



Wombs in the warzone: examining motherhood, childhood, and the ethics of witnessing violence in Gaza

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the acute humanitarian crisis in Gaza amid the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with a focus on gendered and child-specific vulnerabilities. Drawing on recent data from UN agencies and insights from feminist and postcolonial scholarship, it reveals how the conflict disproportionately affects women and children through indiscriminate violence, forced displacement, food insecurity, and systemic oppression. The study critiques the failure of international humanitarian law to restrain state aggression and exposes the complicity of mainstream media—particularly in West and also in India – in legitimising dominant geopolitical narratives. Through an analysis of media silence, editorial bias, and the instrumentalisation of suffering, the paper highlights the erasure of subaltern voices and yearns for critical media literacy and sensibility. By foregrounding independent human rights reports and civilian testimonies, this research advocates for an ethical and decolonial engagement with conflict reporting and humanitarian backing. The findings reveal a stark disconnect between legal norms and geopolitical realities, and yearning for a sustained, justice-oriented global response.

Keywords: Gaza conflict, gendered violence, humanitarian law, media narratives and ethics, colonialism, civilian suffering.

The twenty-first century has ushered in an era of unprecedented technological advancement, transforming the landscape of media, communication, and global connectivity. The devastating humanitarian crisis in Gaza is an example of how technological advancements have facilitated instantaneous communication and access to information, but they have also brought with them the grim reality of contemporary conflicts and “warfare.” The development of sophisticated weaponry and military weapons has had catastrophic consequences for the civilian population, reducing entire towns or cities to rubble and shattering lives in an instant. In Gaza, the impact of modern warfare is particularly devastating, with thousands falling victim to indiscriminate bombings, shootings, and airstrikes. Since October 7th, 2023, the Israeli military has relentlessly bombarded Gaza, resulting in the large-scale destruction of schools, hospitals, and homes. The violation of the dignity and rights of Palestinian women has reached distressing new levels, as they face the horrifying reality of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and an unfolding “genocide,” as the Palestinian bodies

as well as those from outside who empathise with the Palestinians' oppression have termed it.

The Gaza conflict's devastating toll continues to mount, with casualty figures reflecting an escalating humanitarian crisis. According to a June 2025 report, at least 55,720 Palestinians have been killed and 124,190 injured since October 7, 2023, as documented by Gaza's Ministry of Health (Al Jazeera, 2025). These figures, broadly corroborated by Israeli intelligence assessments (Prothero, 2024), highlight the relentless violence impacting civilians, particularly women and children. Beyond direct fatalities, indirect deaths from disrupted healthcare, malnutrition, and infectious diseases amplify the crisis. Khatib et al. (2024) argue in *The Lancet* that armed conflicts generate extensive health consequences, estimating that "applying a conservative ratio of four indirect deaths per one direct death to the 37,396 deaths reported [as of July 2024], up to 186,000 or more deaths could be attributable to the current conflict in Gaza" (Khatib et al., 2024). This projection highlights the profound, enduring human cost of the conflict, extending far beyond immediate losses. As Agamben (1998) critiques in his theory of *bare life*, in conflict zones such as Gaza, civilians are often reduced to a state of political invisibility – living in a condition where the protections of law are suspended, and life itself becomes expendable. Such frameworks help us understand how the vast scale of indirect suffering remains largely unaddressed in dominant legal and humanitarian discourses.

This study therefore focuses particularly on women and children, considering the fact that since the eruption of massive violence on October 7, 2023, the Israeli military has unleashed relentless attacks on the Gaza Strip, disproportionately affecting women and girls, who find themselves among the primary victims of conflict-related violence. By analysing the portrayal of events on various online news and information platforms, it aims to offer vital perspectives on the realities of the ongoing crisis and advocate for meaningful interventions to alleviate the suffering of those affected. Anywhere in the world where wars and conflicts are witnessed, no section of the population is spared by guns and grenades, bombing, air strikes, or all kinds of military mechanisms, but nowhere in modern times has the civilian population in general—and women and children in particular—become such explicit targets and victims of war crimes as in Gaza today. There is an urgent need for global awareness of the atrocities committed against women and children in the conflict zone in Gaza, Palestine. News reports and humanitarian assessments clearly indicate that the international community has fallen short in its responsibility to protect the most vulnerable. Some of the facts need to be noted: women make up nearly half, accounting for 49%, of the entire population in Palestine. As of early 2024, the female population stood at 2.76 million, with 1.63 million residing in the West Bank and 1.13 million in the Gaza Strip (PCBS). H.E. Dr Ola Awad, President of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), highlights the plight of

Palestinian women on the eve of International Women's Day under the theme "Invest in women: Accelerate progress" on March 7, 2024. According to her:

Since the beginning of the Israeli aggression on 07/10/2023 and until the date of the statement, there were over 9,000 female martyrs out of a total of 30,717 martyrs. It is noteworthy that 75% of the total number of wounded, amounting to 72,156, are females. Women and children constituted 70% of the missing persons in the Gaza Strip, totaling 7,000 individuals. Reports from the Gaza Strip also indicate that approximately 2 million people were displaced, half of whom are female (PCBS, 2024).

A feminist scholar Cynthia Enloe (2004) argues, the gendered dimensions of conflict often remain obscured beneath militarised narratives, and women's suffering is frequently depoliticised or underreported. The targeting and displacement of women in Gaza exemplifies this neglect, revealing not only a humanitarian crisis but also a political failure to recognise gender-based vulnerabilities in the conflict zone. The statistics regarding human casualties among women illustrate the dire situation, highlighting the unimaginable fatalities of women in this ongoing war as of March 8, 2024. As of June 11, 2025, Gaza's Ministry of Health reports that at least 55,720 people have been killed and 124,190 wounded in Israeli attacks since October 7, 2023, with women and children comprising approximately 70% of the fatalities (Al Jazeera, 2025).

Amidst these figures, it is important to discuss Palestinian women's role in fighting their oppression and occupation, which is rarely highlighted in the media. Palestinian women have historically played a critical role when it comes to defying the foreign occupation of the then British and now Israeli state. In the civil disobedience against the Israeli occupation, all men, women, and children among the Palestinians are also seen defying the occupation, apart from the armed uprising of politico-militant organisations like Hamas. One notable period of women's resistance occurred during the First Intifada (1987-1993), where Palestinian women actively participated in protests, demonstrations, and resistance activities against Israeli occupation forces (Hasso, 2005). Moreover, it has been studied that the Palestinian women have been at the forefront of political and social movements, advocating for women's rights, gender equality, and national liberation. Scholars like Frances Hasso argue that such resistance by women intersects with broader struggles for social justice, not merely as national liberation but as a feminist praxis within a colonial condition (Hasso, 2005). They have been involved with political parties, civil society organisations, and grassroots initiatives, striving to address gender-based discrimination and oppression within Palestinian society while also resisting external forces of occupation and colonization. What is noteworthy here is that this resistance by women is still an ongoing thing and continues to evolve in response to changing political, social, and economic dynamics in Palestine.

Nesrine Malik, a Guardian columnist, writes in her article titled “In Gaza, there’s a war on women. Will the West really ignore it because they’re ‘not like us’?” aptly states in *The Guardian*, “Sometimes a disaster is so large that it obscures its details,” highlighting the magnitude of the conflict’s impact on women and girls (Malik, *The Guardian*). Beyond the death toll and displacement in Gaza, the conflict has disproportionately affected women and girls. According to the head of the UN, “Women and children have disproportionately borne the brunt of the conflict in Israel and Gaza,” as there has been a troubling reversal of fortunes in the annals of this conflict, where women and children have borne the weight of the war’s impact. “While these heinous acts impact individuals of all genders, their consequences are gendered, with women bearing a disproportionate burden,” emphasised Reem Alsalem, UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls and its causes and consequences. The Israeli occupation and the deprivation of self-determination have exposed Palestinian women to a barrage of various forms of systematic discrimination and violence.

While the Israeli occupation has affected men and women in shared ways, such as restricted movement and economic hardship, their daily experiences reveal distinct gendered impacts in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Since 1997, UN Women has been a steadfast advocate for Palestinian women and girls, promoting socio-economic empowerment and addressing critical humanitarian needs, including support for over 1 million women facing hunger and displacement in Gaza as of May 2025 (UN Women, 2025). A striking finding from this study is that, from 2008 to October 6, 2023, approximately 6,750 Palestinian civilians were killed in the occupied Palestinian territory, with women and girls comprising roughly 15% of these casualties (OCHA, 2025). However, since October 7, 2023, a dramatic shift has occurred, with women and children accounting for nearly 70% of the 55,720 reported deaths in Gaza, reflecting an unprecedented toll on these vulnerable groups (UN Women, 2025; OCHA, 2025).

UN Women reports that the closure of women’s shelters in Gaza City has worsened an already dire humanitarian crisis for women (UN Women, 2025). Severe disruptions in telecommunication and electricity continue to hinder remote service provision, while a surge in households headed by widowed women points to the profound effect on families. The conflict has left thousands of men dead, rendering women solely responsible for their families’ survival, with approximately 13,500 children now fatherless, according to UN Women’s latest estimates (UN Women, 2025). Additionally, the sole operational maternity hospital in northern Gaza faces critical fuel shortages, amplifying risks for expectant mothers and their newborns (UNFPA, 2025). A woman shared her traumatic ordeal amidst the conflict, recounting, “Two weeks after the war began on my due date, I sought medical help, fully aware of the risks to my life and my long-awaited baby’s,” she recalled. “My doctor opted for a private clinic, despite

its limited resources, as it was our only option at the time. She continued, “I took a risk, hoping my baby wouldn’t face senseless violence after I brought him into this world” (UN Women, 2024). Her reflection summarizes the profound anguish and uncertainty experienced by countless mothers in Gaza. Despite these adversities, women’s rights organisations persist, though they face significant obstacles, with many members displaced and infrastructure reduced to rubble. As of March 2025, nine out of twelve women’s organisations in Gaza reported some level of functionality (UN Women, 2025). Feminist scholar Sara Meger (2016) notes that the breakdown of social support systems and the deliberate destruction of gender-specific infrastructure during conflicts represent not only collateral damage but also manifestations of gendered structural violence embedded in modern warfare.

Israel’s unyielding aggression against the reproductive rights of Palestinian women and their newborns is troubling and deeply concerning. As the tragic situation in Gaza continues to worsen, the deliberate and systematic attacks on the sexual and reproductive health of women and girls stand out as a pressing issue, particularly regarding gender-based violence. Israel’s consistent violations of international humanitarian law existed long before October 7. The control and cruelty inflicted on the sexual and reproductive rights of women and girls in occupied Palestine have been a persistent and troubling problem. Amma Awadallah, a women’s rights activist with over two decades of experience, writes in OCHA that “[p]rior to October 2023, 94,000 women and girls already lacked access to sexual and reproductive health services, according to the United Nations Population Fund. This figure has now risen to over 1.2 million as of March 2025” (Awadallah, 2025). Awadallah references UN reports estimating that approximately 52,000 pregnant women resided in Gaza as of early 2025, with around 180 women giving birth daily, 40% of whom face complications due to inadequate medical care (UNFPA, 2025). These numbers were also shared by the WHO on November 3, 2023 (WHO, 2023). Moreover, reports indicate that women are undergoing labour and delivery without medical assistance, including instances of C-sections performed without anaesthesia (Malik, 2024). Additionally, menstruating women and girls lack access to sanitary products, resorting to improvised solutions such as using cloth and plastic bags to manage their periods. Some are even taking norethisterone tablets, typically used for menstrual disorders, due to the unavailability of menstrual pads. The lack of essential items makes this dire situation worse and forces women to use improvised solutions, like cutting baby nappies into pieces. She further writes that:

These are just some of the testimonies from thousands of cases of women’s sexual and reproductive health being compromised throughout this crisis. Pregnant women are miscarrying due to stress and shock, and the availability of medical facilities to give birth safely is now virtually non-existent. Without a full and immediate ceasefire, we can expect to see this vicious cycle continue, with thousands more maternal and newborn deaths. (Ammal, 2024)

Thus, the report exposes, in the ongoing crisis, the urgent sexual and reproductive health emergency disproportionately affecting women and girls. Nesrine Malik, a Guardian columnist in the same article, reflects on the dire conditions wherein mothers and children grapple with hunger and forced displacement and are in profound distress. Pregnant mothers endured an arduous 20-mile journey from northern to southern Gaza (Malik, 2024). Access to adequate food and clean water for nursing mothers is severely limited, and even when formula is procurable, sourcing uncontaminated water for its preparation proves a daily ordeal. Newborns in displaced camps remain unwashed, underscoring the acute challenges of motherhood amid crisis. These poignant realities from November last year reflect not only the physical perils but also the emotional toll exacted by this massive violence. On February 19, 2024, UN experts expressed alarm “over credible allegations of egregious human rights violations to which Palestinian women and girls continue to be subjected in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank” (as cited in Potvin & Lefurgey, 2023; Alsalem et al., 2024). They were “particularly distressed by reports that Palestinian women and girls in detention have also been subjected to multiple forms of sexual assault, such as being stripped naked and searched by male Israeli army officers.” However, Israeli government spokesperson Eylon Levy condemned the UN report, calling the allegations “repulsive” (as cited in Belam & Banfield-Nwachi, 2024).

The relentless loss of lives and destruction of private and public infrastructure in Gaza – homes, schools, hospitals, and entire neighbourhoods reduced to rubble—marks a profound modern tragedy. Civilian areas, particularly hospitals, have become “battlegrounds”, as aptly described by Katie Polglase et al. in their extensive CNN investigation (Polglase et al., 2024). Among approximately 110 hospitals and 400 schools attacked or damaged across the Gaza Strip as of March 2025, their report highlights the plight of key facilities, including Al-Shifa, Al-Quds, and Al-Ahli al-Arabi Hospitals (OCHA, 2025). Al-Shifa, Gaza’s largest hospital, remains a “flashpoint” amidst ongoing airstrikes and missile attacks by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF). Israeli authorities claim a Hamas command centre operates beneath the medical complex, alleging its use for holding hostages. Despite repeated calls for evacuation, Hamas and on-site health officials deny these claims. The IDF also targeted an ambulance, alleging its use by a Hamas “terrorist cell” for “transferring militants and weapons”, though no evidence was presented to support these claims, according to Katie Polglase et al. Hamas dismissed these allegations as “baseless” (Polglase et al., 2024).

By January 2025, reports from the BBC and independent assessments such as *The Guardian* describe Gaza as “barely habitable,” with nine out of ten homes damaged or destroyed, schools and hospitals repeatedly struck, and nearly 1.9 million people (90% of the population) forcefully displaced (Beaumont, 2025). It depicts that throughout Gaza, neighbourhoods lie in ruins, once-bustling

commercial districts are now reduced to debris, educational institutions have been razed, and agricultural lands have been torn apart. In response, makeshift settlements have emerged along the southern border, providing shelter for the numerous individuals displaced by the devastation. Alongside the alarming loss of life, Israel's relentless airstrikes in Gaza are wreaking havoc on its infrastructure. To date, around 197,500 buildings have been either damaged or destroyed in Gaza as a result of the violence, with the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) aiming to create a "buffer zone" by clearing the area, as reported by the United Nations (UNRWA, 2025). This total equates to approximately 60% of all buildings in the densely populated region, with the northern areas of Gaza bearing the brunt, accounting for nearly three-quarters of the destruction. Jamon Van Den Hoek, a geographer at Oregon State University, and Corey Scher, a Ph.D. candidate at the City University of New York, conducted an analysis to compile figures as of January 11, 2025 (BBC News, 2025). Amidst the deaths and forced displacements resulting from relentless violence and destruction, a young woman originally from Gaza City, now displaced to Khan Younis, poignantly expressed her despair: "Now everything is lost, and the future is so uncertain... Most of all: will I ever go back home?" (UN Women, 2024).

Several human rights reports have expressed grave concern for the children of Gaza, often described as one of the world's largest open-air prisons. Amid relentless airstrikes and bombardments, hospitals, schools, and homes—supposed sanctuaries—have been reduced to rubble in minutes, burying thousands of children under debris. Meanwhile, senior Israeli officials and public figures have derogatorily labelled Palestinian mothers and parents as "human animals" and their children as "children of darkness", revealing an intent to dehumanise and collectively punish the population (UN Human Rights Council, 2024). Hundreds of thousands of civilians in Gaza have endured intolerable conditions for over 20 months. Middle East Monitor (MEM), citing Gaza's Ministry of Health on January 11, 2024, reported that "10,000 of Gaza's 1.1 million children—one percent of the total child population—had been killed since 7 October 2023. By March 31, 2025, this figure rose to at least 13,641 children" (UNICEF, 2025). It is estimated that approximately 1,000 children in Gaza have lost one or both legs, with many undergoing amputations without anaesthesia, facing a lifetime of medical care (Middle East Monitor, 2024). Children continue to suffer profound physical and emotional consequences from intensive Israeli bombardment and unprecedented internal displacement. Jason Lee, Save the Children's Country Director for the occupied Palestinian territory, states, "Each day without a definitive ceasefire, 100 children on average are killed. There's no justification for this. The situation in Gaza is monstrous, tarnishing our common humanity" (Middle East Monitor, 2024). Lee further notes that since the violence erupted on October 7, 2023:

[C]hildren have been paying the price for a conflict they have no part in. They are terrified, hurt, maimed, displaced. One per cent of the child population of Gaza has already been killed by Israeli bombardments and ground operations.

Others risk being killed by starvation and disease, with famine coming ever closer. For children who have survived, the mental harm inflicted and the utter devastation of infrastructure, including homes, schools, and hospitals, have decimated their futures.

Defence for Children International (DCIP) designated 2023 as a year with “no comparison in the history of Israeli forces,” who pursued total “control over the Palestinian people and violated children’s rights” (DCIP, 2023). Israeli forces have killed Palestinian children at an unprecedented rate across the occupied Palestinian territories, including the Gaza Strip, West Bank, and East Jerusalem, with this trend continuing into 2025 (DCIP, 2023; UNRWA, 2025). The UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) operates 288 of Gaza’s 737 schools, serving over 40% of students, with the Palestinian Authority or private entities managing the rest (Al Jazeera, 2024). As of May 2025, all educational institutions in Gaza remain closed due to Israel’s ongoing offensive, displacing 1.9 million people—over 80% of Gaza’s 2.3 million population (UNRWA, 2025). The offensive has caused over 54,084 deaths, including at least 15,613 children, with thousands missing, presumed dead under rubble (UNRWA, 2025). UNRWA’s 2018 data reported 9,367 teachers across its 288 Gaza schools (Al Jazeera, 2024). UNICEF has labelled Gaza the “most perilous environment for children,” citing relentless bombardment, displacement, and a lack of basic necessities (UNICEF, 2024).

Another devastating effect of this warfare is the acute food crisis engulfing Gaza, exacerbated by Israel’s use of starvation as a weapon to collectively punish Palestinians, particularly in the Gaza Strip. Feminist scholar Cynthia Enloe argues that militarised policies, such as blockades, disproportionately harm women by disrupting access to essential resources like food, amplifying gender inequalities in conflict zones (Enloe, 2014). Amidst this severe food insecurity, women and girls bear a disproportionate burden, facing heightened risks of malnutrition and health complications, especially pregnant and lactating women. UN Women, in collaboration with the World Food Programme, has provided emergency food aid to over 16,500 women-led households in Gaza as of March 2025, reaching a significant proportion of vulnerable families (UN Women, 2025). Additionally, distribution efforts have included dignity kits, winter clothes, and essential supplies, alongside recreational activities and mental health services for displaced populations. However, these efforts fall short of addressing the escalating needs, which require increased funding, strengthened partnerships, and enhanced safety measures for aid delivery. Reflecting on the dire situation, a 72-year-old woman in Gaza City encapsulates the prevailing sentiment, expressing fear, exhaustion, and a sense of impending doom. She poignantly states, “I am scared, exhausted, and anticipating the worst. God will have mercy on us” (UN Women, 2024).

The prolonged and intensifying Gaza conflict has pushed the entire population of approximately 2.3 million into crisis or worse levels of acute food insecurity,

deepening an already dire humanitarian emergency (WFP, 2025). American political economist and scholar Sara Roy argues that Israel's blockade policies have systematically de-developed Gaza's economy, disproportionately burdening women with food provisioning under conditions of scarcity, exacerbating gender inequalities (Roy, 2016). Child malnutrition rates exceed global thresholds, with one in five children under two suffering from acute malnutrition as of April 2025 (UNICEF, 2025). Overcrowded shelters and hospitals struggle to accommodate 1.9 million displaced individuals – with dwindling food and water supplies compounding the crisis (WFP, 2025). Since October 2023, the World Food Programme (WFP) has provided emergency food and cash assistance to 1.6 million people across Gaza and the West Bank, but ongoing hostilities and restricted access have halted aid convoys to northern Gaza, highlighting the precariousness of relief efforts (WFP, 2025). The WFP's *Palestine Emergency* webpage warns:

The number of places where WFP and partners can safely provide life-saving assistance is shrinking rapidly, putting hundreds of thousands at risk of being cut off from any form of relief. Without more humanitarian assistance, a deadly combination of hunger and disease will claim the lives of countless children, pregnant women, and young mothers. (WFP, 2025)

Framed by the *longue durée* of occupation and resistance, this study contends that the ongoing violence in Gaza has crystallised into a humanitarian crisis, where the heaviest burdens fall on women, children, and other non-combatant lives caught in the crossfire of geopolitical domination. Critical infrastructure – including homes, hospitals, and schools – has been decimated, leaving the population without basic necessities and safety nets. As Sara Roy (2007) notes, this reflects a process of deliberate “de-development,” compounding Gaza's vulnerability. The use of dehumanising and derogatory labels by political and military officials also raises questions about which lives are deemed “grievable” (Butler, 2004), highlighting the need for urgent international intervention and a long-term diplomatic resolution. These conditions not only reflect the humanitarian tragedy on the ground but also signal a broader political planning of domination that, as Edward Said (1993) and Ilan Pappé (2006) suggest, resonates with enduring patterns of colonial subjugation and settler expansionism.

The nature of Israel's political and military strategy toward Gaza, especially in threatening the survival of Palestinians, increasingly mirrors what many scholars interpret as a colonial framework. Communications reportedly sent by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) to Palestinian civilians in northern Gaza – urging evacuation to the southern strip under the threat of being labelled as sympathisers with “terrorist organizations” – exemplify this coercive and territorial logic. These warnings were disseminated via leaflets and mobile audio recordings, explicitly bearing the IDF's insignia, and signaled an impending military escalation. Such actions reflect what Tamar Mayer (2008), a political geographer focusing on ethno-national identities, characterises as a “colonizer-

colonized” relationship, wherein Israel’s asymmetric power dynamics over the West Bank and Gaza align with structural and symbolic features of colonialism (Mayer, pp. 2–13).

International humanitarian law and human rights law prescribe strict frameworks for the conduct of hostilities, especially concerning the protection of civilians, the prohibition of indiscriminate attacks, and the safeguarding of essential services like healthcare and education. However, the violations documented in this paper – including the deliberate targeting of hospitals, schools, and civilian shelters, as well as the use of racist or dehumanising rhetoric – highlight the inadequacy or failure of international political and legal mechanisms in restraining state violence or ensuring justice for victimized populations (B’Tselem, 2023; Human Rights Watch, 2023). Such violations, even when clearly falling within the ambit of *jus in bello*, have often been met with diplomatic inertia, thereby revealing the gap between normative legal frameworks and geopolitical realities in conflict zones such as Gaza.

This article illustrates how dominant media discourses – especially within Western and Israeli networks—frequently align with state narratives, contributing to the legitimisation of military strategies and the marginalisation of Palestinian suffering. Nevertheless, a few international media organisations and UN bodies have consistently highlighted the humanitarian crisis and offered counter-narratives that resist this dominant framing. Alongside military and political dimensions, media narratives are key to determining global perceptions of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and influencing both public opinion and policy discourse. However, as mentioned that these narratives are often influenced by entrenched power structures that amplify dominant voices while marginalising alternative perspectives, especially subaltern ones. An analysis of multiple Indian and international media platforms during the recent escalation in Gaza reveals a glaring editorial silence on the specific vulnerabilities of women and children – who are among the worst affected in the conflict zone. Rather than foregrounding humanitarian suffering, many outlets instead prioritised state-centric narratives, spectacles, and self-referential promotions over in-depth reportage.

Particularly in the Indian media landscape, this tendency was stark. Corporate channels like Republic TV, Times Now, and India Today devoted disproportionately little attention to civilian casualties in Gaza during prime-time debates and social media snippets. Instead, they often echoed pro-Israel narratives without critically interrogating the humanitarian implications. India Today’s coverage, for instance, openly celebrated the fact that the Israeli legal team cited its reporting during the International Court of Justice (ICJ) proceedings on Gaza in January 2024. Anchors described the decision as a “moment of pride” and a “big deal”, screening the event as an accolade for their journalism (Philipose, 2024). Such framing not only sidelines the trauma of

Palestinian civilians but also contributes to the instrumentalisation of suffering to enhance the broadcaster's institutional prestige.

This phenomenon aligns with what Edward Said (1997) identified as the work of “careerist publicists”—journalists and media figures who abandon the ethical responsibility of telling the truth in favour of self-promotion and alignment with hegemonic power structures. Said contends that such figures often cloak themselves in the rhetoric of neutrality while contributing to the erasure of dissenting or marginalised narratives. Thus, Indian media coverage – far from being a detached observer – often appears to be an active participant in legitimising dominant geopolitical agendas, especially when humanitarian crises are at stake. Various national and global news networks continue to present the ongoing violence in Gaza predominantly through a statist lens, framing the unyielding assaults by Israeli occupation forces—including civilians, residential buildings, hospitals, and refugee camps—as acts of “self-defence.” This framing often disregards international humanitarian law, human rights standards, and the immense civilian suffering endured by men, women, and children. Such media behaviour reflects strategic alignment with state narratives, raising questions about journalistic neutrality and the ethics of wartime reporting. By casting Israeli military operations as defensive responses to the Hamas-led attacks of 7 October 2023, several Western and Indian media outlets have normalised disproportionate violence against civilians, while portraying Palestinians either as passive collateral or as complicit “terrorist”. This portrayal not only reinforces racialised stereotypes but also obscures the structural causes of the conflict, including occupation, blockade, and settler expansion (Pappé, 2024; Chomsky & Pappe, 2015).

Edward Said (1997) incisively argued that media are not external to power structures but operate as “political institutions”, performing a central role in manufacturing consent and legitimising domination over oppressed populations. This argument remains salient in the current context, as dominant media outlets function more as extensions of geopolitical interests than as watchdogs of state violence. In this way, the power to represent or misrepresent suffering becomes a tool of ideological warfare, erasing the narratives of the subjugated and silencing their resistance.

In conclusion, the crisis in Gaza requires sustained engagement from the global civil, legal, and political community – not only to alleviate civilian suffering but to pursue a just and enduring resolution that confronts the structural roots of the conflict. It is also imperative for all parties – particularly powerful state actors and their media allies – to uphold international humanitarian law, prioritise human rights, and commit to sincere diplomatic engagement that addresses historical grievances and structural violence. This study observed stark differences between Israeli and Western media narratives – often shaped by nation-state interests – and non-Western, Palestinian, or Global South perspectives. To navigate these epistemic contradictions and avoid distortions, the present study has consciously relied on independent human rights

organisations, United Nations reports, and testimonies from affected civilians rather than solely depending on mainstream journalistic sources. In today's complex media ecology shaped by capitalist and neocolonial forces, both traditional and digital platforms shape how war/conflict zones are seen and understood. The stark contrast in their portrayals of Gaza highlights the urgent need for critical media literacy. Only by challenging dominant narratives and listening to Gaza's silenced voices can we truly grasp the human toll of violence and displacement.

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