

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF GAZA'S CHILDREN: THEIR VOICES AND THEIR PORTRAYAL

Saman Kanwal*

Abstract

This study investigates how the voices of children in Gaza are represented, marginalised, and reshaped across digital and mainstream media discourses. While global media often highlight the humanitarian crisis at a surface level, the lived experiences and self-articulated narratives of Gaza's children remain largely absent or filtered through political and institutional agendas. Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this research examines a corpus of verified social media testimonies alongside selected mainstream news reports to identify patterns in linguistic framing, emotional representation, and narrative positioning. Findings reveal three consistent tendencies: first, children's self-expressed accounts emphasise agency, grief, and the desire for normalcy, whereas mainstream representations predominantly portray them as passive victims. Second, the mediation and translation of children's testimonies frequently dilute emotional intensity and political clarity, contributing to subtle ideological distortions. Third, the visual and verbal framing employed by international outlets reinforces a humanitarian-but-depoliticised narrative that obscures the structural and historical dimensions of their suffering. By contrasting firsthand voices with institutional portrayals, the study demonstrates how discourse shapes global perceptions of Gaza's children and contributes to the broader politics of visibility, empathy, and erasure. The findings underscore the urgent need for media frameworks that preserve narrative integrity and foreground children not as symbols, but as speaking subjects with agency.

Keywords: Gaza's Children, Media Representation, Critical Discourse Analysis, Ideological Manipulation, Authentic Voices.

Introduction

Children are the ones in Gaza suffering the most due to the ongoing warfare and the aftermath it will inevitably leave on these figures in the landscape of violence. Moreover, although the global community has broadly acknowledged and amplified the suffering of these children in Ukraine and in other parts of the world, representations of Gaza's children are often the most extreme forms of media barbarism and dehumanisation of those affected. Children in Gaza are depicted, particularly in the Global West, as pure, unadulterated charity events, as voiceless, as cartoons with no articulation of any words.

*Saman Kanwal is a lecturer at the Department of English, Muslim Youth University, Islamabad. The author can be reached at saman.kanwal@myu.edu.pk.

Moreover, such portrayals create a quasi-philanthropic voyeurism of the children victimised by war. Moreover, such voyeurism is a constituent of the indifference and apathy of the global and political community in relation to the suffering in Gaza.

This study, while focusing on the ongoing 2023-2024 war in Gaza, is anchored on the understanding that, however profound the suffering of children during the current warfare in Gaza, it is a continuation of the suffering that these children have endured for decades. Since 1948, the violence, displacement and systemic inequities inflicted on the Palestinians have undermined the conditions of their childhood. Hence, the ongoing war does not constitute a break in the cycle but rather a continuation, an intensification, and, to an extent, a broadening of a State of the Emergency. This is a paradox, as the post-pandemic world is witnessing unprecedented visibility of children's digital voices. Particularly, those who are children impacted by the violence of the state in the context of this study. This paradox informs the choice of the recent testimonies to exemplify the multiple layers of dispossession and the life of a child under militarisation. It is this focus on time that allows the analysis to speak to both current events and their deep historical lineages, so that what is happening now is understood not as a series of occurrences standing alone but as part of an enduring story of oppression.

This study aims to explore the authentic voices of children in Gaza, recorded on social media, in video clips, and in personal interviews, and to compare them with those presented by mainstream media on their behalf. Through the application of CDA, it aims also to expose the lexis and grammar deployed in representing the children of Gaza as politically manipulated figures (victims), melancholic symbols (of shame/mourning) and political mannequins that lack all agency apart from that which is available for sociopolitical predation through acts of depoliticisation. To portray those youth as cold statistics of a sociopolitical disaster largely ignores their unique stories and warps the size of reality. Through these digital narratives, beginning with the 7-year-old Shams who pines for safety, and ending with teenage diarist Tasneem Ismael Ahel¹, contemplating the prospect that her life could be snuffed out by a blast at any time.² This article will reveal how real stories are subsumed under sanitised political narratives in mainstream media. The language in some media disavows the gravity of it all, with reports preferring to call what is happening "action" or "clashes" or acknowledging only "casualties".

The paper will discuss the control narrative and the extent of description of apparatuses as they pertain to the perception of the global audience of children in Gaza, and how such a framing can be utilised as an instrument of ideological control. This work has attempted to challenge the general media discourses that lack compassion and empathy, but require some form of representation that would act on behalf of the children, juxtaposing the personal narratives of the Gaza children with media accounts. These two questions are the main ones the analysis seeks to answer.

How is narrative control and framing involved in creating the image of Gaza as the children as the victims and not as individuals with their unique experiences? Moreover, how does translation influence the image of children in Gaza, and how does language affect the politics and emotions in media coverage? Therefore, the study is expected to address a critical gap in the portrayal of youth in conflict by establishing that objectification and victimisation shape identity, feelings, and individuals' strength. With this, the research paper recommends that the media move beyond the shallow representations of children at war.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Discourse Analysis

Applied to the news reporting about the children of Gaza, CDA² (Fairclough 2001) demonstrates a systematic method of narrative control, where suffering is watered down using euphemistic depersonalised language. The idea of the ideological square, introduced by Van Dijk³, in which US is presented as the most rational and humane, and them as less critical and dehumanised, is observable in Western media. The children of Gaza are denied their voices and identity, with the mass media typically referring to them in mass, anonymous, and impersonal names like casualties or collateral damage. CDA is a methodological tool that explores how language is used to sustain power relations, ideologies, and domination in society. Based on the publications of other scholars such as Norman Fairclough, Teun van Dijk, and Ruth Wodak, CDA argues that discourse is not neutral; however, it is a strong instrument employed by institutions, especially in the media, in influencing the way people see things and making some views of the world normal. In conflict reporting, CDA has been used to show how the choice of vocabulary, grammatical usage, and storylines can dehumanise victims or hide agency. As an example, the passive form, such as children were killed does not specify who killed the children and avoids assigning blame, as well as causing moral outrage. Applying CDA to Gaza, the researchers are in a position to explore the discrepancy in the framing of the Palestinian and Israeli voices. The invisibility of the language of the children of Gaza, as frequently condensed in shared loss, figures, or impersonal coverage, reflects more of the asymmetry of power and media collusion in political interests. Therefore, the use of CDA on media texts provides an understanding of how the plight of children in Gaza is conveyed to either elicit sympathy or support geopolitical discourses. It reveals the invisible mechanisms of power expressed through language and shows whose voices are prioritised, whose are subjugated, and how these decisions shape the world's discourse.

In the instance of the Gaza children, there is a fantastic disparity between the actual testimonies of young people and stories depicted by the children themselves through personal testimonies, social media, and video clips and the twisted accounts of the media at large.

The conflict between basic, guttural experiences and the politically charged language used by the mainstream press, expressed dialectically, is felt when trying to reconcile these two extremes.

By comparison, mediated images tend to provide a detached and impersonalized child suffering. The children of Gaza are often called victims caught in the middle of the escalation or crossfire, and this eliminates the story and identity of the children involved. Mainstream reporting euphemisms like the term casualties of war or collateral damage soften the emotional component of the tragedy to the point of it being beyond identification, a process that makes the tragedy appear to be something abstract, unavoidable and faceless. Such expressions as the children in crisis in Gaza, or young victims of war, will create an impression of robbing the children of their natural agency and personhood and then, instead, reducing them to figures in a political game. This form of framing demonstrates an informative divide between the actual voices of the children of Gaza that hold the objective emotional complexity of their lives, and media conceptualisations that tend to simplify their trauma to fit a particular narrative. There is a need to appeal to genuine voices so that we can maintain the humanness of children in Gaza in the context of their plight.

Framing Theory

Erving Goffman first presented the framing theory, and subsequent elaboration by scholars such as Robert Entman describes how media outlets package and frame information, influencing how audiences perceive it. Frames are mental shortcut structures that bring out the best in reality and, in a way, shade the darkest side. In media stories, framing influences not just the content but also the style. In matters concerning the reporting of conflict areas such as Gaza, the media tend to take positions that align with overall geopolitical needs. These can be such frames as security, emphasising that the aggressor has the right to defend himself, terrorism, emphasising resistance as illegitimate violence or humanitarian frames, emphasising victims in pitiful, apolitical terms. This selective framing not only masks the underlying causes of violence, but it also robs the oppressed, and in particular children, of political voice and agency.

The two critical discourse analyses and Framing Theory intersect with each other to provide an in-depth prism through which the media portrayals of Gaza kids can be unpacked. At the same time, CDA aims at the micro-linguistic formulations of word choice, syntax, and voice. Framing Theory deals with the macro-discursive patterns, themes, and storylines employed to make meaning. Collectively, they uncover the problem of media violence contamination and the simultaneous overemphasis on the story of the strong. In the situation of Gaza, this two-fold lens shows that the children are usually created as collateral damage instead of victims of systematic oppression.

As an example, in CDA, the grammatical disappearance of agents in such headings as “Children killed in Gaza strikes”, the framing theory describes how such language reinforces a hegemonic geopolitical frame that portrays Israel as acting in self-defence. Furthermore, the voices of the Palestinian children are usually absent, or they are only shown through suffering, rather than resistance and hope that would debunk stereotypes of passive and victimised people. This is the synergy between CDA and Framing Theory, showing that language and narrative framing mutually constitute a biased discourse that influences the masses consciousness and policy reactions. By foregrounding these instruments, this research will also re-position the humanity, agency, and lived experiences of Gaza children within the world narrative.

Media framing theory also allows us to appreciate the effects of a particular lexical choice on people's perceptions. The use of words such as clash, escalation or strike glorifies the atrocities of an airstrike on innocent people. The framing lacks emotional authenticity and re-contextualises child victims as the unfortunate outcomes of a symmetrical war, as opposed to subjects of an asymmetrical war. This rebranding is consistent with the soft power agenda, in which the domination of international sympathy becomes a strategic objective. In this respect, CDA exposes, among other things, the fact that the suffering of children in Gaza is not only underreported but also linguistically controlled so that the world does not get outraged. It reveals the ideological labour the media undertake in situating the discourse of the human tragedy within abstract conflict. It demands a reacquisition of genuine voices through ethical and politically conscious reporting.

The power of narrative control and the application of the framing device in the media representation of the children of Gaza is explored in the light of the way in which the global audience is shaped to perceive their plight. These methods are critical in defining the range, inflexion, and emotive weight of narratives crafted about Gaza's children, with the audience's perception essentially designed for some political, ideological, or diplomatic purpose. With framing, the media not only provides the angle from which the audience will suffer a particular tragedy, but also directs the feeling with which that tragedy will be met.

One of the most common framing devices in the media is the victim frame, which casts Gaza's children as helpless casualties of a prolonged struggle. This narrative often highlights their pain and helplessness, but leaves no room for their hopes or their agency. Children are depicted as innocent bystanders who are caught in the crossfire, as seen in “Gaza's Children”: Innocent Victims of Violence. While this Picture of life draws attention to the harsh realities faced by children, it strips them of individuality, denying them the ability to be unique, identifiably diverse persons, shapeless victims to trauma bereft of identity.

Another framing device is the neutrality frame, which casts the narrative of Gaza as a politically neutral conflict between two equal parties, thereby avoiding the underlying power relations that are needed to understand the media in question.

This is apparent in the use of terms such as “escalation” or “clash,” which euphemise violence and erase agency in military undertakings. For example, in the coverage of civilian children’s deaths, “tragic casualties” is preferred to soften the emotional reactions that “bombing” or “airstrike” would otherwise invite.

Affective and Lexical Dimensions of Trauma Discourse

In relation to the voices of children in Gaza, the notions of voice, authenticity and trauma representation disclose the profound difference between the experience and the discourse of the experience in the world media. Voice in the terms of the trauma discourse is not just about being heard, it is about being comprehended in the context, emotion, and will. The accounts of Palestinian children that are often awash with uncivilised emotions of loss, terror, and strength are usually lost in translation or buried under politically neutral accounts. When a child cries out, saying, “We just wanted to live, it is a cry filled with historical pain and generational trauma with a plea to be seen as desperate as possible. Nevertheless, these words are constantly substituted with generic headlines such as “Children affected by ongoing conflict,” which deprives the story of its emotional and political impact⁸. The media also erodes authenticity by using tones deemed objective to conceal the pain they are experiencing, and by using clinical or sterile terms. Trauma manifestations, the death of a sibling, the sight of destruction, or a survivor of bombings are reworded in such a way that is biased towards neutrality, rather than the truth. The outcome is a detached depiction of strongly personal encounters. Also, the representation of trauma in the Western discourse tends to be passive, and, in this context, children are depicted as silent victims, but not as witnesses with emotional and linguistic power. This not only dehumanises them but also strengthens the divide of power, where their suffering cannot be addressed but instead must be mediated by outsiders. After careful examination of the trauma, it has become geometrically more apparent that voice and authenticity are systematically suppressed. The issue is that it is pretty challenging to create discursive spaces where children’s stories are not stolen or made less harsh, but are accepted as complex, painful, and political. Moral trauma representation requires putting the words of the child in the centre: pure, unedited, and unashamedly true.¹⁰

Among the most touching stories is an eyewitness of a little girl, Lamar Toutah¹¹, who sustained a serious injury as a result of a blow that left her helpless, unable to move, she told a local Instagram account owner that she wants to be able to walk, to go back and take care of her mom, stay with her brothers and sisters, help her mom in the tent, carry her sister and take care of her brothers and sisters¹². Her mere desire is an appeal to the latent trauma of many children in Gaza; the constant fear of being killed, where one lives day after day in a state of fear of what is threatening their lives. The quote by Lamar shows how fear has become normalised and how it is hard to maintain some degree of normality in the face of chaos. Descriptions of loss, the loss of loved ones, homes and way of life are typical features of testimonies of the trauma.

Another video posted by one of the Palestinian activists talks about a group of children grieving at the grave of their favourite friend. One of them replied who is going to play with us now? It was your final game with us, buddy, that was our final game with the boys. And now you are gone... Allah has mercy on you”

الاء نداءات أحد في ق ضى الذي هيد، ال ش صدي قهم ق بر حول الأط فال من عدد تجمع مؤلم، مشهد في بي الأذيرة.

12. "هل كيت؟ معنا ي لعب رح مين" بت ساءل واب ال حزن، ممزوجة ب براءة

His words can document not only the physical ravaging of his life but also the psychological burden of displacement. Interviews have a young survivor who always has a very final feeling of loss of loved ones, like the 9-year-old Youssef, picking up paper and fire and saying, my uncle and his son were martyred. During a desperate emotional exchange, he said he had a most heart-melting desire: "I want to eat fruit and chicken." The loss of a loved one is only one of the reflections of this testimony, but also the gap in her emotional world¹³. Another factor that adds to the agony of such losses is the fact that they cannot grieve in a secure setting, and the process becomes a solitary affair.

Testimonies of children in conflict areas, such as Gaza, tend to be raw and first-hand experiences of how they are deeply traumatised by situations they have to endure day after day. They are not just war stories; these testimonies are the summation of the loss that children experience daily in their lives growing up in a persistent and unceasing position of violence and displacement. To most children of Gaza, the loss does not just end up being physical safety, but also emotional stability, childhood innocence and future potential.

The best way to describe the emotions of children living in areas of conflict is through the language they use to narrate their experiences. The speech and writing of children living in Gaza also expresses the stark contrast between the emotional world of children and despair and hope, loss and survival, love and mourning. These patterns can offer much information about their psychological condition and their perception of the war and how they cope with it¹⁴. The loss is one of the vocabulary motifs found in the children of Gaza. Words related to destruction, absence and desire are common among children. Simultaneously, the theme of hope and survival is powerfully conveyed. Children are powerful, even when faced with adversity. One of the young girls in Gaza, by the name of Raghad, expressed the following: "I wish the war ends, and I could go back to my home to play and live the rest of my life just like other children do."¹⁵ The word hope and the mere want to get back to normalcy is an indication of the inner longing to have peace, safety and to go back in time. The term play is in contrast with the crude reality of the situation, which is a sign of a desire to live without violence.

Moreover, the themes of love and grief are also common in the stories about children, which may cause the chilling lexical question of death, innocent and innocent at the same time.

This was revealed in a heartrending scene when 4-year-old Shahd, who had seen all the violence surrounding her, questioned her mother, Is it painful to die? Moreover, what is worse, to be killed by a rocket or a tank shell? The contrast between the question Shahd poses and an untimely encounter with death and sorrow is evident.¹⁶ These are some of the lexical decisions that are crucial to humanising their experiences so that the children of Gaza's stories are heard with empathy and urgency.

The mainstream media usually puts the plight of children in Gaza into perspective in a manner that distorts the degree of violence and power imbalance. The fact that they are collateral damage in an alleged war of equals underestimates the seriousness of their trauma and misrepresents the war. This kind of language implies a sad but still probable end to military action between two belligerent sides, thereby obscuring the fact that the violence is primarily unilateral, protracted, and tactical. As a matter of fact, it is not a war between equals but an asymmetrical war in which the Israeli state has overwhelming military, economic, and geopolitical strength. In contrast, Palestinians, especially in Gaza, are under siege with few means to defend themselves.

Through naming the aggressor, and by not using agency in reports, e.g. passive voice, such as children were killed in strikes, media reports help in what Norman Fairclough calls ideological mystification: the disappearance of responsibility through the use of language. This framing not only alienates the readers from the emotional and physical reality of the victims but also blunts the moral urgency of the crisis. The image of Palestinian children as accidental objects, but not the targeted object in a larger machine of occupation and structural violence, maintains apathy and does not allow any effective intervention from the world. A Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) shows how these framings make structural violence seem normal and hegemonic discourses that are consistent with the interests of the dominant power. To reflect the truth within the ethical context of the Gaza children, the media accounts need to engage and communicate the asymmetry that lies at the core of the conflict.

Media Representation

Dehumanisation through Narrative Framing

The dominant narratives in the media with respect to conflict areas like Gaza often use derogatory terminology alongside structural framing that strips the people concerned of their fundamental humanity. For Gaza's children, Western media tend to use language that denies individual identity and instead renders their experiences disembodied numbers or abstract horrors. Such passivity in humanisation stems from a lack of active voice in the omission of emotion and the selection of vocabulary, which, in turn, separates the audience from the realities of life and death.

A stark instance of dehumanisation through language is the inclusion of passive phrasing, "children caught in crossfire," and even more abstract casualties such as "casualties of war" in headlines.

Instead of bearing responsibility for the consequences of a conflict, children become mere subjects of overwhelming violence, and their agency is stripped¹⁷.

The erasure of the identity of child victims further adds to this form of abstracting victimisation as they are described not by their names but as “a child” or simply “an unnamed minor.”¹⁸ This form of grief is justified through the absence of familial grief, rendering it more palatable in the name of political discourse.

Furthermore, the use of euphemisms in Western media reporting plays a crucial role in sanitising the harsh realities of conflict¹⁹. Terms like “escalation,” “clashes,” or “conflict” are frequently used to describe incidents of violence, thereby diminishing the severity of the events and avoiding the emotional weight of words such as “massacre” or “genocide. These euphemisms help mitigate the savagery of the event and shield readers' eyes from the real inhuman tragedy unfolding, apart from Many media platforms, which only focus on the death of children in Gaza, or any child for that matter, from a geo-strategic viewpoint, pointing either to the concept of “collateral damage” or considering children as mere objects of the battle and not as young souls with dreams, fears, and aspirations²⁰.

In both words and deeds, these patterns of dehumanisation have a substantial impact on the public's perception. The dominant media enforces a gaze devoid of empathy upon Gaza's children, rendering their pain to be nothing but an alleviated, sentimental disconnection, which is more convenient for an international audience. The youth in Gaza are often dehumanised and viewed as mere victims of war. Mainstream media does not help this either. Child casualties are usually described as “collateral damage”, which does nothing to evoke emotion. In fact, these terms serve to depersonalise children and their inevitable deaths due to warfare. As an example, consider: "Gaza's children killed in crossfire." This phrase numbly describes the individual tragedy and profound emotional loss families suffer. All of these children suffer from the same fate; their identities are stripped from them, and their stories are drowned in an ocean of reported fatalities.

In the media portrayal of Gaza's children, the manipulation of language through translation is a powerful tool that shapes public perception and reinforces particular ideological narratives. The ideological use of language, facilitated by translation, often distorts reality, presenting it in ways that support or align with specific political viewpoints.²¹ This is especially evident in the coverage of Gaza, where the translation of Arabic terms and phrases into English can influence the emotional tone of the message and, consequently, the audience's understanding of the conflict.

One of the most significant ways translation is manipulated is in the choice of terminology. For instance, the term "martyr" in Arabic, frequently used in the context of Palestinian casualties, is often translated as "casualty" or "victim" in Western media.

This subtle shift erases the ideological and emotional weight of the original term, which carries connotations of resistance, heroism, and political struggle—turning the word “martyr” into something more neutral, like “casualty”, strips away the aspect of defiance and any political agency, framing the deaths as part of a faceless, indiscriminate conflict instead of acts within a larger struggle for justice and political recognition.

Likewise, the term ‘occupation’ might be translated more mildly or omitted altogether, as media outlets prefer wording such as “disputed territories” or “conflict areas.”²² This choice of words aims to mask the political reality of occupation and lessen the perceived burden of responsibility on the occupying powers.

Omission, Silencing, and Narrative Erasure

Strategic erasure describes the cutting or omission of critical aspects of detail that would make the victim, in this case, the children of Gaza, more human. The media captures only the abstract terms like “casualties” or “victims of conflict,” so as not to have to deal with the complicated, painful truth of personal loss. In addition, the emotional and psychological consequences of war on children are often overlooked or muted by the media, and this is necessary to grasp the impact of war on society in question. “Hundreds of children killed in Gaza” is a headline that has no context and strips these deaths from the individuality and stories attached to them, hence reducing the deaths to a number²³.

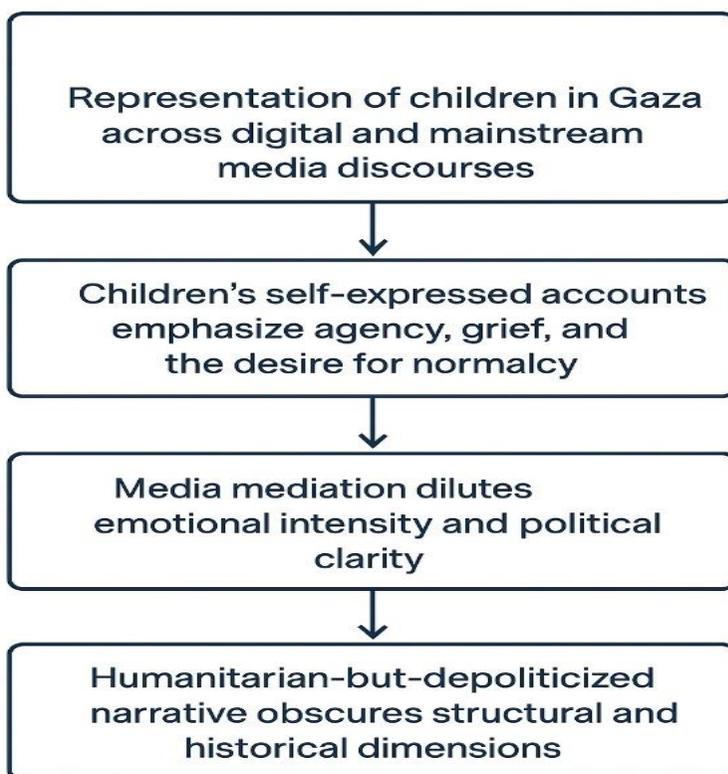
In contrast, linguistic dilution refers to the metaphorical “softening” of the violence’s description and language used so that its emotional association is muted²⁴. Words such as “escalation”, “clashes,” or “military actions” are usually used to replace what in truth are violent bombings, airstrikes, or even mass killings. Such euphemisms reinforce the detachment afforded to the audience, enabling them to view the events in neutral terms. To give an example, calling the murder of children “casualties of conflict” instead of recognising them as victims of calculated violence grossly underplays the horrific nature of that act and treats what should be seen as the consequence of aggressive military action as collateral damage of war. Together, strategic erasure and linguistic dilution serve to depersonalise and decontextualise the suffering of Gaza’s children, allowing global audiences to disengage emotionally from the crisis and reducing the urgency of the situation.

The additional dehumanisation occurs when the children are represented as the powerless, inactive victims. This is a kind of objectification in which the feelings, ideas and experiences of children are instead ignored, and instead, they are seen as silent suffering beings. Indicatively, media reporting tends to present the cases of dead children without portraying their stories or allowing them to be heard.²⁵ The dehumanising objectification of child mortality rates and the lack of attachment between these mortality rates and the personal lives of the people leads to the dehumanisation of the mortality rates.

This manner in which children of Gaza are turned into not subjects with agency but symbols to be used to rouse up sympathy or excuse political discourses only increases their alienation from their humanity and the emotional disengagement by the audience of their plight.

In one of her most tense audio diaries, 19-year-old Tasneem Ismael Ahel of Gaza City said what she wanted to say and what she was afraid of as she became the subject of daily life under siege, sharing her thoughts in daily WhatsApp voice notes. Such an uncivilised statement is the manifestation of the ever-present fear and uncertainty children experience in Gaza, in which every day might be the last day²⁶. In the same way, 10-year-old Shams, displaced by the violence, made the statement about her desire to live in safety: We kids are not living in safety... I miss my friends so much. This mere sentence is a lot to the psychological cost of surviving the war, and there is a desire to lead an everyday life that is not afforded to many children in war zones. The Al Jazeera broadcast also highlighted the fact of what Shams had to face, as it depicted the sense of being out of place and losing one's native identity as represented by Palestinian children. In a heart-rending story, a four-year-old Shahd inquired of her mother, Is it excruciating to die? What has less hurt, to die from a rocket or a tank shell?²⁷ The unbelievable but at the same time frightening question that Shahd asks is the reflection of the trauma that is going through the minds of small children growing up in an environment where violence is present. They are not mere transient thoughts, but existential questions shaped by the cruelty of their surroundings.

These stories are also repeated by children, such as Raghad Abu Hejier, who was a second-grader and expressed her plain desire: "I wish the war were finished and I would be able to go home and play and continue living my life like other children."²⁸ Her cry is a cry of peace that goes beyond political rhetoric and literally refers to a universal need for all children to be safe and regular. In one of the most popular posts on TikTok, 13-year-old Lina, whose school had been bombed, posted a video of the aftermath of her classroom, captioned: "This was my classroom." I used to dream here²⁹. This video documents both the devastation of her physical space and the demolition of her educational future, and at the same time is a testament to her strength. Children also have a platform on social media, such as Instagram, where they may express their experiences. In a sensibly liked text, 11-year-old Noor wrote, "I want to grow up without fear," and included a photograph of her with a broken toy that once belonged to her brother—this moment captured innocence lost and the reality of growing up in a war zone. These personal testimonies do not just dehumanise the figures, but they also strike against the dehumanised image of Palestinian children used in international media.



Source: Author's Contribution

Conclusion

Both traditional and social media have their own biases, depending on their sociopolitical realities. No source can be considered an authentic source of information; however, this research illuminates the divergence between Gaza's children's authentic voices and the media's portrayal. This study analyses media sources, including personal testimonies, social media posts, and video clips, and argues that Gaza's children possess unique emotions that conflict with the Western portrayal, which attempts to strip them of their individuality. The results illustrate the impact of controlling narratives and media framing on these children through the victim frame and neutralising euphemistic euphemism techniques that shroud them in dehumanisation. Instead of recognising these children's humanity and agency, they are reduced to puppets of political torment and expendable tools of war. Using critical discourse analysis, this study has also demonstrated how translation can change the tone and meaning of media reports, therefore further alienating the audience from the realities the children in Gaza endure.

The manipulation and sanitisation of a particular form of communication serve to shape public opinion while perpetuating dominant ideologies, including emotional truths, which are often devoiced in the case of the children trapped in the war. The study also broadens the scope of attending to the actual voices of the children when talking about the war and its trauma. Listening to the children directly or through their posts on social media allows us to witness their complexities of emotions—hope, loss, survival and resilience. These voices provide a compelling contrast to the militarised narratives pushed by mainstream media. In the end, the research emphasises the need for change in the way the media depicts children in conflict zones. They should not be simplified as mere victims of abuse or war, or be political instruments, but rather, seen as human beings with individuality and agency. They noticed that as the world continues to consume news from Gaza and other war zones, media perceptions need to improve to present a mixture of the children's experiences and invoke their voices while upholding their dignity even in the most challenging situations.

References

- ¹ Ahel, Tasneem Ismael. Interview by Shrouq Al-Hlou. *The Times of India*, 2023. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/middle-east/maybe-its-my-last-voice-gaza-teenagers-audio-diary-captures-life-under-bombardment/articleshow/104736867.cms>
- ² Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power* (Harlow: Longman, 2001), 23
- ³ Teun A. van Dijk, *Elite Discourse and Racism* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1993), 45. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926593004002006>
- ⁴ Philippe Lazzarini, "UNRWA Commissioner-General's Statement on the Killing of Children in Gaza," press release, United Nations Relief and Works Agency, 2023. Omar, "Press Conference at Al-Shifa Hospital," YouTube, 2023.
- ⁵ Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organisation of Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), 21–39; Robert M. Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4 (1993): 51–58.
- ⁶ BBC News, "Gaza's Children: Innocent Victims of Violence," BBC, October 15, 2023.
- ⁷ Murray, Daniel, and Elaine Segal. 1994. "Vocal Expression of Traumatic Experiences and Emotional Processing." *Journal of Trauma and Healing* 8 (2): 123–145.
- ⁸ Shaima Al-Obaidi. 2025. *The Voices of Gaza's Children: Trauma and Survival in Conflict*. Gaza City: Al-Quds Publishing. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/mar/21/children-gaza-israeli-bombs-uk-government>
- ⁹ Stephen Jukes. 2017. *Reporting from Conflict Zones: Objectivity and Emotion in Journalism*. New York: Routledge.
- ¹⁰ Richards, Clark, and Boggis. 2015. *Honouring Children's Voices: Ethical Approaches in Research*. London: Sage Publications.
- ¹¹ Sana_aljama182, "Video showing children in Gaza expressing their plea during conflict," *Instagram*, May 2025, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DEaQ9Ncu69j/>.
- ¹² @filasteeni, "Video showing children in Gaza expressing their plea during conflict," *Instagram*, May 2025, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DJXzsmqsen-/>.
- ¹³ @palestine.pixel, "Video showing the impact of conflict on children in Gaza," *Instagram*, May 2025, https://www.instagram.com/reel/DJW_PFKuadr/?igsh=MXNoY2d4NnUwemFhMA%3D%3D.
- ¹⁴ Refaat Alareer, *Gaza Writes Back: Short Stories from Young Writers in Gaza, Palestine* (Charlottesville, VA: Just World Books, 2013).
- ¹⁵ CNN, "Gaza's Children Speak: Dreams of Peace amid the Rubble," *CNN*, October 2023, <https://www.cnn.com>.
- ¹⁶ The Guardian, "Is It Painful to Die?: Gaza's Children Speak of Fear and Loss," *The Guardian*.
- ¹⁷ The Guardian's headlines, like many Western outlets, frequently utilise depersonalised phrases that abstract the identity and agency of Palestinian children, contributing to a detached narrative framing, *The Guardian*, 2023.
- ¹⁸ Rami G. Khouri, "Watching the Watchdogs: Israel's Legacy of Media Deception Stumbles," *Al Jazeera*, February 2, 2024. <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/2/2/watching-the-watchdogs-israels-legacy-of-media-deception-stumbles>.
- ¹⁹ Lara Gibson, "War on Gaza: How Language Used by Media Outlets Downplays Palestinian Suffering," *Middle East Eye*, 2023. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/war-gaza-how-media-language-manipulated-justify-killing-palestinians-and-used-dehumanise-them>.
- ²⁰ Nadda Osman, "War on Gaza: How Language Used by Media Outlets Downplays Palestinian Suffering," *Middle East Eye*, 25 December 2023, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/war-gaza-how-media-language-manipulated-justify-killing-palestinians-and-used-dehumanise-them>
- ²¹ Mona Baker, *Translation and Conflict: A Narrative Account* (London: Routledge, 2006), 3–4.
- ²² Karma Nabulsi, "The Pitfalls of Peace: The Politics of Language in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," *The Guardian*, September 25, 2002.
- ²³ Hundreds of Children Killed in Gaza," *BBC News*, October 30, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cor5827dke10>
- ²⁴ Karma Nabulsi, "The Pitfalls of Peace: The Politics of Language in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," *The Guardian*, September 25, 2002.
- ²⁵ Joe Catron, "Erasing Gaza's Children: Media Dehumanisation and the Silencing of Palestinian Voices," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 49, no. 4 (2020): 74–88.
- ²⁶ Anas Al-Hlou, "Gaza Teen Records Heartbreaking Audio Diaries amid Conflict," *Al Jazeera*, November 10, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/10/gaza-teen-records-heartbreaking->

- audio-diaries-amid-conflict.²⁷FYI, "Gaza: A 10-Year-Old's Story of Displacement," *FYI News*, October 25, 2023, video, <https://www.fyi.news/video/gaza-10-year-old-story>.
- ²⁸ Nima Elbagir et al., "I Hope the War Will End': Gaza's Children Speak Out on Surviving War," *CNN*, January 10, 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/01/10/middleeast/gaza-children-voices-war-intl-cmd/index.html>.
- ²⁹ @Eye.On.Palestine, "This was my classroom. I used to dream here," *TikTok video*, 2024.
- ³⁰ EyeOnPalestine, "I want to grow up without fear," *Instagram post*, April 10, 2024, [https://www.instagram.com/eye.on.palestine/reel/DHGTLqYKSc3/?api=WhatsApp%E8%87%AA%E5%8A%A8%E5%8C%96%E7%BE%A4%E5%8F%91%E5%B7%A5%E5%85%B7%F0%9F%92%Bo-\[%E8%AE%A4%E5%87%86%E5%A4%A9%E5%AE%87TG%3A%40cjhshk199937\]-WS%E7%B2%BE%E5%87%86%E7%A7%81%E4%BF%A1%2FW%6E6%89%B9%E9%87%E9%87%87%E9%9B%86%2FWS%E5%BC%95%E6%B5%81%E5%8A%A9%E6%89%8B.xvrc&hl=zh-cn](https://www.instagram.com/eye.on.palestine/reel/DHGTLqYKSc3/?api=WhatsApp%E8%87%AA%E5%8A%A8%E5%8C%96%E7%BE%A4%E5%8F%91%E5%B7%A5%E5%85%B7%F0%9F%92%Bo-[%E8%AE%A4%E5%87%86%E5%A4%A9%E5%AE%87TG%3A%40cjhshk199937]-WS%E7%B2%BE%E5%87%86%E7%A7%81%E4%BF%A1%2FW%6E6%89%B9%E9%87%E9%87%87%E9%9B%86%2FWS%E5%BC%95%E6%B5%81%E5%8A%A9%E6%89%8B.xvrc&hl=zh-cn)