what happens, happening, might happen and Ryan's perception of the storyworlds. The frequent assassinations, and the novelty of their execution, the rapid geopolitical escalations, and the use of apocalyptic rhetoric create an evolving and often surreal narrative spaces. This extreme deviation from typical political and social norms aligns with the idea of a "maximum" deviation from what might be expected in a traditional, stable reality. Therefore, until the conflict reaches a conclusion, the narrative potential remains open-ended, and events can constantly challenge our expectations of what might happen next.

By looking at the events retrospectively, we see Ryan's maximal departure (MxD) manifested first in Hamas' initial surrealistic attack that should not have happened, happening. This sudden extreme departure in the plot of the conflict's narrative unsettles the storyworld. Hamas, reportedly taking instructions from Iran and backed by Iranian proxies like Hezbollah in Syria and Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, and some factions of Hashd al-Sha'abi in Iraq, launched its sudden, devastating attack. In return, Israel took a maximal departure stance when retaliating with unprecedented extreme force with impunity counting on its Western allies. Eventually, this unprecedented event immediately polarized the press and all types of social media generating polyphonic narratives. Some narratives,

especially those articulated by Hamas's overzealous partisans on TV shows, and other official and non-official media venues, immediately hailed the act as heroic, jumping to conclusions that, from a detached perspective, appear surrealistic or even grotesque. Other narratives remained somewhat ambivalent, that is to say neither thrilled by the event nor dismissive of it. For instance, the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, being the closest to the events and the people of Gaza, adopted an undecided position, as Blanchard et al. (2023, p. 8) observed, noting that the Palestinian Authority is "unwilling to embrace their Hamas rivals but also unable to denounce them for fear of alienating the sizable population of Palestinians who support confronting Israel." By remaining ambivalent, the Palestinian Authority managed to maintain the minimal departure (MD) recommended by Ryan's (2021, p. 100) model as a "criterion for truth in fiction." Conversely, others condemned the act itself as unequivocally grotesque, though not in the refreshing, carnivalesque sense articulated by Bakhtin (1968), rather in the negative, non-therapeutic sense described by Wolfgang Kayser. While Bakhtin sees the grotesque as possessing positive and regenerative energy, Kayser (1968, p. 37) views it as a negative force that evokes fear of life. For him, the grotesque alienates "the familiar and apparently harmonious world [...] under the impact of abysmal forces, which break it up and shatter its coherence". This is what the sudden attack and counter attack did in the Gaza storyworld. Like Kayser's grotesque, it imposed a profound sense of disruption and unease. It shows how the familiar order has been irrevocably shattered by an underlying, terrifying chaos, thereby evoking horror and alienation rather than liberation or renewal. This is exactly the current scene in the region.

Within this escalating narrative, specific events acquiring the characteristics of Hollywood Techno-Thriller and spy-fi combined, quickly introduced further elements of Maximal Departure (MxD) into the narrative's plot. This is seen in Israel's elimination of Hezbollah's first and second-tier leaders through sophisticated intelligence operations, including the booby-trapping of their mobile devices such as pagers and phones. Ironically enough, this scene is reiterated again and again in the assassinations of various other resistance leaders, such as Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, Hassan Nasrallah in Lebanon, and Yahya Sinwar in Gaza, among several others across the Middle East. Such maximal departure is further grounded in Prince's (1988) concept of the unnarratable. For these unnatural events to happen, the narrative excluded the stories of the hidden players whose actions and roles in the conflict may remain unnarratable in the foreseeable time: these are the stories of the secret intelligence activities and their secret means and methods; the stories of the undercover players from all sides; the stories of who was bought, who was sold, who infiltrated whom and how. All these unnarratable events truly lurk in the shadows of this unfinished story. Such intricate details might only be narrated, if ever, decades after the conclusion of these events.

Meanwhile, as a sub-plot within this extensive narrative, events like Turkey's success, through its proxy arm in Idlib, in removing the Assad regime, and distancing Russian forces from certain areas of Syria illustrate the multi-layered and interconnected nature of regional events. Also, we should not forget that the bombing of Iran's nuclear installations, and the current Iran battle mark another side plot, and add further layers to the 7th October events. All this dramatic maximal departure (MxD) in the plot lines of this conflict makes interpretive closure not only elusive but epistemologically dangerous. As Erwin van Veen (2023, p. 2) argues, "Sketching scenarios is a way to look at the future by making ambiguity tangible, including undesirable outcomes, and to encourage reflection." This echoes the narratological point I advocated in this paper, that is to resist the desire for premature interpretive finality and instead allow narrative ambiguity to inform our understanding.

To conclude, in view of all this, the current Gaza conflict, like all world-wide inter/national conflicts, serves as a real-world example for the application of narratological theories and principles to international relations. This paper has argued, without judging any side, that passing definitive judgements, and jumping to conclusions by declaring winners and losers, and proclaiming villains and heroes while the final chapter is not yet written are totally contrary to the principles of literary and artistic criticism. While scholars in artistic fields have the privilege of judging a completed work with impunity, those attempting to make sense of live conflicts will remain, unfortunately, grappling

with a story still being written, a narrative lacking the essential clarity of its final chapters. I believe another generation may be able to reflect on and judge this story with better insight, yet not without the biases inherent in humans' readings.

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