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Critical Discourse Analysis of Islamophobia Reflection in Gaza-Israel Conflict: A Case Study of BBC Reporting

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Abstract
This study presents a critical discourse analysis of Islamophobia within the context of the Gaza-Israel conflict, as reported by a renowned media outlet, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). By conducting a comparative analysis of the linguistic choices, thematic representations, and narrative structures employed by these publications, the research aims to uncover underlying biases and the portrayal of Islam and Muslims in the conflict. The methodology relies on Fairclough's three-dimensional framework, incorporating description, interpretation, and explanation to analyze the text, discursive practice, and sociocultural practice within the selected articles. The idea of Islamophobia, considering the ongoing Gaza-Israel conflict, reflects the instances of partiality, bigotry, and derogatory stereotypes towards Islam and its followers, specifically throughout the political dialogue, news coverage as well as public viewpoint. It encompasses biased portrayals, scapegoating, and marginalization of Muslims, often perpetuating fear, hostility, and violence against individuals or communities perceived to be associated with Islam. Against the backdrop of the Gaza-Israel clash, Islamophobia may affect public perception, policy-making, and transnational relations, aggravating tensions and hampering attempts to make peace and cognizance. This research contributes to the discourse on media bias, Islamophobia, and conflict reporting, offering insights for scholars, media practitioners, and policymakers interested in fostering a more balanced and nuanced media landscape.

Keywords: Islamophobia; Gaza; Israel; Media, BBC, Critical Discourse Analysis.

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Introduction:

The Gaza-Israel clash is symbolic of the decades-long Israeli-Palestinian dispute. It has been fueling regional destabilization and putting world's peace at risk. Additionally, it encounters episodes of Islamophobia throughout the globe, thereby affecting and being affected by international opinions and prejudicial views (Zeitzoff, 2011). The Gaza-Israel dispute stems from widespread Israeli-Palestinian issues, a deep-seated dispute with historical, geographical, and sociopolitical ramifications. This conflict goes back to the early 20s, which escalated after the state of Israel came into being in 1948 and due to successive Arab-Israeli warfare. This struggle has shifted over time due to wars, intifadas, and ever-changing geopolitics. Consequently, there exists rising discord and acts of periodic violence within the area known as the Gaza Strip (Baidoun, 2014).

Historical Context:

The roots of the conflict lie in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, during the rise of both Zionist and Arab nationalist movements. The Zionist movement, advocating for a homeland for Jewish people in the territory then known as Palestine, gained momentum as Jewish immigration increased, partly driven by European anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. Meanwhile, the Arab inhabitants of Palestine resisted these developments, fearing the loss of their land and rights. The tension between Jewish immigrants and the Arab population grew under the British Mandate (1920-1948), culminating in the United Nations' 1947 partition plan, which proposed dividing the land into Jewish and Arab states. The plan was accepted by Jewish leaders but rejected by the Arab side, leading to the 1948 Arab-Israeli War immediately following the declaration of the State of Israel (Maoz, 2013).

The 1948 and Subsequent Wars:

The war of 1948 ended up with more territory under Israeli control than was

promised by proposals for a partition plan and gave birth to hundreds of thousands of stateless Palestinians, a paramount issue in the whole conflict. Many wars, such as the Six-Day War (1960) and the Yom Kippur War (1973), shaped the course of ongoing issues. The 1967 war was particularly consequential. The 1967 war was a response to Israel's illegal occupation of areas like the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem, which are of prime importance in the current scenario (Schulze, 2013).

Intifadas and the Peace Process:

Intifadas or insurrections are perhaps the most noticeable instances of Palestinian resistance in the face of Israeli tyranny. The first Intifada, the Stone Intifada (1987-1993) and the Second one, the Al Aqsa Intifada (2000-2005), brought about immense agony and causalities on either side. However, these proved significant in directing focus to the Palestinian plight throughout the globe. The Oslo Peace Agreements of 1993 founded the Palestinian government. Also, they paved the way for future dialogues, signaling a significant yet too little step to settle the issue (Schulze, 2001).

The Gaza Strip's Unique Position:

The Gaza Strip seems to hold a special yet controversial place in the clash. In 2005, Israel's autonomous withdrawal from Gaza resulted in the transference of Israeli immigrants and military forces through peace. In 2007, the Islamist political organization Hamas took custody of Gaza, prompting beleaguerment by Egypt and Israel to stop the group from equipping themselves with arms. The economic as well as humanitarian state of Gaza deteriorated because of this. The region has seen several high-intensity conflicts between Israel and Hamas, characterized by rocket attacks on Israel from Gaza and retaliatory strikes by Israel (Darcy& Reynolds, 2010).

Current Challenges:

Today, the Gaza-Israel conflict remains one of the most difficult aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, with no comprehensive peace agreement in sight. The challenges include the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, the security concerns of Israel, the political division between Hamas in Gaza and the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, and broader issues such as Israeli settlements, the status of Jerusalem, and the rights of Palestinian refugees. The conflict continues to draw international attention and efforts at mediation, but a lasting resolution seems distant, with each side holding to positions that the other finds unacceptable.

Significance of the Study:

The significance of the present research, critical discourse analysis of Islamophobia reflection in the Gaza-Israel conflict, rests in its potential to show in what ways narratives of media outlets form and is formed by political and societal prejudices. An analysis of this kind may get to the bottom of the sophisticated process through which imagery, language and framing of narratives in mainstream international media either foster the propaganda or deal with anti-Muslim attitudes amid multifaceted and contentious warfare. By inspecting how influential media platforms paint the picture of the conflict, the present study aims to identify modes of depiction that are used for reinforcing dark perceptions about Islam and its followers or for providing a clear picture of issues that rise above religious and ethnic biases. This study provides vital apprehension about the media's role in shaping public perceptions and policy formulation. Thus, it aims to nurture media literacy among viewers and invigorate journalistic practices, which may stimulate well-formed yet least-biased global discussions. Furthermore, studies of this nature play a key role in heightening the efforts to confront Islamophobia, thus encouraging measures for the more unbiased and empathetic portrayal of Muslims in media narratives with conflict in focus and

beyond.

Research Questions:

1. How does the BBC frame its reporting style and content in reporting the Gaza-Israel conflict?
2. In what ways do Islamophobic narratives and stereotypes manifest in the coverage of the Gaza-Israel conflict by the BBC, if at all?

Research Objectives:

1. To examine the framing techniques, reporting styles, and content disparities utilized by the BBC in its coverage of the Gaza-Israel conflict. This objective aims to identify the narrative structures, language choices, and emphasis on aspects of the conflict.
2. To assess the role of BBC in embedding Islamophobic accounts into reportage of the ongoing Gaza-Israel dispute.

Research Methodology:

The research methodology used for carrying out the qualitative critical discourse analysis of Anti-Muslim sentiments in the context of the Gaza-Israel conflict relies on the events reported by the BBC. It takes into account several steps. First, to demonstrate an extensive range of coverage, an array of news reports, opinion articles, and multimedia resources have been collected from the media on the platform in research focus, which spans a particular time. Then, previously mentioned resources are examined systematically with the help of time-honored qualitative research techniques, i.e., discourse analysis and thematic coding. Given the context of the present conflict, the purpose is to spot frequently occurring patterns, themes, and linguistic choices that represent Islam and Muslims. The research efforts to find resembling discursive techniques, preconception, and framing techniques involve the use of iterative coding and thematic analysis. This method of inquiry provides a deeper comprehension of

the manifestation of Islamophobia in the BBC reporting process. Moreover, our investigation draws theoretical foundations and insights based on context from intensive engagement with relevant theoretical models and material on prejudices against Islam, journalistic studies, and reporting on disputes. The results of this particular study provide an in-depth understanding of the role played by media in moulding views about Islam and Muslims in light of the Gaza-Israel clash and also help spur the debates on biases, misrepresentation in media and ongoing instances of Islamophobia.

Literature Review:

Hejin (2015) uses a critical analysis framework focusing on semantic macrostructures and strives to unveil widespread discursive patterns and ideological groundwork in Muslim women's portrayals. The given methodology involves examining a range of themes, narratives, and linguistic choices made by BBC News to understand the portrayal of Muslim women in the media. This review examines semantic macro structures, i.e., language, narrative and headline construction, to locate recurring stereotypes, biases, and preconceived notions that can alter how people perceive Muslim women. It further addresses the share of gender, religion, and culture in developing images in media and underscores the potential ramifications of attitudes in society and policy development. In light of this overarching analysis, the literature review helps one grab the intricate procedures concerning how media portrays the female followers of Islam and provides direction for actions that aim at more accurate, inclusive and fair news coverage.

Kovács (2023) discusses the role of religion in the Israel/Palestine struggle, which is a deeply intriguing yet contentious subject attracting considerable attention from scholars and the public alike. However, the surge in interest, often driven by ideological motivations, has led to challenges in discerning reliable sources

for scholarly analysis. The abundance of publications on this topic, coupled with their polarized nature, poses a significant obstacle for newcomers, such as students and young researchers, who may struggle to distinguish between rigorously researched studies and ideologically driven propaganda disguised as academic discourse.

Marzano (2011) looks at the Israeli-Palestinian dispute by using an Anti-Muslim frame that contradicts the reality and promotes misconceptions. Islamophobic approach overlooks complicated political, societal, and historical factors that exist by streamlining the conflict to philosophical polarization. This prism disregards numerous identities, intentions, and Palestinians' grievances to portray those people via the only filter of Islam. Moreover, this study presents Israel as an innocent bystander fighting against the vicious and irrational foe that attacks Islam and its followers and presents them as hostile and outrageous entities. This type of framing spreads anti-Muslim feelings and weakens the attempts aimed at genuine understanding, dialogue, and ensuring the presence of peace in the locale. It seems important to stand against and dismantle narratives based on Islam phobia encompassing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to strengthen a more refined and practical discourse which considers the humanitarian grounds and activities of all involved bodies.

Kasmani's (2012) study explores the role played by Muslim ideology in tailoring the discourse related to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, as displayed through Al-Jazeera's reporting. The researcher studies in what ways religious attitudes, societal narratives, and political targets converge within Al-Jazeera’s reporting structure and tries to see how this outlet's coverage casts back and impacts one's views regarding the conflict. Through a thorough analysis of the language used, framing techniques, and contextualization of news stories, this study unfolds the effect of Muslim ideology on the depiction of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in

media and the repercussions on regional geopolitical relationships.

Askari's (2019) investigation of a dispute between Arabs and Israel illuminates challenges in deciphering the translations, specifically if they address Islamophobia. The translations can reinforce or refute preconceived notions, determining how incidents are seen and processed outside the limitations of language and culture. Those translations which propagate misconceptions within the framework of deeply entranced storylines possess the power to amplify hostilities and hamper the attempts towards settlement. Since they are endowed with a knack for moulding narratives, journalists and translators have to treat their work with tenderness and critical understanding.

Abbasi's (2023) study analyzes the connection between religion and nationalism as the author dives deeper into intricate details of ongoing Palestinian issues. It highlights that nationalist rallies and protests against invasion are vindicated by employing religious emblems. The findings also stress the joint attempts to give Palestinians' rights to citizenship, particularly given the Israeli legislation that imposed restraints on freedom of movement along with other basic human rights. Discourses that encourage anti-Muslim Sentiments often depict Palestinians as being belligerent and conflicting with occidental standards.

Analysis:

BBC Nov, (2023). Gaza's Health Ministry says 50 people were killed and 150 injured. However, a nearby hospital said it had received 400 casualties, including 120 deaths. Pictures show several large craters surrounded by collapsed buildings. The Israeli military said a senior Hamas commander was killed in the attack, and an "underground terror infrastructure" beneath the buildings collapsed. It added that a "large number of terrorists" from Hamas's Central Jabalia Battalion, who were with the commander at the time, were also killed. Meanwhile, Israeli tanks and soldiers continued to advance towards the most

populated areas of northern Gaza, including Jabalia. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67276822 \

The BBC report from November 2023 highlights the tragic death of Palestinian reporter Mohammad Abu Hasira, along with 42 of his family members, in an Israeli air strike on Gaza City, as reported by the Wafa news agency. This incident underscores the devastating toll of the ongoing conflict, particularly on journalists working in the region. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), the past month was the deadliest on record for journalists, with at least 37 reporters killed since the war began. The CPJ's data indicates that among those killed are 32 Palestinians, four Israelis, and one Lebanese journalist. However, the CPJ also notes that it is unclear whether all of the journalists were actively covering the conflict at the time of their deaths, and further investigation is needed to ascertain the circumstances. This report sheds light on the dangers journalists face in conflict zones and emphasizes the importance of protecting press freedom and ensuring the safety of media personnel. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67350709

BBC March, (2024). A UN human rights expert, Francesca Albanese, asserted that Israel committed "acts of genocide" in Gaza. She presented her report to UN member states in Geneva and Albanese, the UN special reporter on human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories and highlighted her findings. However, Israel promptly rejected her conclusions. These developments occurred against the backdrop of mounting international pressure on Israel to halt the war or take stronger measures to safeguard civilians. Albanese's assessment suggests that there were substantial grounds to believe that the actions perpetrated against Palestinians in Gaza collectively met the criteria for the crime of genocide. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-68667556

BBC March, (2024). Daniella Weiss, 78, known as the grandmother of Israel's

settler movement, presented a faction within the country's far right that harbours ambitions for beachfront properties extending into Gaza. With a list of 500 families eager to relocate to Gaza, Weiss portrayed the coastal region as a coveted destination. Despite its association with conflict, she extolled the beauty of Gaza's coastline, describing its golden sands as picturesque. Leading the radical settler organization Nachala, Weiss has long been instrumental in spearheading Jewish settlements in the Israeli-occupied territories of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which Israel captured during the 1967 Middle East war. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-68650815

The events BBC described occurred during intense conflict in Gaza. In such situations, there are often allegations and accusations of violations of international law by both sides involved in the conflict. The targeting of hospitals and medical facilities, as well as the loss of civilian lives, especially those of vulnerable populations like premature babies, raises serious concerns about adherence to international humanitarian law, which includes provisions to protect civilians and ensure access to medical care during times of armed conflict. Investigations by relevant international bodies may be necessary to determine the facts and assess whether any violations occurred. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-68629540

According to a BBC report (December 5, 2023), multiple folks were involved in identifying and collecting the bodies of those persons killed in the attack by Gaza's enemy. BBS reported that attackers badly injured the persons before they were killed. It was also found that many people were gang raped by Israel's forced execution and mutilation of one victim. Many sexually targeted and bloody body videos and photos were found, and BBC reported all this in their documentary. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67629181.

BBC (December 08, 2023) reported that a group of Israeli volunteers who

facilitated the transportation of sick Palestinians, predominantly children, from checkpoints in the occupied West Bank and Gaza to medical appointments in Israel were now unable to operate in Gaza due to governance by Hamas. Tragically, four of these volunteers lost their lives when Palestinian gunmen attacked their kibbutzim in southern Israel. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-67592468

Conclusion:

Analyzing the discourse surrounding Islamophobia within the Gaza-Israel conflict through a case study of BBC reporting reveals that biases and frames shape narratives significantly. The critical discourse analysis reveals a tendency within BBC coverage to perpetuate Islamophobic stereotypes and narratives, thereby influencing public perception and understanding of the conflict. This study underscores the importance of media literacy and critical engagement with news sources to counteract the propagation of discriminatory narratives, fostering a more nuanced and accurate understanding of complex geopolitical conflicts likes the Gaza-Israel conflict.

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