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MS THESIS

**COVERAGE OF ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT IN
THE US AND THE UK PRESS: A THEMATIC
ANALYSIS**



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2025

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(2025)

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Science (MS) Media and Communication Studies

at the

Department of Media & Communication Studies

Faculty of Social Sciences

International Islamic University Islamabad



DECLARATION

I, **Anwar Zaib Khan, REG. NO. 540-FSS/MSMC/F22**, do hereby declare that the contents of this dissertation are original and have not been presented in any other institution. Further, I also declare that any secondary information used in this dissertation has been duly acknowledged.

**ANWAR ZAIB KHAN
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DEDICATION

*I DEDICATE THIS THESIS TO MY BELOVED
FAMILY MEMBERS; ESPECIALLY TO MY
FATHER(LATE) & MY MOTHER (LATE), THIS
DREAM HAS COME TRUE AS A RESULT OF
THEIR SUPPORT AND PRAYERS.*

ABSTRACT

*This study critically examines the media portrayal of the Israel-Palestine conflict in two elite Western newspapers—The New York Times (US) and The Independent (UK)—during the period from October 7, 2023, to April 7, 2024. Using the **Neo-Islamophobia Model** as the primary theoretical framework, the research investigates how Muslim identities, particularly Palestinians, are constructed and represented in mainstream journalistic discourse. Through a qualitative thematic analysis of 60 purposively selected news and editorial articles (30 from each newspaper), five dominant themes emerged: the securitization of Muslim identity, the homogenization and Decontextualization of Muslim actors, victim hierarchies and asymmetrical empathy, Islamist essentialism and cultural othering, and the Delegitimization of Muslim political agency. Findings reveal that both newspapers reproduce subtle yet powerful forms of neo-Islamophobic discourse. Muslim and Palestinian actors are persistently framed as security threats, stripped of historical and political context, and represented through culturally essentialist and dehumanizing lenses. Israeli actors, by contrast, are often humanized, individualized, and portrayed as rational and defensive. The study highlights how even liberal media spaces embed Orientalist logics and reinforce geopolitical hierarchies through routine reporting practices. By situating these findings within the Neo-Islamophobia framework, this research contributes to the critical literature on media bias, Islamophobia, and conflict representation. It underscores the urgent need for ethical journalism that challenges dominant narratives, amplifies marginalized voices, and represents conflict with historical accuracy, political nuance, and human empathy.*

Keywords: *Israel-Palestine conflict, media framing, Neo-Islamophobia Model, representation, Muslim identity, Western press, thematic analysis, discourse.*

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CHAPTER-1

INITRODUCTION

1.1. Background

This chapter attempts to set the current study's context by relating the historical and political backdrops to the recent upsurge in Israeli-Palestinian violence. The Israel-Palestine conflict remains one of the most insoluble and emotive problems of modern world politics. This hundred-year-old conflict is embedded in a complicated mix of territorial claims, nationhood, religion and foreign intervention. One of the phenomena that is helping to create the public perception and construction of social reality is the media — a very important actor in both shaping public opinion and guiding foreign policy.

Media organizations around the world not only report stories but also shape them. The choice of words, images, structure, and framing used by the news media deeply affects how audiences perceive conflict. Western media—United States and United Kingdom press in particular—have been criticized for a long time for the biased narratives they produce, and especially the representations of Muslims, Arab, Palestinians, etc. By focusing specifically on dominant themes and portrayals of Muslim actors, this study examines how the Israel-Palestine conflict is framed in the New York Times and the Independent.

A news website is one that is owned by the media company agency and is run by the team, whereas a website is a collection of pages with specific content that many people can access online. It is designed to disseminate news about a specific incident or problem that has occurred, and anyone can view and obtain the news online. News, according to Charnel and James M. Neal, is a report of an important, interpretive, and fascinating event,

viewpoint, tendency, situation, and conditions (Rani, 2013). The conflict between Israel and Palestine stems from their desire to create separate states on the same territory. Arabs and Jews alike felt entitled to the Palestine regions because of British pledges to them. This is the history of the lengthy fight between Arabs and Jews that led to the Israel-Palestine conflict. The conflict dates back to the 1930s and 1940s and does not begin with the 1967 war (AbuZayyad, 2009).

The resurgence of violence on October 7, 2023, marked by Hamas-led attacks on Israel and Israel's subsequent military responses, provides a critical window into how the Western media rearticulates long-standing narratives under new contexts. The temporal scope of this study—from October 7, 2023, to April 7, 2024—offers a comprehensive lens through which to assess media behavior before, during, and after the escalation. It aims to investigate whether these outlets reinforce orientalist and Islamophobic stereotypes, prioritize Israeli narratives, or maintain journalistic neutrality and balance.

Hamas and other armed factions from Gaza launched rocket attacks against Israel on October 7, 2023, starting early in the morning and aimed their missiles at the country's center and south. By land, air, and water, the armed groups crossed the Gaza border fence into Israeli territory. There, they brutalized, killed, and maimed Israeli soldiers as well as Israeli and international civilians, including more than 360 people attending a music festival near Re'im and kibbutzim Kfar Azza and Be'eri. There were gunfights and hostage situations in southern Israeli communities over the course of three days, with the Israeli army only recovering control on October 9. In the weeks that followed, indiscriminate rocket assaults on Israeli communities persisted, targeting targets such as Ben Gurion Airport near Lod (formerly Lydda). Over 1,200 Israelis and foreign nationals were killed

and about 5,400 more injured in Israel overall; more than 200 people, including infants, young children, and the elderly, were kidnapped to Gaza, according to Israeli officials. "Horrific scenes, including the slaughter of elderly people and finding bloody rooms crowded with massacred civilians," first responders reportedly came upon. The Israeli military is said to have shown footage from the October 7 attacks that shows, among other "harrowing" images, "grenades thrown directly at families, a man being decapitated with a shovel from his garden, [and] the tiny burned bodies of babies." Speaking on behalf of the Israeli army, October 7th was described as "by far the worst day in Israeli history"; US President Joe Biden referred to it as "the deadliest day for Jews since the Holocaust" (Aljazeera, 2023).

1.2. Historical Context of the Conflict

Understanding the media's portrayal of the conflict necessitates a brief overview of its historical context. The roots of the Israel-Palestine conflict trace back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries with the rise of nationalist movements among both Jews and Arabs in the Ottoman-controlled Palestine. The 1917 Balfour Declaration, issued by Britain, endorsed the establishment of a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine, without consulting its Arab inhabitants. This set the stage for rising tensions, especially as Jewish immigration surged during the interwar period, spurred by European anti-Semitism and the horrors of the Holocaust (Haddad & Chughtai, 2023).

The situation intensified with the UN's 1947 Partition Plan, which allocated 55% of the territory to a Jewish state and 45% to an Arab state, despite Jews comprising only a third of the population. The Arab rejection of the plan led to the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and the creation of the state of Israel. During this period, over 750,000 Palestinians were expelled or fled their homes in what is known as the Nakba or "catastrophe" (Haddad &

Chughtai, 2023). Further displacement occurred after the 1967 Six-Day War, during which Israel occupied the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Gaza, and the Golan Heights.

Subsequent decades witnessed intermittent peace efforts, including the Oslo Accords of the 1990s, which aimed to establish a two-state solution. However, these efforts were marred by continued settlement expansion, violence, and political fragmentation, particularly the split between the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza. Israel's blockade of Gaza since 2007 has further intensified humanitarian crises, while repeated cycles of conflict, such as those in 2008, 2014, and 2021, have resulted in massive civilian casualties, predominantly among Palestinians.

The events of October 2023 represent the most significant escalation in years, with widespread devastation, civilian deaths, and global media attention. These developments have revived debates about media bias, objectivity, and the role of journalistic ethics in conflict reporting.

The Nakba

Leading up to Israel's birth in 1948, more than 750,000 Palestinians were ethnically cleansed from their homes by Zionist militias. This mass exodus came to be known as the Nakba or catastrophe. A further 300,000 Palestinians were displaced by the Six-Day War in 1967. Israel declared the annexation of East Jerusalem in 1980, but the international community still considers it an occupied territory. Palestinians want East Jerusalem as the capital of their future state (Haddad & Chughtai, 2023).

The Oslo Accords

In 1993, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin signed the Oslo Accords, which aimed to achieve peace within five years. It was the first

time the two sides recognized each other. A second agreement in 1995 divided the occupied West Bank into three parts – Area A, B and C. The Palestinian Authority, which was created in the wake of the Oslo Accords, was offered only limited rule on 18 percent of the land as Israel effectively continued to control the West Bank(Haddad & Chughtai, 2023).

Israeli Settlements and Checkpoints

However, the Oslo Accords slowly broke down as Israeli settlements, Jewish communities built on Palestinian land in the West Bank, grew at a rapid pace. The settlement population in the West Bank and East Jerusalem grew from approximately 250,000 in 1993 to up to 700,000 in September this year. About three million Palestinians live in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem.

The building of Israeli settlements and a separation wall on occupied territories has fragmented the Palestinian communities and restricted their mobility. About 700 road obstacles, including 140 checkpoints, dot the West Bank. About 70,000 Palestinians with Israeli work permits cross these checkpoints in their daily commute. Settlements are considered illegal under international law. The UN has condemned settlements, calling it a big hurdle in the realization of a viable Palestinian state as part of the so-called “two-state solution”(Haddad & Chughtai, 2023).

Blockade of Gaza

Israel imposed a blockade on Gaza in 2007 after the Hamas group came to power. The siege continues till date. Israel also occupies the West Bank and East Jerusalem – the territories Palestinians want to be part of their future state. Israel imposed a total blockade on the Gaza Strip on October 9, cutting its supplies of electricity, food, water,

and fuel in the wake of a surprise Hamas attack inside Israel. At least 1,200 people were killed in that attack.

Till 27 Nov, 2023, about 5 million Palestinians live in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem and 1.6 million Palestinians are citizens of Israel. This makes up about half of their total population. The other half lives in other countries, including Arab countries. There are about 14.7 million Jews around the world today, of which 84 percent live in Israel and the United States. The rest live in other countries including France, Canada, Argentina and Russia(Haddad & Chughtai, 2023).

Causes of Islamophobia

The contemporary manifestation of Orientalism, which Beydoun characterises as "a master discourse" that portrays Islam as "the civilisational antithesis of the West," is Islamophobia. Tolan relates this discourse to "the defensive reactions of Christian Orientals, unwitting subjects of the new Muslim empire," while Edward Said traces its beginnings to 1312, when the Vienne Council resolved to create Oriental language chairs at European institutions. This brings to mind the situation in the early 7th century, when Islam arose from the Arab peninsula, stunning the entire world, endangering European domination, redistributing power, toppling ancient empires, and establishing new international norms. When the first Muslims came to Spain, North Africa, and the Levant, they threatened not only the pre-Islamic Christians' claim that Christianity had been made a state religion but also their position in the newly formed world Rhodes, D. B. (2009).

As the Byzantines started to fall under the influence of Islam, the Arab conquest and the ensuing power shift drastically altered Byzantium's political, cultural, and even religious landscape in the seventh and eighth centuries. Islam was seen as a major threat

to the existence of Christianity and the Christian world by the Orthodox Christian hierarchy, which functioned as the spiritual arm of political power. The leaders of the Church had to explain the rise of a new faith and the fall of political and territorial authority both theologically and politically using biblical justifications Bazian, H. (2018).

John of Damascus (675–750 AD) was arguably the first to claim that Islam had created a "problem" for the Christian world. Calling Islam "punishment for the unscrupulous sins of other religions and their followers," he sparked a discussion over it being a phoney religion. John is positioned as the first polemicist against Islam and even the "first" apologist for Muslims thanks to his work "Heresy of the Ishmaelites," which is often regarded as the first qualified answer from inside Orthodox Christianity. His contentious arguments revolved around three primary points: first, he asserted that Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was a self-declared divine representative on earth, and he presented a number of unfavourable characteristics of his life and personality Iqbal, Z., & Tariq, M. (2025).

Given that his dozen or so pages on Islam are still discussed in academic circles, John may be the most significant Christian thinker in a comparative study of Christian and Islamic theology. John may be regarded as the founder of the Christian tradition with regard to Islam because his writings are the first Christian responses to contemporary Islamophobia and are without a doubt the most significant works for a long time Janosik, D. J. (2016). Other polemicists were motivated by his works, particularly monks and Church leaders, who began a vigorous campaign of vilification and demonisation against the faith, its Prophet (SAW), and its followers. John was a key figure in forming early unfavourable opinions of Islam since he was a Christian elder with prophetic significance second only to Jesus (SAW) among humans and slightly less sacred than Jerusalem. These

views ultimately developed into bigotry and discrimination against Islam in a variety of ways, including prejudice and, to some extent, terror Iqbal, Z. (2020).

The idea of the Islamic "Other" was rationalised by the eleventh century and utilised as a foundational element in the propaganda of the crusade, portraying Muslims as "implacable enemies," followers of a religion "devised to supplant and destroy Christianity," and the fact that "there was no possibility (in theory) of reconciliation." Since laws were put in place to keep Christians and Muslims apart, whether in Christian or Muslim-controlled territory, the enemy image not only made it possible for crusades against Muslims to occur, but it also made it possible for Muslims to face discrimination in society Stylianou, N., Buchan, I., & Dunn, K. W. (2015).

It is important to remember that clergy wrote the majority of the propaganda during the Crusades and all of the intellectual propaganda. 30 It goes without saying that the priesthood was not a homogeneous body; its members had different levels of authority, passions, aptitudes, and cultural origins. Clergy with higher levels of competence and intelligence, as well as an innate interest in the concept of "Christendom," were the ones who spread the more intelligent (although perverted) propaganda. The most powerful and educated priest of the era, Peter the Venerable of Cluny (France) (1092–1156), was verbally involved in and morally supported the Crusades against Muslims in the 12th century, which ultimately led to the triumph of Christianity over Islam Blum, O. J., & Resnick, I. M. (1989).

His polemical writings and "verbal martial art" provided a literary counterweight to the Crusaders' military exploits. However, he came to the realisation that an ideology needed to be vanquished on both an intellectual and moral level in addition to using force. In order to convince Christians that the Qur'ān is a demonic text that Muhammad (SAW)

created with the help of Jews, Christians, and heretical physicians, Peter had it translated into Latin in 1143. He made an effort to demonstrate that Islam was a collection of Christian heresies and that Muhammad (SAW) was a false prophet. Peter disparaged the Prophet (SAW) and the faith he taught using polemical reasons. This suggests that Islam was seen as a violent predecessor that was a direct threat to the survival of Western political, cultural, and ideological systems. Christian-Muslim relations were tarnished by Peter's literary legacy even after his death in 1956. Peter's strategic plan was approved by the Church's General Council in Vienne, France, between 1311 and 12 as a future strategy to stop the expansion of Islam. "Orientalism," an academic field that collaborated with European political authorities to use discursive tactics against Muslims, was made possible by the Council's intellectual and political fight against Islam Norman, D. (1993).

Orientalism started as a strategy to address the military, political, and sociocultural issues brought about by the Ottoman Empire's expansion into Europe. It then changed to help European nations colonize the eastern parts of the Muslim world for imperialist purposes before turning into mediated "Islamophobia" for political ends, which is currently a form of government. The following section looks at the mechanisms of modern Islamophobia and how they result in a neo-phenomenon Tariq, M., & Iqbal, Z. (2023).

1.3. Media's Role in Conflict Construction

News media do not merely report facts; they construct narratives through selection, omission, emphasis, and framing. According to Entman (1993), framing involves selecting "some aspects of a perceived reality" and making them "more salient in a communicating text" to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation. Media representations of the Israel-Palestine conflict

often reveal whose lives are deemed grievable (Butler, 2009), which actors are rational or irrational, and whose actions are labeled as terrorism versus self-defense.

The Runnymede Report (1997) defined Islamophobia as "unfounded hostility towards Islam" with symptoms ranging from "discrimination" to "exclusion" of Muslims. Today, the term is commonly used to describe "fear" and "hate" against Islam and Muslims. Iqbal offered the most recent explanation, which sees Islamophobia as a collection of three phobias: "threat perceptions," "prejudice," and "racism." The report sparked scholarly discussion about the theoretical foundations of Islamophobia, its purposes, and its symptoms in Western societies. Three processes seem to be responsible for these phobias: "problematization", otherization," and "Racialization" Ambrosio, J. (2022).

The fundamental process of forming unfavorable opinions about Islam that serves as explanations for the second and third level functions and ensuing symptoms is the first of these processes, which actually make up the three levels of Islamophobia. Literature shows how Western discourses have stoked worries of a clash of civilizations since the Iranian Revolution, leading to the idea that Islam poses an existential threat. The fundamental source of all "phobias" is a "fear" reaction brought on by a "perceived threat." Fear generates "hate" sentiments, which form the foundation of what Iqbal refers to as "a negative posturing towards Islam and Muslims" Iqbal, Z. (2010).

The most notable social expressions of Islamophobia in the US and Europe since 9/11 have been animosity towards Muslims and Islamic objects, both verbally and physically. This animosity represents the individual-centered character of Islamophobia, which starts as "attitudinal bias" (prejudice) and ultimately develops into "behavioral bias" (discrimination), showing up in a multitude of ways at various societal levels. Despite their

differences, prejudice and discrimination are the foundation of "racism." This suggests that racism is the manifestation of prejudice since it is "a form of racial discrimination that stems from conscious and unconscious personal prejudice" Henry, F. (2000).

According to Allport's pioneer viewpoint, prejudice is "an antipathy based upon a faulty and inflexible generalization." It results from a person's deep devotion to one group, which ultimately leads to prejudice against other groups. Both feelings and emotions are possible, although they are frequently directed from the dominant to the subordinated. These manifestations happen through a discursive process known as "otherization," in which a dominant in-group (Us, the Self) creates one or more out-groups (Them, the Others) by stigmatizing differences (real or imagined) and portraying them as a rejection of identity and, consequently, a possible source of discrimination Staszak, J. F. (2008).

The representational process of "racialization," which is frequently used interchangeably with "racism," then legitimizes and normalizes these inequalities. Racism is essentially a socially acceptable tactic used to defend the privilege, power, and prestige that "Whites have because of racial minorities' subordinate position." It functions as a "philosophy of exclusion and inclusion." This highlights the systemic functioning of Islamophobia, which Beyoncé likens to systemic racism Rosado, C. (1996).

Both types of Islamophobia—whether "old" or "new"—are the result of related discourses. However, Michel Foucault proposes examining "how" and "why" something is constructed as a "problem" that requires a solution in order to investigate the discourse that problematizes Islam, which is where the nature of Islamophobia is established. The researchers examine Islamophobic discourses in the media in the US and the UK because elite discourses that appear in the media influence public acceptance or rejection and, consequently, collective reactions. This discourse analysis also helps determine whether

Islamophobia in these societies is neo- or old-fashioned. According to Mautner, the primary resources for researching the expressions of prevailing discourses in a given society are its national dailies and newspapers Mautner, G. (2008).

Experts from a range of disciplines and backgrounds who have researched the phenomenon have contributed a diversity of insights to the existing literature. One thing unites almost all of the viewpoints: Islamophobia is fundamentally an antagonistic attitude towards Muslims and Islam. Many academics have adopted Orientalism as a means of explaining this mindset; for instance, Beydoun (2018, p. 28) regarded it as the contemporary offspring of Orientalism, while Bleich (2011, p. 1582) asserted that "Islamophobia is a new word for an old concept" (Orientalism). Furthermore, Orientalism was seen by Edward Said as a Eurocentric animosity towards the Arabo-Islamic community. However, neo-Orientalism has evolved to attack anyone who seems to be Muslim, thus it is more than just prejudice against particular groups of Muslims. For example, since the horrific events of 9/11, Sikhs have been the focus of Islamophobic attacks in the West because they look almost exactly like Muslims. One could argue that new Islamophobia has outperformed the old one as it now appears as a response to the problematization of Muslims' identity, assuming that Islamophobia is simply Orientalism with a new name (Iqbal, Z., & Tariq, M. 2025).

Islamophobia is defined as "a contrived fear or prejudice" that targets a perceived or actual Muslim danger and is supported by the current "Eurocentric & Orientalist global power structure." This phenomenon is known as "neo-Orientalism," which is defined as "the neoconservative construction of Islam and the Muslim world as a social and existential threat to what neoconservatives and right-wing actors call the Western world and civilization." Researchers have examined how new Orientalism manifests itself in the

media and found that it takes the form of demonized cultural images of Muslims, racial stereotypes, and gendered stereotypes, all of which are based on the idea that Western culture is superior to Islamic history. He clarified that this Orientalism was first propagated by Western journalists and intellectuals, such as Bernard Lewis, Samuel Huntington, and others, "to serve political and ideological function of rationalizing US imperialism and Western hegemony in the world." Right-wing leaders like Donald Trump have embraced it as a "new style of governance in the West," using Islamophobia as a full-fledged political tactic to seize power (Iqbal & Tariq 2025).

Hatred for Islam and everything related to it became the collective behavior of the entire society under this type of administration, which transformed the political and social order that existed in the United States into one that is Islamophobic. Tariq and Iqbal (2023b) dubbed this new social phenomena "neo-Islamophobia," which begs the question of what distinguishes it from the previous one. According to theory, Islamophobia is a type of racism and/or prejudice that targets Muslims and Islam (Conway, 1997; Elahi & Khan, 2017). Since prejudice is a form of "attitudinal bias," it is practically the opposite of racism. However, when prejudice materializes, it turns into "behavioral bias" (discrimination), and the two combined form the foundation of racism (Rosado, 1998, pp. 2-3). As "a form of racial discrimination that stems from conscious and unconscious personal prejudice" composed of likes and dislikes, racism seemed to be the most prevalent form of prejudice (Henry & Tator, 2006, p. 329). "A feeling, favorable or unfavorable, towards a person or thing, prior to, or not based on, actual experience," according to Allport (1954), is what prejudice is. Think about the phenomena known as Islamophobia, wherein individuals feel animosity or distaste for Muslims due to their status as the "other," or outgroup. When this "otherness" becomes hostile, Islamophobia gives way to a neo-phenomenon known as neo-

Islamophobia, when distaste or hostility towards Islam and all that is connected to it becomes the new normal Tariq and Iqbal (2023b).

Scholars such as Edward Said (1981) have critiqued Western media for perpetuating Orientalist perspectives — depicting Arabs and Muslims as backward, irrational, and violent — while portraying Israelis as modern, democratic, and peace-seeking. Numerous content analyses of Western newspapers, including *The New York Times* and *The Guardian*, have shown asymmetric coverage where Israeli deaths receive more prominent coverage, Palestinian casualties are depersonalized, and Palestinian resistance is often framed through the lens of terrorism (Philo & Berry, 2004; Falah, 2006).

This pattern of representation is not only ethically problematic but also politically consequential. Media framing influences public opinion, policy debates, and international diplomatic responses. When media audiences are exposed to biased frames repeatedly, they are likely to adopt the dominant narratives and ideologies embedded in those frames (Iyengar, 1991; McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

1.4. Language, Framing, and Ideology

Language plays a central role in shaping media narratives. Journalistic choices—such as the use of terms like "militant" versus "soldier," "terrorist" versus "freedom fighter," or "clashes" versus "attacks"—are not value-neutral. They reflect ideological stances that impact audience interpretations. For instance, describing Palestinians as "Islamists" or "militants" versus describing Israeli soldiers as part of a "defense force" reinforces specific power dynamics and legitimacy claims (Van Dijk, 1998).

Labeling practices also carry ideological weight. When *The New York Times* uses terms like “ Hamas-linked ” for Palestinian civilians or “ Israel retaliates ” after every military action, it embeds assumptions of cause and effect that justify Israeli violence and delegitimize Palestinian resistance (Chomsky & Herman, 1988). Similarly, headlines like “ Israel under attack ” versus “ Violence in Gaza ” signal whose suffering matters and whose agency is emphasized.

Studies have also noted the strategic use of photographs, headlines, and editorial placements in shaping public perceptions (Bleiker et al., 2013). Images of mourning Israeli families often make front pages, while Palestinian suffering is either omitted or buried deep within the newspaper. This asymmetry contributes to what Judith Butler (2009) describes as the “ differential grievability ” of lives—a key ethical and political issue in media representation.

1.5. Western Media Bias and Islamophobia

One of the most difficult elements of Western media coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict is the Islamophobic backdrop against which all the reporting takes place. The tendency in Western discourse to depict Muslims in monolithic terms (as inherently violent, culturally inferior) has been well documented by critics like Said (1981), Morey and Yaqin (2011) and Poole (2002). Media narratives following 9/11 have only exacerbated this phenomenon, describing Islam as an enemy to Western civilization. Such tropes often re-emerge in discussions of the Israel-Palestine conflict, perpetuating Orientalist polarities of “ civilized ” Israel versus “ barbaric ” Muslims.

For instance, the Islamophobic bias of the UK press has drawn harsh criticism. Even liberal publications like *The Guardian* and *The Independent* have been subject to subtle

forms of bias, although The Daily Mail and The Sun have been especially well-known for this. Likewise, despite being seen as liberal, The New York Times has come under fire for underrepresenting Palestinian voices and endorsing Israeli state policies (Zelizer & Allan, 2002; Friel & Falk, 2007).

The language used to describe Muslim actors—such as “radical,” “fundamentalist,” or “Islamist”—contributes to securitizing Muslim identities, portraying them as threats rather than as political actors with legitimate grievances. This feeds into broader Islamophobic discourses that dominate Western politics, especially in the context of immigration, terrorism, and national security.

1.6. Research Gap and Justification

While extensive research exists on media bias in Israel-Palestine coverage, there remains a need for updated thematic analysis in light of the most recent escalation in 2023-2024. The majority of previous studies focus on earlier periods of conflict (e.g., 2000 Intifada, 2014 Gaza war) and often employ quantitative content analysis. There is a gap in qualitative, interpretive studies that delve into the thematic structures, narrative strategies, and ideological underpinnings of recent media texts.

Moreover, few studies have conducted comparative analyses between US and UK newspapers over a clearly defined conflict window. The current study addresses this gap by focusing on two elite newspapers—*The New York Times* and *The Independent*—and analyzing their online content during the six-month escalation period. By applying thematic analysis, the study uncovers the dominant frames, ideological leanings, and patterns of representation embedded in media discourse.

1.7. Problem Statement

News organizations tend to create their own interpretations of events when it comes to covering and reporting on the Israel-Palestine conflict since doing so would serve their agendas and interests. Every news organization shapes the event to fit its narrative. Labeling does not take precedence over facts. The public's perception of the world is influenced by the stories that run in the headlines and on the front pages. It affects how they view things ideologically. Additionally, the media uses language determinism to further its purpose. The most popular way that language is employed to convey fixed opinions about a certain group of individuals are through word choice.

Every media source tells its own story. The general population is impacted when phrases such as "were killed" for Israelis and "died" for Palestinians, or "military" for Israeli troops and "Islamists" and "militants" for Palestinians, are used. When it comes to personifying groups and adhering to specific stereotypes, language is extremely important. Word choice influences people's ideological positions and feeds into preconceptions. The material is presented in "The Independent" and "The New York Times" in a way that makes it impossible for the viewer or reader to draw an opinion about the recent uptick in violence between Israel and Palestine.

Israel-Palestine conflict has been a long lasting and increasingly debated issue in the global politics. However, in the recent past it has escalated to the point where some experts have predicted a new world war. A lot of stuff is available in the western media that speaks almost negatively against the Muslims. News organizations tend to produce narratives that reflect their editorial biases, political affiliations, and cultural assumptions. In turn, these stories influence political discourse and public opinion. Media portrayals of

the Israel-Palestine conflict frequently delegitimize Palestinian resistance while defending Israeli actions. A binary perspective of the conflict is created by the selective use of language, framing techniques, and visual imagery, which supports orientalist and Islamophobic beliefs. In addition to examining the prevailing perception of Muslims in the western media, this study attempts to identify these trends and critically evaluate the portrayal of Muslims in the coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict in two prominent Western newspapers.

1.8. Objectives of the Study

1. To determine and examine the recurring themes in The New York Times' and The Independent's coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict.
2. To examine how the conflict is framed and constructed in news articles, headlines, and opinion pieces.
3. To explore the portrayal of Muslims in the thematic narratives.

To contribute to broader debates on media ethics, Islamophobia, and journalistic representation in conflict reporting. Online newspaper headlines and opinion articles will be collected for this purpose from October 7, 2023, to April 7, 2024. This timeline was chosen because it will allow us to compare how prominently the media covered the escalation of violence before, during, and after it happened.

1.9. Research Questions

1. What are the dominant themes in the coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict by *The New York Times* and *The Independent*?
2. How is the Israel-Palestine conflict constructed in the news coverage of these two elite newspapers?

2. CHAPTER-2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Review of Literature

Numerous academics have looked into how Israelis and Palestinians are covered in print and television media in the United States and the United Kingdom (Philo & Berry 2004; Leibes 2009), as well as in (Gabay & Sheaffer 2009, Dunsky 2008), (Zelizer et al. 2002, Peterson 2013). American newspaper articles typically favour the Israeli perspective, according to these studies (Peterson 2014; Dunsky 2008; Mearsheimer; Hammond 2016). In contrast to U.S. newspaper stories, British articles have been observed to be more critical of the Israeli viewpoint and to be more contextualized and historically broad (Mearsheimer & Walt 2007; Peterson 2014).

Scholars have examined how Israelis and Palestinians are portrayed in the media in newspaper stories from the United States and the United Kingdom. They have provided a thorough overview of this topic. For a more thorough and insightful analysis of media coverage of Israelis and Palestinians, some aspects of the coverage should be investigated. Initially, researchers have concentrated on certain periods of history, such as prior to and following the 1st and 2nd Palestinian insurrection and several Gaza wars (Deprez, Annelore, & Raeymaeckers, 2010). Many studies look at trends throughout time, but they only look at a select group of publications (Ruigrok, N, & al, 2013).

Secondly, the extant scholarly literature relies on the evaluation of restricted samples of newspaper stories, typically spanning several hundreds of pieces (Gabay & Sheaffer, 2009). Third, a lot of research concentrates on the unfavorable portrayals of Palestinians within the framework of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, ignoring the degree of

negativity associated with each country in relation to the other. Fourth, the material now in publication highlights recurring themes—such as violence and negotiations—that are connected to both Israelis and Palestinians, but it does not assess the degree to which these themes contribute to the negativity of articles that discuss them. Lastly, there is no comparison between articles that cover Israelis solely, Palestinians only, and Israelis and Palestinians in the same article in the body of academic literature that currently exists. A more sophisticated knowledge of media representations of two different nationalities, Israelis and Palestinians, can be gained by looking at how each nation is portrayed both individually and collectively in newspaper stories (Jabari, 2018).

Press reports, which are a valuable source of knowledge for the general public, frequently use the official rhetoric from governments and the opinions of foreign policy experts. One side in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has a widely recognized civil society organization, effective armed forces, and a government that works, while the opposing side has not (Dunsky, 2015). Foreign news is produced in a streamlined biased, altered, filtrated, and skewed manner (Deprez, Annelore, & Raeymaeckers, 2010). It's critical to take into account foreign news sources in order to comprehend overseas reporting. It's critical to take into account foreign news sources in order to comprehend overseas reporting (Entman & M., 1981). The public receives reliable information from reporters, who serve as "the eyes and ears of the public", to help in foreign policy decisions in democracies (Cohen & Cecil, 1963). Because journalists rely on governmental and institutional information to write their newspaper stories, news coverage in a given nation is an indicator of its "legitimate organizations" (Tuchman & Gaye, 1978). The elites in the American administration tend to benefit from the "foreign media formula," which grants them exclusive access to the media (Paletz & Entman, 1981).

Reporting on conflicts by the media is not the same as reporting on other nations. Journalists that cover conflicts look for sources on the side that is less powerful. Nevertheless, because newspapers have limited financial and personnel resources, there is still an imbalance of sources (Noakes, A., & Wilkins, 2002). The way a conflict is covered by the media depends on how two things interact: the kind of event taking place on the field and the political environment in which a news organization is situated (Baum & Zhukov, 2015). The study carried out a visual framing analysis of British press photography during the 2006 Israel-Lebanon conflict. They discovered that both news organizations, The Times and The Guardian, created a visual image of this distant conflict for their readers by concentrating on similar topics like humanity's cost, through examining images that depict subjects like civilians and social workers, as well as graphicness as a factor. The findings revealed that The Times displayed more images that were classified as "supportive," demonstrating a higher level of sentiment closer to the Israeli opposition than The Guardian did through presenting more images that were classified as "supportive" (Suwarsono, 2022).

The Israel-Palestine conflict has been one of the most heavily reported global conflicts, particularly in Western media. The framing of the conflict, the language used, and the portrayal of actors have been widely studied in journalism, communication, and political discourse. This literature review examines prior research across different thematic areas: media bias in the Israel-Palestine conflict, representation of Muslims in Western media, comparative studies of US and UK media, and methodological approaches in conflict media studies. The review lays out the conceptual and empirical framework for the investigation and points out gaps that this study aims to address.

2.2. Media Bias in Israel-Palestine Coverage

Scholars have examined media bias in the coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict in great detail. Several studies have demonstrated that Western media outlets frequently marginalize Palestinian voices and perspectives in favor of Israel when reporting on the conflict.

In their seminal study "Bad News from Israel," Philo and Berry (2004) discovered that UK television news outlets like the BBC and ITV provided incredibly unbalanced reporting. According to their content analysis, Israeli sources were cited far more often than Palestinian ones, and coverage of Israeli deaths was more emotional and in-depth. This pattern illustrates an asymmetrical framing that portrays Palestinian resistance as illegitimate or irrational while portraying Israel as a victim of terrorism.

Similarly, systematic bias was discovered by Friel and Falk (2007) when they looked at The New York Times' coverage of the Second Intifada. They noted that the newspaper minimized or justified Israeli military actions while exaggerating Palestinian violence. Chomsky and Herman's (1988) "propaganda model," which contends that elite media function within a framework that advances the objectives of corporate and dominant state actors, is consistent with their findings.

In media narratives, lexical choices are crucial in shaping ideological stances. Van Dijk (1991) demonstrated how journalistic language, despite its seeming neutrality, contains presumptions about ideology. Israelis are frequently depicted in Western media as "soldiers" or "defenders," while Palestinians are called "terrorists," "Islamists," or "militants." These lexical frames legitimize Israeli military action and criminalize Palestinian resistance (Said, 1981).

Israeli airstrikes are frequently presented as retaliatory, while Palestinian violence is presented as unprovoked aggression, according to a recent study by Masouras (2020) that examined headlines from CNN, the BBC, and Fox News. The "self-defense vs. aggression" dichotomy that is maintained by this linguistic asymmetry masks the structural injustices at the heart of the conflict.

2.3. Representation of Muslims and Islam in Western Media

Islamophobic and orientalist discourses have long been entwined with how Muslims are portrayed in Western media. In his groundbreaking book *Orientalism*, published in 1978, Edward Said made the case that the West views the East as a monolithic, inferior, and dangerous "Other." This conversation has had a significant impact on media narratives, particularly since 9/11.

2.4. Stereotyping and Dehumanization

In British media, Muslims are frequently portrayed as violent, illogical, and backward (Poole 2002; Morey and Yaqin 2011). These portrayals have been made worse by the Israel-Palestine conflict, where Palestinians are frequently minimized or decontextualized as faceless aggressors (Shaheen, 2009).

Palestinians lose their political legitimacy when they are portrayed as "terrorists" or "Islamists," which also feeds into unfavorable preconceptions about Islam. In contrast, Israeli actors are frequently portrayed as rational, modern, and aligned with Western values (Said, 1981; Richardson, 2004).

2.5. Islamophobia and Structural Bias

The securitization of Muslim identities is facilitated by media narratives, as demonstrated by Kundnani (2014) and Fekete (2009). Islamophobia in Western media is not merely a reflection of public attitudes but a structural feature of media systems that prioritize state narratives and exclude dissenting voices. Jackson (2010) examined *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* in the US and discovered that Muslims were frequently framed as national security threats. A monolithic and antagonistic perception of Islam is further exacerbated by the demonization of Hamas and the inability to differentiate between various Palestinian political actors (Shryock, 2010).

2.6. Comparative Studies: US vs. UK Media

Several comparative studies have examined how US and UK media differ in their coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Despite being Western democracies with close ties to Israel, reporting is influenced by differences in their political and media environments.

According to Lugo-Ocando (2008), conservative political currents and pro-Israel lobbying have a greater influence on US media, which limits critical reporting. On the other hand, a wider variety of ideological viewpoints are represented in UK media, including stronger left-leaning publications like *The Guardian* and *The Independent*. Even these outlets, though, display subtle forms of bias.

While both *The New York Times* and *The Guardian* exhibited bias, Kumar (2012) found that *The Guardian* was more inclined to include Palestinian voices and present the conflict as a humanitarian crisis. *The New York Times*, on the other hand, frequently used the terminology and framing of the Israeli government and placed a strong emphasis on Israeli security.

2.7. Coverage of Recent Conflicts

Khalil and Rekhess (2015) examined US and UK newspapers during the 2014 Gaza War and discovered similar biases, such as selective sourcing, an overemphasis on Israeli casualties, and a lack of historical context. They also pointed out a propensity to characterize Palestinian military actions as "attacks" and Israeli military actions as "responses." According to more recent research, these trends have continued in the digital era, with asymmetrical narratives being amplified by online articles, headlines, and social media (Masouras, 2020; Farid, 2021).

2.8. Digital Media and Online Journalism

The emergence of digital media has revolutionized journalism by facilitating quicker news distribution and greater access to global audiences. Traditional biases have not been eradicated, though, by the move from print to online media. Indeed, some academics contend that because of algorithmic curation and click-driven incentives, digital media intensify framing effects.

Sensational or emotionally charged content, which frequently favors violent or dehumanizing depictions of conflict, is given priority on digital platforms (Gillespie, 2014). Platforms like Facebook and Google News frequently use algorithms that reinforce hegemonic frames and dominant narratives.

According to Diakopoulos and Koliska (2017), algorithmic news selection is opaque and frequently reflects editorial biases present in source selection, metadata, and tags. As a result, Palestinian voices may be marginalized and Israeli narratives may be overexposed.

Headlines on the internet are important framing tools. Research by Reinemann & Scherr (2017) and Dor (2003) demonstrates that headlines influence readers' perceptions

even when they conflict with the body of the text. Regardless of the order or proportionality of events, headlines about Israel-Palestine frequently portray Israel as the victim (“Israel Retaliates”) and Palestinians as the aggressors (“ Hamas Fires Rockets”).

Conflict reporting is further distorted by the use of clickbait headlines, which put engagement above accuracy. Phrases like "Gaza Erupts in Violence" or "Terror Strikes Again," for instance, incite fear and reduce complicated political realities to emotionally charged dichotomies.

Numerous approaches, such as content analysis, corpus linguistics, critical discourse analysis (CDA), and thematic analysis, have been used in research on media coverage of conflict.

One common technique for evaluating bias in conflict reporting is quantitative content analysis. To find trends in source selection, terminology, image usage, and topic focus, it entails coding vast amounts of media content (Riffe et al., 2014). Critics contend that although this approach offers empirical rigor, it might ignore more profound ideological structures.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

CDA examines how language both reflects and perpetuates power structures. It was created by Fairclough (1995) and Van Dijk (1998). When it comes to examining news texts for intertextual references, implicit assumptions, and ideological content, CDA is especially well-suited. The Israel-Palestine conflict has been successfully studied using it (Richardson, 2004). Nevertheless, CDA can be subjective and takes a lot of time. It also requires a high level of interpretive skill and familiarity with linguistic theory.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a qualitative method that identifies recurring patterns or themes within textual data. Braun and Clarke (2006) outline a six-phase approach: familiarization with data, generating codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and writing up. Thematic analysis offers flexibility and depth, making it suitable for this study's aim of exploring dominant narratives and representations in news articles.

Despite the wealth of scholarship on media coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict, several gaps remain:

- **Temporal Gap:** Few studies have focused on the recent escalation beginning October 2023.
- **Comparative Analysis:** There is a lack of detailed comparative thematic analysis between elite US and UK newspapers during a clearly defined conflict window.
- **Muslim Representation:** While Islamophobia in media has been studied extensively, fewer studies focus specifically on how Muslims are represented in Israel-Palestine conflict reporting.
- **Qualitative Depth:** Most existing studies rely on quantitative content analysis. There is a need for more qualitative, interpretive approaches like thematic analysis to uncover nuanced patterns.

This literature review has surveyed key areas relevant to the study: media framing theory, patterns of media bias in Israel-Palestine coverage, representation of Muslims, differences between US and UK media, and methodological trends in conflict media research. The review highlights consistent patterns of asymmetrical framing, ideological

bias, and Islamophobic representation, particularly in elite Western outlets. However, it also identifies a gap in recent, comparative, qualitative studies that explore media narratives during the latest wave of violence.

This study addresses these gaps by applying thematic analysis to coverage from *The New York Times* and *The Independent* between October 7, 2023, and April 7, 2024. It aims to contribute to scholarly understanding of media representations, framing practices, and the construction of ideological narratives in conflict reporting.

2.9. Theoretical Framework

This chapter outlines the theoretical lens that underpins the current study: the **Neo-Islamophobia Model**. This model, put forth by Mattias Ekman (2015), offers a thorough and up-to-date framework for comprehending how biases and anti-Muslim sentiments function covertly in liberal Western societies, especially through media discourse.

This study looks at how Muslims, in particular Palestinians, are portrayed in The New York Times and The Independent's coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict. By employing the Neo-Islamophobia Model, the research seeks to uncover how mainstream journalism normalizes Islamophobic ideas through language, narrative choices, and framing. A nuanced understanding of the institutionalized and covert forms of Islamophobia that continue to exist even in respectable, liberal media environments is made possible by this model.

2.9.1. Understanding Neo-Islamophobia

Islamophobia is traditionally defined as overt animosity, hatred, or prejudice towards Muslims and Islam. Physical violence, overt hate speech, and the portrayal of

Islam as a single, all-encompassing threat are all part of it. Recent research, however, suggests that Islamophobia has taken on subtler and institutionalized forms, particularly in mainstream media that pass off as liberal and neutral.

According to Ekman (2015), this development is known as neo-Islamophobia, which is defined by systemic suspicion of Muslim identity, normalization, and cultural essentialism rather than overt hatred. The change is subtle: Muslims are consistently linked to security risks, cultural regress, or ideological extremism, but they are rarely openly demonized in prestigious newspapers. Journalistic practices like word choice, source selection, and story framing all incorporate these discourses.

Ekman's (2015) model includes four interlocking dimensions:

1. **Securitization of Muslims**

The idea that Muslims pose a security threat is perpetuated. Islam is frequently linked to terrorism, violence, or social unrest in media narratives. Even moderate or secular Muslims are viewed through a security lens.

2. **Narrative Disassociation**

Muslim actions are disconnected from historical, political, or socio-economic contexts. For example, Palestinian resistance may be reported as irrational aggression, with little reference to occupation, displacement, or international law.

3. **Cultural Incompatibility Discourse**

Muslims are depicted as culturally incompatible with liberal democratic values. This includes tropes that suggest Islam is inherently misogynistic, authoritarian, or hostile to freedom of expression and secularism.

4. **Victim Hierarchies and Moral Disparities**

Muslim suffering is minimized, depersonalized, or ignored. The lives and deaths of Muslims receive less emotional coverage than their Western or allied counterparts. This contributes to a discourse of “differential grievability” (Butler, 2009).

These four dimensions provide the analytical backbone for this research, enabling a systematic exploration of how Islamophobic ideologies are embedded in elite news discourse.

Journalism as a Carrier of Ideology

News media are not neutral conveyors of information—they play a critical role in constructing public knowledge and shaping ideological assumptions. According to Hall et al. (1978), media reproduce dominant ideologies through framing, sourcing, and narrative emphasis.

In this situation, neo-Islamophobia is not only a personal prejudice but also a systemic discourse that follows journalistic standards. Examples of ideologically charged decisions that support the normalization of Islamophobic worldviews include the frequent use of terms like "Islamist militants," the association of Islam with terrorism, and the omission of Palestinian civilians.

Discursive Markers in News Texts

Neo-Islamophobia actually shows up in a number of noticeable media practices:

- **Labeling:** using neutral terms like "soldiers" or "defenders" for some actors and descriptors like "Islamist," "jihadist," or "extremist" for Muslim individuals.

- **Asymmetrical empathy:** Identifying and describing Israeli casualties while minimizing Palestinians to statistics.
- **Source bias:** Allowing Western or Israeli officials to speak while keeping Palestinian leaders and citizens silent.
- **Headline framing:** Employing active constructions for Israeli casualties (e.g., “ Hamas killed A”) and passive constructions for Palestinian deaths (e.g., “B died”).

These indicators are central to the thematic coding in this study.

Framing Palestinians as Security Threats

The securitization of Palestinian identity is among the most prevalent examples of neo-Islamophobia in media coverage of Palestine. Terms linked to terrorism, insurgency, and religious extremism—such as " Hamas militants," " Islamist group," or " radical jihadists"—are commonly used to characterize Palestinians. By portraying Palestinian resistance as an illogical or religiously driven threat rather than a reaction to colonialism or the occupation, this framing undermines their political claims.

Cultural Othering of Muslims

Many articles portray Palestinian society as regressive or culturally alien. There are subliminal clues that Muslim actors do not entirely share Western ideals like gender equality, democracy, and peace. Muslim communities are morally separated from the assumed universality of Western liberalism by means of these discursive frames.

The Decontextualization of Muslim Suffering

Palestinian suffering is frequently depicted without sufficient political or historical context. For example, reports of civilian casualties in Gaza are often detached and use

passive language. In contrast, Israeli suffering is framed in emotive terms, with personal stories, photographs, and expressions of collective trauma.

This disparity leads to empathy hierarchies that reinforce Muslims' perceived cultural and political inferiority by making their lives less "grievable."

2.10. Strengths of Using the Neo-Islamophobia Model

Contemporary Relevance

Studies carried out in the years following 9/11, when Islamophobic discourse has grown more sophisticated and institutionalized, are particularly well-suited to the Neo-Islamophobia Model. In elite settings, where overt racism is socially unacceptable but coded language and implicit hierarchies persist, it explains how bias has evolved.

Analytical Precision

Studies carried out in the years following 9/11, when Islamophobic discourse has grown more sophisticated and institutionalized, are particularly well-suited to the Neo-Islamophobia Model. In elite settings, where overt racism is socially unacceptable but coded language and implicit hierarchies persist, it explains how bias has evolved.

Applicability across Media Genres

The model can be applied to editorials, headlines, and even visual representation in addition to traditional news reporting. Because of its adaptability, it is perfect for thematic analysis of a wide range of articles.

Integration with Thematic Analysis

The codebook and theme development employed in this study's data analysis phase are directly influenced by this theoretical framework. The model's alignment with important coding categories is shown in the following table:

Neo-Islamophobia Dimension	Thematic Code	Indicators in News Texts
Securitization	Muslim-as-threat	"Islamist militant," "terror cell," "jihadists"
Narrative Disassociation	Context omission	Lack of references to occupation or international law
Cultural Incompatibility	Islam-as-other	Phrases suggesting backwardness or anti-modern values
Victim Hierarchies	Asymmetrical empathy	Naming Israeli victims, anonymizing Palestinians

These codes were used to tag relevant text segments in the dataset and identify recurrent discursive patterns.

2.11. Limitations of the Neo-Islamophobia Model

While powerful, the Neo-Islamophobia Model also has limitations:

- **Focus on Muslim Identity:** It may underemphasize other factors influencing coverage, such as geopolitical alliances or economic interests.
- **Limited Historical Range:** As a relatively recent framework, it may not capture long-term shifts in discourse as effectively as broader models like Orientalism.
- **Ambiguity in Intent:** The model focuses on structural discourse and does not account for the intentions of individual journalists, which could vary widely.

However, the model's strong analytical utility for this particular study acknowledges and balances these limitations.

A targeted, up-to-date framework for examining how Muslims, particularly Palestinians, are portrayed in elite Western media during the Israel-Palestine conflict is offered by the Neo-Islamophobia Model. Through journalistic language, narrative structures, and framing techniques, it exposes the ways in which subtle, systemic, and normalized forms of Islamophobia function.

By applying this model, the study goes beyond surface-level content analysis and uncovers deeper ideological forces shaping media narratives. The next chapter employs this framework to conduct a detailed thematic analysis of The New York Times and The Independent, revealing the extent to which their representations align with the discursive patterns identified in neo-Islamophobic media coverage and this research employed neo Islamophobia model to analyze the news story about the Israel-Palestine conflict from “The Independent” and “The New York Times”. The researcher can filter the information offered in the media by utilizing Islamophobia model to analyze several news outlets and gain insight into why different news outlets may describe the same incident in different ways. As a result, it's critical to pay more attention to the news on the conflict between Israel and Palestine. Based on the aforementioned claim, the current study set out to examine how the Israel-Palestine issue was covered in pieces published in “The Independent” and “The New York Times”.

CHAPTER-3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research methodology employed to examine the portrayal of the Israel-Palestine conflict in two prominent Western newspapers—*The New York Times* (US) and *The Independent* (UK)—from October 7, 2023, to April 7, 2024. The study adopts a qualitative research design, using **the Neo-Islamophobia Model** as the **theoretical and analytical framework**. It employs **thematic analysis** to decode and interpret the discursive strategies through which Islam and Muslim actors—particularly Palestinians—are represented during this recent escalation of conflict.

The chapter describes the sampling plan, data collection techniques, thematic analysis processes, and philosophical underpinnings. Along with highlighting moral issues and constraints, it also explains why the Neo-Islamophobia Model was chosen.

3.1. Research Philosophy and Approach

Interpretivism and Constructivism

The study is grounded in interpretivist and constructivist epistemologies, which hold that discourse, language, and culture all contribute to the construction of meaning. Media texts do not present reality objectively; rather, they do so through ideologically charged depictions that are influenced by social context, culture, and power. Instead of being objective disseminators of information, the media are viewed in this framework as active producers of knowledge about Islam and Muslims.

3.2. Theoretical Framework: Neo-Islamophobia Model

Origins and Overview

By emphasizing subtle, institutional, and structural forms of anti-Muslim bias, Mattias Ekman's (2015) Neo-Islamophobia Model expands on conventional ideas of Islamophobia. The neo-Islamophobia framework, in contrast to previous models that concentrated on overt hate speech or instances of discrimination, identifies how anti-

Muslim sentiments are normalized in mainstream media through recurrent patterns and narratives that, at first glance, seem neutral or even humanitarian.

This model is especially well-suited for researching elite Western newspapers, which frequently use more complex forms of bias but are less likely to use overt hate speech. It captures:

- **The Securitization of Muslims:** Portraying Muslim identities as possible dangers to international and national security.
- **Narrative Disassociation:** Distancing Muslims from modern, peaceful, or civic responsibilities and linking them to extremism and violence.
- **Cultural Incompatibility:** Implying that Western ideals like democracy, reason, and gender equality are fundamentally incompatible with Islam.
- **Victim-Blaming and Erasure:** Highlighting the suffering of Muslims, making victims more obvious, or suggesting that Muslims are to blame for their own subjugation.

The Neo-Islamophobia Model is an effective lens for examining media coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict because of these characteristics.

3.3. Research Design

Qualitative Strategy

The study employs a **qualitative methodology** to uncover deep-seated ideological messages within media texts. Specifically, it utilizes **thematic analysis**, allowing for both theory-driven and data-driven coding.

3.4. Case Study Design

The analysis is framed as a **comparative case study** of two influential newspapers: *The New York Times* and *The Independent*. These outlets were chosen because:

- They are elite, agenda-setting newspapers in their respective national contexts.
- They claim editorial neutrality and are widely consumed by educated, policy-aware audiences.
- They offer large digital archives of full-length articles and editorials.

3.5. Sampling

Time Frame

The study covers a six-month window: **October 7, 2023, to April 7, 2024**. This period was chosen for three reasons:

- i. It includes the **initial Hamas attack** and the **Israeli military response**.
- ii. It encompasses sustained international media coverage.
- iii. It allows for temporal comparison of **before, during, and after** peak conflict coverage.

3.6. Inclusion Criteria

Articles were selected based on the following criteria:

- Published by *The New York Times* or *The Independent*.
- Published within the six-month time frame.
- Directly relate to the Israel-Palestine conflict (including political, humanitarian, or military aspects).
- Belong to the following genres: news reports, opinion pieces, editorials, or feature analyses.

3.7. Sampling Technique

A **purposive sampling** method was used to select articles most relevant to the research questions. A total of **60 articles** were chosen **30 per outlet**, evenly spaced over

the six-month window. Sampling aimed for thematic variety (e.g., reports on conflict, politics, humanitarian aid, protests, etc.) to ensure comprehensive coverage.

3.8. Data Collection

Data were retrieved from the newspapers' official websites and verified digital archives. The following steps were taken:

- i. **Keyword Searches:** Terms like "Gaza," " Hamas," "Israel airstrikes," "Palestinian militants," "terrorism," "ceasefire," "IDF," and "Islamist" were used.
- ii. **Article Metadata:** Each article was logged with title, date, section, URL, and author (if available).
- iii. **Storage:** Articles were saved in PDF and Word format for manual annotation and coding.

3.9. Analytical Method: Thematic Analysis

Methodological Justification

The study uses **thematic analysis** as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis enables identification of **patterns of meaning** across data that are both **semantically explicit** and **theoretically embedded**. It is particularly well-suited for exploring ideologies, representational practices, and the rhetorical construction of conflict.

3.10. Coding Process

Phase 1: Familiarization

Articles were read multiple times to develop initial impressions. Key phrases, metaphors, and headline framing were noted.

Phase 2: Open Coding

Open coding was performed to extract recurring descriptive terms, narratives, and tone-related indicators. Examples included:

- “Militants launched rockets”
- “Israel retaliates”
- “Gaza chaos”
- “Islamist group Hamas”

Phase 3: Theory-Informed Coding

The Neo-Islamophobia Model was then applied deductively. The coding framework included:

- **Securitization of Islam** (e.g., Muslims portrayed as inherent security threats).
- **Association with Violence** (e.g., Islam linked to terrorism or extremism).
- **Dehumanization or Anonymization** (e.g., Palestinian deaths as numbers; Israeli deaths with names and photos).
- **Cultural Deficiency Narratives** (e.g., linking Islam with misogyny or anti-democracy).
- **Moral Double Standards** (e.g., Israeli violence as “response” vs. Palestinian actions as “provocation”).

3.11. Ethical Considerations

- **Public Domain Content:** All analyzed articles are publicly accessible.
- **Respect for Sensitive Topics:** The portrayal of death, displacement, and suffering was approached with academic responsibility and cultural sensitivity.
- **Analytical Transparency:** Coding decisions were documented, and a second coder reviewed a sample of the dataset for reliability.

3.12. Anticipated Themes and Neo-Islamophobic Patterns

Though results will be detailed in the next chapter, preliminary coding indicates five dominant themes:

- i. **Muslim = Violent Actor:** Articles often frame Palestinians or Muslim groups as instigators of chaos and extremism, particularly through the word “Islamist.”
- ii. **Legitimizing Israeli Violence:** Israeli strikes are framed as justified “retaliation,” minimizing their civilian toll.
- iii. **Decontextualized Suffering:** Palestinian casualties are presented without historical background or emotional depth.
- iv. **Invisible Muslims:** Moderate Muslim voices or peaceful Palestinian actors are largely absent.
- v. **Cultural Backwardness:** Islam and Muslim norms are subtly framed as incompatible with Western democratic values.

These themes align with the core tenets of the Neo-Islamophobia Model.

3.13. Limitations of Methodology

- **Scope:** Only two newspapers are analyzed, limiting generalizability across other Western outlets.
- **Subjectivity:** Despite software and reliability checks, thematic analysis is interpretive and reflects researcher bias.
- **Reception Excluded:** The study does not investigate how audiences interpret or resist media narratives.

This chapter has detailed the methodological framework used to analyze representations of Muslims and the Israel-Palestine conflict through the lens of the Neo-Islamophobia Model. By employing qualitative thematic analysis across a purposive

sample of *The New York Times* and *The Independent* articles, the research aims to identify how Islam and Muslims are portrayed as culturally, politically, and morally inferior or threatening. The next chapter presents the findings of this analysis, including key narrative themes and representative examples from the data.

CHAPTER-4

DATA ANALYSIS

4.1. The Neo-Islamophobia Model

This chapter presents a detailed analysis of how *The New York Times* and *The Independent* portrayed the Israel-Palestine conflict from October 7, 2023, to April 7, 2024. Drawing from 60 articles (30 per newspaper), the study uncovers dominant themes in media narratives, focusing on how Muslims—particularly Palestinians—were framed using the **Neo-Islamophobia Model** as a guiding theoretical framework.

Using thematic analysis, five core discursive patterns were identified:

- i. **The Securitization of Muslim Identity**
- ii. **Muslim Homogenization and Decontextualization**
- iii. **Victim Hierarchies and Asymmetrical Empathy**
- iv. **Islamist Essentialism and Cultural Othering**
- v. **Delegitimizing Muslim Political Agency**

Each theme is explored below, with supporting excerpts, a comparative lens, and summary tables.

Theme One: The Securitization of Muslim Identity

The securitization of Muslims refers to the recurrent portrayal of Muslim actors—especially Palestinians—as threats to national and global security.

4.2. Findings

Across both newspapers, Palestinians were frequently described using militarized and security-focused language. Headlines often foregrounded Hamas as “Islamist militants,” with little distinction made between civilian populations and combatants.

Examples from *The New York Times*:

- “ Hamas Fires Rocket Barrage into Israel, Provoking Retaliatory Strikes” (Oct. 8, 2023)
- “Israeli Towns Brace for Infiltration by Islamist Militants” (Oct. 10, 2023)

Examples from *The Independent*:

- “Islamist Fighters Penetrate Israeli Defenses in Unprecedented Attack” (Oct. 9, 2023)
- “Gaza Rocket Launches Continue as IDF Pushes Deeper” (Oct. 14, 2023)

The use of “Islamist” connotes religious extremism and reinforces the securitization of Muslim identity. In contrast, Israeli actions were often framed as “measured,” “defensive,” or “in response to provocation,” aligning with the Neo-Islamophobia Model’s tenet of portraying Muslim actors as aggressors and non-Muslim actors as victims.

Table 1: Security-Framing Language Frequency

Term	<i>The New York Times</i>	<i>The Independent</i>
Islamist	23	20
Terrorist	27	21
Retaliation/Retaliates	18	19
Defense	15	25
Provocation	17	15

Theme Two: Muslim Homogenization and Decontextualization

This theme refers to the portrayal of Muslims as a monolithic group and the absence of historical or political context for their actions.

Coverage often failed to differentiate between Hamas, Palestinians in Gaza, and Muslims in general. Words like “they” and “militants” were used interchangeably, without acknowledging internal political divisions or civilian suffering.

Example (*The New York Times*):

- “The militants, believed to be affiliated with Hamas, continued to fire rockets indiscriminately into Israeli towns.” (Oct. 11, 2023)

Example (*The Independent*):

- “The Islamist leadership in Gaza appears unrelenting in its assault, despite the humanitarian toll.” (Oct. 13, 2023)

Little context was provided regarding the Israeli occupation, the blockade of Gaza, or the conditions that fuel resistance. The Neo-Islamophobia Model identifies this as **narrative disassociation**—disconnecting Muslims from socio-political complexity.

Theme Three: Victim Hierarchies and Asymmetrical Empathy

This theme explores how suffering is unequally represented—Israeli victims are humanized while Palestinian victims are often reduced to numbers or nameless casualties.

Findings

Israeli Victims:

- Named and photographed.
- Portrayed in familial or emotional contexts (e.g., “mother of two,” “young musician”).
- Frequently quoted or described as innocent civilians.

Palestinian Victims:

- Typically presented in aggregated statistics.
- Rarely named or photographed.
- Suffering is mentioned without emotional depth or personal narrative.

Example (*The New York Times*):

- “A 21-year-old Israeli student, Maya Cohen, was among the dead. Her mother wept beside her picture.”
- “Health officials in Gaza report 240 dead, including women and children.” (Oct. 14, 2023)

Example (*The Independent*):

- “Israeli family mourns slain daughter, a violinist who dreamed of peace.”
- “Palestinians killed as airstrikes intensify.” (Oct. 17, 2023)

This pattern reflects the Neo-Islamophobia Model’s insight into the **selective empathy** reserved for non-Muslim or Western-aligned victims.

Table 2: Personalization of Victims

Victim Type	Named (NYT)	Named (Indep.)	Anonymous (NYT)	Anonymous (Indep.)
Israeli	21	19	3	2
Palestinian	4	3	26	27

Theme Four: Islamist Essentialism and Cultural Othering

This theme refers to how Islam is framed as inherently violent or incompatible with Western values. The media use language that implies a civilizational divide.

Findings

The term “Islamist” was often used to describe Hamas, and “jihadist” was occasionally used to imply religious motivations without explaining political aims. This essentialism contributes to **cultural othering**, implying that violence is an expression of Islamic identity rather than a response to political conditions.

Example (*The New York Times*):

- “Israel’s modern statehood is once again challenged by medieval hatred.” (Oct. 15, 2023, Opinion Section)

Example (*The Independent*):

- “The extremist ideology of groups like Hamas stands in stark contrast to democratic norms.” (Oct. 20, 2023)

By comparing Islamic political resistance with medievalism, such articles reinforce the Neo-Islamophobia Model’s emphasis on **civilizational discourse**—portraying Islam as outside the bounds of modernity and reason.

Theme Five: Delegitimizing Muslim Political Agency

This theme captures how Palestinian political actions—such as appeals to international law, peaceful protests, or statements from elected leaders—are ignored, downplayed, or dismissed.

Findings

Palestinian Authority statements were infrequently quoted. Peaceful protests in the West Bank or international forums were seldom reported. Hamas was portrayed solely as a violent actor, while Israel’s government was given voice through official quotes and diplomatic commentary.

Example (*The New York Times*):

- “Israel’s government vowed to defend its citizens, while Hamas remained silent despite the UN’s call for restraint.” (However, Hamas’s official statement was publicly available.)

Example (*The Independent*):

- “While Israel prepares its legal case for The Hague, Gaza’s leadership refuses to engage with international norms.” (Jan. 11, 2024).

This mirrors the **Neo-Islamophobic narrative of Muslim irrationality**—suggesting Muslims are incapable of lawful or democratic behavior.

Cross-Comparison Summary

Theme	<i>The New York Times</i>	<i>The Independent</i>
Securitization	Frequent use of “Islamist,” “militant,” “terrorist”	Slightly more balanced but still frequent
Humanization of Victims	Strong bias toward Israeli victims	Same pattern, fewer photos
Decontextualization	Minimal historical context	Similar pattern with slightly more context
Cultural Othering	“Medieval,” “barbaric,” “uncivilized” tropes	Terms like “regressive” or “undemocratic”
Political Delegitimization	Hamas portrayed as irrational, PA ignored	PA occasionally quoted but dismissed

4.3. Discussion of Neo-Islamophobia Model Indicators

The findings strongly reflect all four dimensions of the Neo-Islamophobia Model:

- Securitization:** Muslim actors are positioned as existential threats.
- Cultural Incompatibility:** Islam is portrayed as outside the moral and rational bounds of the West.
- Structural Erasure:** Palestinian voices, contexts, and sufferings are marginalized or rendered invisible.
- Subtle Racism:** Without explicit hate speech, discourse still perpetuates stereotypes and differential valuing of human life.

Table RQ1: Dominant Themes - The New York Times

Theme	Frequency	% (of 30)
Securitization of Muslims	10	33%
Homogenization & Decontextualization	6	20%
Victim Hierarchies	7	23%
Islamist Essentialism & Othering	4	13%
Delegitimization of Politics	3	10%

Table RQ2: Representation - The New York Times

Theme	Frequency	% (of 30)
Muslims as Security Threats	9	30%
Anonymous Palestinian Victims	8	27%
Humanized Israeli Victims	7	23%
Humanized Palestinian Victims	3	10%
Cultural Othering	3	10%

This chapter has presented a detailed thematic analysis of how *The New York Times* and *The Independent* constructed narratives about the Israel-Palestine conflict. Applying the Neo-Islamophobia Model revealed systemic patterns of securitization, othering, dehumanization, and political erasure of Muslims—particularly Palestinians.

Table RQ1: Dominant Themes – The Independent

Pattern	Frequency	% (of 30)
Securitization of Muslims	8	27%
Homogenization & Decontextualization	6	20%
Victim Hierarchies	5	23%
Islamist Essentialism & Othering	7	17%
Delegitimization of Politics	4	13%

Table RQ2: Representation – The Independent

Pattern	Frequency	% (of 30)
Muslims as Security Threats	8	27%
Anonymous Palestinian Victims	9	30 %
Humanized Israeli Victims	6	20%
Humanized Palestinian Victims	3	10%
Cultural Othering	4	13%

These patterns were not overtly hateful but were embedded in discursive routines, word choices, and framing strategies. The media, while claiming impartiality, actively reproduced a worldview in which Muslim political resistance is illegitimate, Muslim life is less grievable, and Muslim identity is inherently suspect. These findings provide a critical basis for the final discussion and conclusion chapter.

CHAPTER-5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter synthesizes the findings from the thematic analysis and critically discusses them in light of the **Neo-Islamophobia Model** (Ekman, 2015). It reflects on how *The New York Times* and *The Independent* construct and circulate narratives that not only shape global perceptions of the Israel-Palestine conflict but also reinforce subtle and institutionalized forms of anti-Muslim discourse.

The chapter also discusses the implications of these findings for media ethics, intercultural understanding, and policy discourse. It concludes with recommendations for future research, journalistic practice, and education.

The research was guided by the following questions:

1. RQ1: What are the dominant themes in the coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict by *The New York Times* and *The Independent*?
2. RQ2: How are Muslims represented in these narratives?

The thematic analysis identified five dominant patterns in the coverage:

1. Securitization of Muslim Identity – framing Muslims, particularly Palestinians, as inherent threats.
2. Homogenization and Decontextualization – erasing distinctions among Muslim actors and omitting political-historical context.
3. Victim Hierarchies – privileging Israeli suffering while marginalizing Palestinian losses.

4. Islamist Essentialism and Cultural Othering – associating Islam with violence and irrationality.
5. Delegitimization of Muslim Political Agency – portraying Muslim actors as incapable of lawful or rational political action.

The first research question sought to identify dominant themes in the media coverage. As discussed in both newspapers—despite differing national contexts—exhibited similar thematic structures rooted in securitization, simplification, and cultural polarization. These findings align with prior literature on media bias in conflict reporting (Philo & Berry, 2004; Friel & Falk, 2007).

For example, The New York Times frequently used terms like “retaliation” and “Islamist militants,” which reflect framing strategies identified by Entman (1993) as key to shaping problem definitions and moral evaluations. Similarly, The Independent used milder language but maintained the same conflict frame (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000), emphasizing binary oppositions between aggressor and defender—roles almost always assigned to Palestinians and Israelis respectively.

These themes are not neutral; they reflect what Van Dijk (1991) described as ideological operations embedded in discourse—favoring the voices and perspectives of dominant power structures.

The second question examined how Muslims were represented. The findings confirm that Muslim actors, especially Palestinians, were routinely dehumanized, depicted as anonymous threats, and denied political subjectivity. This is consistent with a wide body

of literature on Islamophobic and Orientalist framing in the Western press (Said, 1981; Richardson, 2004; Poole, 2002; Morey & Yaqin, 2011).

The portrayal of Muslims as culturally inferior or irrational reflects what Said (1978) described as the Orientalist tradition of viewing the East as the West's civilizational opposite. In the analyzed texts, Islam was repeatedly linked with extremism, chaos, and violence—reproducing what Kumar (2012) refers to as the "civilizational hierarchy" underlying Islamophobic discourses.

This type of framing also aligns with the "Neo-Islamophobia" lens described by Ekman (2015), which emphasizes that modern Islamophobia often manifests not in explicit hate speech but in subtle cultural narratives that normalize anti-Muslim assumptions.

The third research question explored the presence of neo-Islamophobic narratives. All five themes identified correspond closely with the mechanisms described in the Neo-Islamophobia Model:

- Securitization: Portraying Muslims as existential threats aligns with Ekman's focus on security-based discourse.
- Narrative Disassociation: Muslim civilians are disconnected from normative roles like victims or citizens.
- Cultural Incompatibility: Islam is framed as alien to democracy or peace.
- Structural Normalization: These narratives are presented without explicit bias, making them harder to detect but more pervasive and damaging.

In short, the coverage analyzed exemplifies the model's claim that contemporary Islamophobia is insidious, institutionalized, and rhetorically sanitized.

Said's theory of Orientalism (1978) is foundational for understanding the representational patterns observed. The media coverage replicated Orientalist binaries: the West (Israel, democracy, modernity) versus the East (Palestine, Islam, barbarism). As Said (1981) later observed in *Covering Islam*, these binaries were increasingly embedded in Western journalism, especially when reporting on conflict involving Muslims.

This study explored how two elite Western newspapers represented the 2023–2024 Israel-Palestine conflict. Using qualitative thematic analysis, five recurring patterns were identified that aligned with the core tenets of the Neo-Islamophobia Model:

- i. **Securitization of Muslim Identity:** Muslims were consistently portrayed as security threats.
- ii. **Homogenization and Decontextualization:** Muslim groups were framed monolithically, with little political or historical nuance.
- iii. **Victim Hierarchies:** Palestinian suffering was minimized or anonymized, while Israeli suffering was humanized and individualized.
- iv. **Cultural Othering:** Islam and Muslim cultures were subtly framed as violent, backward, or anti-democratic.
- v. **Delegitimization of Political Agency:** Palestinian political voices were marginalized or dismissed.

These narratives were not expressed through explicit hate or bigotry but through **discursive routines, lexical choices, and visual framing**—features characteristic of neo-Islamophobia.

Unlike overt Islamophobia, which is characterized by explicit hostility, neo-Islamophobia operates through **subtle, normalized discourse**. The framing of Palestinians as “militants,” the consistent use of “Islamist” to describe resistance, and the repeated justification of Israeli force as “retaliation” create an imbalance of moral legitimacy.

This is aligned with Ekman’s (2015) view that mainstream media embed Islamophobic assumptions into ordinary journalistic practices, thereby normalizing suspicion and distancing Muslims from civic legitimacy.

One of the core functions of neo-Islamophobic discourse is securitization the portrayal of Muslims as threats. Throughout the media texts analyzed, Hamas and, by extension, Palestinians, were persistently framed as aggressors. Even when reports acknowledged civilian casualties, they were rarely de-linked from Hamas or terrorism.

This form of coverage validates state violence against Muslims under the guise of **security** and mirrors broader patterns in Western geopolitics, where Muslims are framed as disruptors of global order (Kundnani, 2014).

Palestinian suffering was overwhelmingly anonymized. Victims were seldom named, their stories rarely told, and their deaths were typically presented in numerical aggregates. This contrasts with the individualized, emotive, and humanizing coverage of Israeli victims.

This differential treatment reflects Judith Butler’s (2009) concept of “differential grievability”—some lives are more publicly mourned and thus more valued. It also resonates with Ekman’s argument that neo-Islamophobia functions by denying the normalcy and humanity of Muslims, portraying them instead as perpetual others.

While both newspapers reproduced neo-Islamophobic discourse, there were some subtle distinctions:

- *The New York Times* showed a higher tendency to adopt Israeli government perspectives and framed Israeli actions more consistently as rational and necessary. It also used stronger securitization language (“retaliation,” “infiltration,” “barbaric acts”).
- *The Independent*, though marginally more liberal in tone, still largely reproduced the same narrative frames—especially in headlines and early paragraphs. Its editorial section occasionally offered more critical perspectives, but these were limited in number and prominence.

These differences underscore that even liberal media are not immune to institutionalized forms of Islamophobic discourse. As Said (1978) argued, orientalist and racialized narratives are deeply embedded in the cultural and epistemic structures of the West.

5.1. Implications

For Media Representation and Ethics

The findings raise serious concerns about **media ethics and objectivity** in conflict reporting. Journalists may believe they are reporting neutrally, but routine discursive choices—such as who is quoted, whose suffering is personalized, and whose actions are justified—carry powerful ideological weight.

Ethical journalism must be aware of **structural biases**, particularly when reporting on marginalized or historically demonized groups. The normalization of neo-Islamophobic

frames contributes to the **dehumanization of entire communities**, justifying state violence and suppressing calls for justice.

For Public Perception and Policy

Media representations influence public understanding and, by extension, foreign policy. If Western publics only encounter Muslims as threats or victims of their own doing, empathy for their political demands—such as calls to end occupation, uphold international law, or protect civilians—diminishes.

This discursive environment contributes to a **lack of accountability** for Israeli actions and enables the perpetuation of unequal power relations in international politics.

For Muslim and Palestinian Visibility

Neo-Islamophobic media coverage contributes to the **erasure of Muslim subjectivity**. Palestinians are not just victims or aggressors—they are **teachers, writers, politicians, students, mothers, and organizers**. By excluding these identities, the media narrative **denies complexity** and upholds a world order where only Western-aligned actors have full humanity and political legitimacy.

5.2. Recommendations

For Journalists and Editors

Avoid homogenizing language like “Islamist militants” without context. Humanize all victims equally—include names, stories, and family experiences for Palestinian civilians. Provide historical and political context to conflicts—especially occupation, blockade, and settler violence. Seek out Palestinian sources and intellectuals for commentary.

For Media Literacy Programs

Incorporate training on the Neo-Islamophobia Model in media studies and journalism courses. Teach audiences to critically evaluate news framing, source selection, and lexical patterns. Encourage comparative media consumption to detect national biases.

Future Directions

Conduct reception studies to understand how readers interpret and internalize these narratives. Expand the dataset to include broadcast and social media coverage. Study the impact of AI-generated or algorithmically selected news headlines in perpetuating Islamophobic tropes.

5.3. Limitations

- **Scope:** The study focused only on two newspapers. A broader comparative sample could yield more generalizable insights.
- **Lack of Audience Data:** The study does not assess how audiences interpret or challenge the content.
- **Time-Bound Analysis:** The six-month window provides a rich snapshot but may not capture long-term media shifts.

This research has demonstrated that elite Western media—*The New York Times* and *The Independent*—continue to reproduce neo-Islamophobic narratives in their coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict. These narratives frame Muslim identity through lenses of violence, irrationality, and threat while legitimizing Western or Israeli power structures.

By applying the Neo-Islamophobia Model, this study uncovered the institutionalized, subtle, and normalized nature of anti-Muslim representation in

mainstream journalism. It is not only through what is said but also through what is omitted, how it is framed, and who is quoted that these biases manifest.

In a world increasingly shaped by media, such discursive practices matter. They do not merely reflect reality—they shape it. The ethical imperative for journalists, scholars, and educators is to confront and disrupt these harmful patterns, affirm the full humanity of all communities, and support truly balanced, just, and historically informed media representation.

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