



ANALYSIS

OPINION - Western media framing reveals more about their biases than Gaza's realities

To shape narrative, mainstream media employs 4 key stages: Disinformation and misleading content, creating pre-attack legitimacy, dehumanization of one side's victims, shadowing the perpetrator

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- Suggesting that only solution to combat 'terrorist' group is through indiscriminate killing of civilians, stated merely in numbers, poses a significant risk of legitimizing genocide



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In the nearly four-week conflict between Israel and Palestine, Western media manipulation has taken center stage according to Israel's strategic use of propaganda. Amid mainstream failures, alternative voices and social media became pivotal in offering a multi-voiced perspective on the human catastrophe and Israel's atrocities in besieged Gaza.

Media serves not only as an information tool but also as a potent propaganda instrument. Particularly during times of war, propaganda undermining atrocities is extensively employed by states involved in the conflict. The most recent example of "atrocious propaganda" can be observed in Israel's portrayal of its war in besieged Gaza. Following Hamas' surprise attack on Oct. 7, claiming at least 1,500 lives, Israel declared war on Hamas,

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completely sealing off Gaza's borders and initiating collective punishment on Palestinian civilians by blocking the entry of water, food, medicine, and fuel. Despite Israel's claims that it is taking care not to target civilians but only Hamas, the number of Palestinian civilians killed by Israeli airstrikes in the last three weeks exceeded 9,000.

Throughout the conflict, Western media, including state-funded broadcasters such as the BBC and Germany's DW, and global media outlets such as the New York Times, Washington Post, Times of London, CNN, and Fox News, have been widely criticized for echoing Israel's propaganda.

Israel based its propaganda on the "self-defense" argument, aiming to justify internationally recognized war crimes under the law such as collective punishment, the use of weapons like white phosphorus bombs, and targeting civilians. The actions came with the wide support of Western policymakers and media outlets despite clear violations of the Geneva Convention and Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Furthermore, those daring to raise their voices against the loss of civilian lives, advocate a ceasefire, or pleading for essential aid to reach Gaza were callously stamped with the "antisemitic" label. The indiscriminate use of this term extended to those participating in peaceful anti-war protests. Adding insult to injury, individuals who boldly spoke out or shared their anti-massacre sentiments on social media sometimes found themselves paying the price with job losses.

Under the shadow of discrimination, Western media not only embraced one side's narrative but also distanced itself from journalistic objectivity. Recognizing the power of rhetoric to shape public opinion, mass media opted for a biased framing in presenting news narratives in the last three weeks.

Western media outlets shaped their rhetoric through the lens of "one reality" over the many brutalities witnessed on the ground. To support the "reality," the chosen victim group is highlighted and emphasized, while simultaneously the "other" victim group is either minimized or silenced.

To shape the narrative, the mainstream media employed four key stages: Disinformation and misleading content, creating pre-attack legitimacy, dehumanization of one side's victims, and shadowing the perpetrator.

Disinformation and misleading content

The first stage of propaganda in Israel's "just" war process is using disinformation and misleading content to create a basis for their "self-defense" argument. Disinformation is often used to prepare the public for "proportionate and necessary attacks" to protect one side. The causes and consequences of this violence are either ignored or left ambiguous.

On the first day of the attacks, Oct. 7, one piece of "news" made a big splash: Hamas beheading 40 babies, without any verification of the information (Fox News, CNN, The New York Post). This rumor, on which the Israeli authorities have repeatedly based the reason for their actions, could not be confirmed. It couldn't be substantiated.

Misleading content was also used to support the "real victim" narrative.

In one example, the Times of London, during that period, used photos of injured Gazan children with the headline: "Israel shows mutilated babies." Not only did they feature images of Palestinian children instead of Israeli children, but the Times also mentioned in the news that photographs of mutilated Israeli babies were "too graphic" and, as a result, they chose not to publish them. They rather used one's suffering to boost sympathy for another's pain.

Creating pre-attack legitimacy

The second leg of propaganda seen in Western media is to create pre-attack legitimacy, which basically refers to preparing the international public for attacks using the rhetoric that "attacks may be just." This involves shaping rhetoric to prepare the international

audience for the notion that the impending attacks are justified. Notably, Britain's BBC circulated information claiming that hospitals were being used as Hamas tunnels just a day before a major hospital was targeted.

The subsequent coverage of the hospital shooting was presented to the public with the perpetrator described vaguely in passive language. Additionally, Western media adopted the Israeli propaganda narrative depicting Palestinians as human shields, refraining from reporting on the targeting of schools, hospitals, churches, and mosques within the context of "civilian targeting."

Dehumanization of one side's victims

The third phase of the propaganda is seen on the framing of one side's tragedies. The Western media have been focusing on the victimhood of Israeli side through interviews with prisoners' families, short documentaries, and personal stories shared repeatedly on social media.

In contrast, Palestinian casualties are relegated to mere numbers, lacking the depth of individual narratives and the human suffering accompanying each loss. Moreover, Palestinians faced complete silence in the first days of attacks.

Western media's linguistic and narrative asymmetry raises concern as the public is directly linked to creating pre-attack legitimacy. Highlighting the suffering of one side while neglecting the other, and suggesting that the only solution to combat a "terrorist" group is through the indiscriminate killing of civilians, stated merely in numbers, poses a significant risk of legitimizing genocide.

Shadowing the perpetrator

The fourth stage of the propaganda can be seen in Western media coverage of Israeli and Palestinian losses. A notable linguistic bias emerges as Israelis are described as "killed," while Palestinians are said to have "died," with perpetrators of the killings often left unnamed. For instance, when a Reuters journalist was killed by an Israeli airstrike, the BBC hardly included the word Israel, and only when "the army" was "deeply regretful for the incident."

In a parallel instance, when a civilian settlement in Gaza experienced an impact, the incident was characterized in news reports as an "explosion" or a "blast" without referencing the Israeli bombardment – the root cause of the explosion.

This choice of language in news portrays Israelis as individual victims and Palestinians as unknown statistics.

Multivoiced counter-narrative: Resilience amidst media failures

Amid the Western media's inability to capture the nuances of the Palestinian narrative, alternative global media and the pervasive influence of social media have emerged as the vanguard of a diverse counter-narrative.

Anadolu Agency's exposure of the fabricated story of 40 beheaded babies underscores the critical role of these alternative voices in debunking misinformation. At the same time, TRT World and Al Jazeera, in their efforts to dispel biased claims, have used powerful documentaries to challenge dominant narratives.

These counter-media not only quickly report on civilian casualties and identify perpetrators, but also amplify the voices of the oppressed and provide an unfiltered spotlight on the ongoing humanitarian catastrophe. In essence, these alternative narratives serve as a robust and essential corrective to the limitations of mass media, ensuring a more comprehensive understanding of the complex realities on the ground.

Social media, on the other hand, has put each Gazan user in the position of a "self-journalist." Through this endeavor, Gazans used their social media accounts to share moment-by-moment photos, videos, firsthand accounts of the injured, and narratives of families grappling with profound losses to convey the atrocities to the world.

In response to the transmission of regionally reported news that contradicted Israel's narrative, Israel took severe measures. Press members and their families became targets, and telecommunication services in Gaza were entirely eradicated, isolating the region from global communication channels.

Israel strategically shrouded one of its most intense bombardments in darkness, effectively thwarting self-journalism and blocking the events in the region from being conveyed to the world in any form. This deliberate action created a blackout in global public opinion by obstructing information from both within and outside the area.

This led to the mobilization of pro-Palestine social media users on social media issuing a call to Elon Musk with the hashtag #starlinkgaza. Responding to the plea, Elon Musk facilitated a satellite connection to the region, defying the imposed blackout.

As Israel's war in Gaza continues unabated, the ongoing human tragedy persists, overshadowed by a mainstream media that disproportionately highlights a singular perspective. The biased coverage not only adopts one side's propaganda as the prevailing narrative but also undermines the proclaimed "journalistic objectivity." Through biased coverage, Western media not only adopted one side's propaganda as its narrative and rhetoric but put their claim of "journalistic objectivity" at risk, potentially leading to a loss of credibility in the eyes of the public.

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