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CONSTRUCTING VICTIMHOOD IN BBC COVERAGE OF THE PALESTINE-ISRAEL CONFLICT BETWEEN 2023 TO 2025: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT
This study investigates the linguistic construction of *victimhood* in BBC's coverage of the Palestine–Israel conflict during the two-years period following October 7, 2023. The analysis is grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), focusing on lexical semantics and discursive strategies that shape narratives of victimhood. Word choices and phrases are examined to reveal how connotation and lexical choice contribute as narrative strategy to build public's perception, specifically representation of victims and perpetrators. Wodak's discursive strategies— nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, dan intensification/mitigation are applied to interpret how actors are named, attributed, and positioned within conflict narratives. Findings highlight recurring linguistic patterns that emphasize suffering and legitimacy for the actions by particular party, while obscuring agency or responsibility. By situating lexical analysis within CDA, this study demonstrates how victimhood is discursively constructed through language, offering insights into how victimhood framing shapes global perceptions of Palestine-Israel conflict.

1.INTRODUCTION

Discourse of international conflict reported by media outlets always presents the actors involved, both preparators and victims. The labels attached to each party are the result of media representation in a news article, implicitly and explicitly. The mention of victims or preparators is certainly inseparable from the background narrative, the emphasis of the news (prioritized voices and views) and the ideology of the parties involved in the conflict, including two parties directly involved, international humanitarian organizations/ institutions, and the media outlets that publish the news coverage. With a long conflict history, far before the Hamas attacks on October 7 2023, Palestine-Israel conflict has been narrated in countless media coverages. Throughout general coverage, whether it's on newspapers, television news or on social media, a number of narratives have been found nominating certain parties as perpetrators and others as victims. These nominations are seen to continue to evolve in line with the context of the conflict, such as which party triggers the attacks, the numbers of the victims and the scale of the damage caused for each party. In this writing, the study focuses on the media narrative post Hamas attacks on October 7, 2023. For reference, the timeline of the conflict between Palestine and Israel since the October 7 attack is summarized and reported by Anti-Defamation League (ADL), the leading anti-hate organization as follows:

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1.1 Table Timeline of Gaza War based on *Anti-Defamation League (ADL)*

The October 7 Attacks	October 7, 2023
Israel's Military Response to Hams' Attack	October 2023-September 2025
Israel-Hezbollah Conflict	October 2023-November 2024
Houthi Attacks	October 19, 2023
First Hostage Release and Rescues	October 2023-February 2024
Direct Confrontations with the Islamic Republic of Iran	April & October 2024
Ceasefire and Hostage Release Deal	January, 19-February, 27 2025
The Israel-Iran Twelve Day War	13-25 June, 2025
Two-State Solution Conference and Palestinian State Recognition	July-September 2025
Trump's 20-point Peace Plan and Gaza Ceasefire	September-October 2025

The Hamas attack on October 7 2023 sparked various reactions globally. Israel openly stated that they were the victims and therefore had the legitimacy to carry out retaliatory attacks against Hamas in Palestine, as a form of defense. According to BBC the day after Hamas attack (October 8, 2023), Israel launched a ground operation in Gaza to respond Hamas. This conflict, which has been consumed by the international public since its inception, was reported by a number of mainstream media outlets, so the global readers received abundant information after the October 7 attack. In this regard, this study examines how the media narrates "Victimhood", the party that became the victim based on the news coverage of the Palestine-Israel Conflict on October 7, 2023. Using a critical discourse analysis approach to news discourse, researchers will identify words or phrases used by the media in narrating the form of suffering experienced by victims during this conflict. One of international media outlets that wrote news about the Palestine-Israel conflict is BBC.com, one of the mainstream media outlets from England. In the period from October 7, 2023 to 2025, the BBC has produced more than 5,000 articles related to the development of the conflict (based on the Media Bias Meter article matrix (2026). To obtain comprehensive data, researchers narrowed down the data on BBC news coverage to 20 news articles after the attack was launched, from October 7, 2023 to May 2025 when the ceasefire started. The 20 articles are chosen purposively, one article from every month. By identifying articles during that period, researcher will look at the BBC's narrative strategy about victimhood in the Palestine-Israel conflict.

The narratives that appear in news coverage consist of quotes from the parties involved, the views of external parties, as well as narratives generated by journalists' views or reports based on various factors. Therefore, victimhood narratives can also vary based on the context and perspective of journalists. This study aims to examine the strategies used by the media in narrating or labeling victims in the ongoing conflict between Palestine and Israel. This label is seen based on the suffering experienced by certain parties based on the events that occurred. This study aims to examine how the BBC media outlet constructs a victimhood narrative in reporting the Palestine-Israel conflict that occurred on October 7, 2023, with a reporting period of October

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7, 2023 to May 2025. The data used will then be analyzed at the linguistic level and discursive strategies with indicators of victimhood and preparators by Wodak's representation, namely nomination, predication, argumentation, perspective and intensification/ mitigation. After the analysis process, the author examines how narrative strategies in articles can shape the figure of the victim. The researcher interprets the ideological implications of the BBC's framing of victims at the CDA level.

The media plays a significant role in distributing narratives related to the event of October 7 2023, involving Palestine and Israel. The media not only writes the news but also has agenda to convey the perspective they hope readers will accept. In reporting the Palestine-Israel conflict, the media portrays the actors involved, including identifying the victims of the incident. The media constructs victimhood, who is victimized, and how their suffering is narrated. Through a critical discourse analysis study, the author will examine the narrative strategy of an international media outlet, BBC.com, through nomination, predication, argumentation, perspective, intensification/mitigation, using the Wodak's discursive strategy.

The articles used are articles on the topic of Palestine-Israel since the 7 October 2023 attacks began to observe narrative changes at different phases of the conflict (until May 2025). The objectives of this study include: 1) The BBC's representation of victimhood (victim status) in its coverage of the Palestine-Israel conflict from the Hamas attack on October 7, 2023, to 2025. 2) An analysis of narrative strategies in the construction of the victimhood label through lexical choices using the Wodak's discursive strategy. 3) Identifying representations of victimhood framing in reporting on the Palestine-Israel conflict. 4) Identifying shifts or changes in victim nominations between 2023 and 2025. The results of this study are expected to demonstrate linguistic patterns that indicate the representation of victims within the context of conflict discourse and demonstrate the BBC's consistency in framing parties as victims throughout the conflict.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Palestine-Israel Conflict

The ongoing conflict between Palestine and Israel is one of the longest-running conflicts in international history. Historically, the conflict began with the Balfour Declaration in 1917, when the British government, occupying Palestine, issued a statement expressing support for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. After the United Nations (UN) passed Resolution 181, dividing Palestine into two states: Jewish and Arab, in November 1947, Israel declared its own independence in 1948, when British rule ended. This declaration led to the first Arab-Israeli war. Arab nations, led by Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt (supported by Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and the Yemeni army), invaded Israel. The war ended in 1949 with the signing of the Armistice Agreement.

The conflict culminated in December 1948 with the exodus of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, known as the "Nakba" (catastrophe). With this victory, Israel took control of another area, West Jerusalem, from the territory originally defined in UN Resolution 181. Meanwhile, Egypt gained control of the Gaza Strip, and Jordan gained control of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The UN then passed Resolution 194, which stipulated the right of return for

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the Palestinian people. In 1967, another war broke out, the Six-Day War, in which Israel won and took control of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, areas previously occupied by Palestinians. This victory gave Israel the right to occupy the Sinai Peninsula until April 1982. In November 1962, the UN again raised the issue of a two-state solution, and the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 242, calling for Israel's withdrawal from Palestinian territory. This was a form of respect for and recognition of Palestinian sovereignty and an effort to realize a peaceful life within secure boundaries, a "land of peace."

As the conflict between Palestine and Israel is continuing over the years, as well as the international peace efforts, Hamas was founded as a symbol of Muslim resistance, then labeled as terrorist organization in 1997 by the US. In 2021, conflict broke out between Israel and Hamas in Jerusalem, reaching its peak in August 2022, resulting in the highest number of deaths during the conflict. Then, on October 7 2023 on Jewish holiday, Hamas launched an attack on Israel near the Gaza border. The Hamas attack killed 1200 people, followed by kidnapped 251 people as Hostages, including babies, elderly and women. The hostages are not only citizens of Israel, but also few numbers of foreigners. The reaction to this attack was reported by international media outlets, one of which highlighted Hamas's meticulous plan and the weakness of the Israeli intelligence which was unable to detect initial signal of this attack (Wyss:2024).

Responding the attack and labelling themselves as victim, Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu declared a revenge and vowed that Hamas, which rules Gaza, would pay an unprecedented price (BBC News:2023). Zanotti and Sharp (2024) reported that Israel Defence Force (IDF) launched a multi-front military operation in Palestine to dismantle Hamas, retrieve hostages and neutralize threats along its borders.

The operation is making it as the longest-lasting conflict and the one with the highest number of casualties in the history of the two countries (to this date). During the conflict period there are a number of news about cease-fire talks, Gaza transition planning and humanitarian assistance to Gaza. The information reported by media outlets which began with Hamas attack on October 7, 2023, marked a turning point in public perception of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Although it remains unsolved, media and social media narratives have significantly influenced public perception, making it the most talked-about conflict on various digital platforms and in the mass media. The Hamas attack on October 7, 2023, is the focus of this research, examining the representation of victim narratives or victimhood by the media reporting it.

2.2 Victimhood in Conflict discourse

Defining "victim" in social construction means answering the question of who is the victim based on the results of intersections, mutual influences and conditioning, values, cultural representations, legal and social rules, economic and political structures and everything that arises in a context. In addition to the meaning of the victim as someone who suffers due to the power relations of a system, there is also the term ideal victim described by Nils Christie (1986) in Vezzadini (2024), as a concept that creates ambiguity in society's view of victims by selecting, separating and selecting the victim label based on parties deemed worthy or not worthy of help, support, and hearing. This is based on indicators that certain individuals or parties do not have the ideal characteristics to be the party harmed based on a certain image. In contrast to the ideal victim, the concept of the real victim due to political violence, the state, ideology and (religious)

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fanaticism is a victim who is considered troublesome because it is considered not entirely innocent. After World War II, the concept of the victim began to be narrated as a subject affected by crime, violations, disasters, calamities, violence and cruelty. The portrayal of victims as innocent and helpless subjects by the media and political agendas arises and is related to the relationship of the victim label with social recognition or rejection. Christie (1986) provides five attributes to the victimhood label: 1) The victim is depicted as weak person. Sick, old, or very young people are particularly well suited as ideal victims; 2) The victim was carrying out a respectable project caring for her sister. The so-called victim also includes figures who have responsibilities (for their siblings or others); 3) Individuals who have difficulty or inability to leave their siblings cannot be judged for the decision to take small children to work on the street during the day. 4) The offender was big and bad means if the perpetrator is someone big and bad; and 5) The offender/ perpetrator was unknown and in no personal relationship to the victim.

Victimhood is a label given by authors to parties or individuals who experience suffering. In English, victim means someone affected by disasters and crimes and becomes the party that suffers. Spalek (2006) in Jan van Dijk (2009) explains that victims are stereotyped as "passive" and "powerless." Furthermore, given the conditions of suffering experienced, assigning the victim label to certain parties becomes crucial because the label justifies or acknowledges their suffering and innocence. In addition, with the victim label there is an expectation to demand the right to revenge. (Jan van Dijk, 2009) Conversely, the victim label can also have negative implications, namely the connotation of a passive and powerless party who is unable to help (Römkens and Diekstra: 1998), and creates certain stereotypes for victims (Spale, 2006). In addition, the victim label also has the connotation of someone who sacrifices something. Van Dijk concluded that the "ideal victim" is a party who is innocent, suffering but ready to forgive the perpetrator.

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict has featured numerous media reports and studies that illustrate the tendency to label Israel as a victim. In "Chosen Trauma and Terrorism: The Jewish Narrative," Aqdas (2023) examines the justification often used by Israel for its violence and illegal occupation of Palestine, namely the lens of selective trauma for the Jewish group due to the Holocaust. This concept of selective trauma has become a victim identity for the Jewish group and has been passed down through generations, thus shaping Israel's identity as a collective victim. Volkam (2001) in Wolff (2022) defines chosen trauma or selective trauma as a severe trauma experienced by an ethnic, national, or religious group in the past and naturally becomes a shared identity. This trauma has a hereditary psychological impact, and between these groups there is an obligation to reverse past conditions so that they do not recur. This sense of victimhood influences a group's attitude towards other groups, especially those perceived as competitors or groups involved in their past suffering (Keynan 19). This reality then became the seed of a number of ongoing conflicts, including the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict. The collective trauma felt by the Jewish community due to the Holocaust tragedy drives the Jewish community to never again experience that suffering.

Through this thought, Wolff (2022) reveals the negative feelings that victims have towards the aggressor that are projected onto those perceived as aggressors today, often triggering existing conflicts. In the context of the illegal occupation and violence committed by

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Israel against Palestine, Noor et al. (2012) explain that these actions are part of competitive victimhood, where Israel legitimizes the suffering experienced by Jews during the Holocaust as being more severe than that experienced by others (Palestinians) today. Bar-Tal et al. (2009) even defines this kind of view as "victimhood syndrome."

2.3 Narrative Strategies of Representing Victimhood

Barton (2025) considers victimhood a political force to be reckoned with. The assignment of victim status serves to foster solidarity and strengthen relationships. Victimhood is a label generated through a narrative process (by the media) depicting the harm caused to individuals. The label of victim is narrated by social instruments, including the media. As a platform for mass information dissemination, the media plays a role in framing and representing the actors depicted in each news report. Representation in media discourse refers to how individuals, groups, and identities are portrayed in the social order through media such as television, news, film, and social media. Media representation depicts people, events, issues, and cultures through a process of language construction, such as the choice of narratives, words, actors, and the framing of various groups, particularly those with a history of marginalization. This depiction is crucial because it can construct narratives and influence identities and lead to stereotypes. According to Brooks & Hebert (2006), good media representation is accurate, diverse, and inclusive, while poor representation can lead to misunderstandings, bias, and even harm certain groups.

In the representation of victimhood, there is a paradoxical concept identified based on the reality of conflict. The definition of victim, which refers to the weak and suffering party, differs in the context of international conflicts such as the Palestine-Israel conflict due to military attacks that have resulted in thousands of Palestinian casualties, yet public perception still sees Israel as the victim.

In Chatioui et al. (2023), Gray & Wegner (2011) view the paradoxical context of victim representation as commonplace, considering the psychological aspects and social functions of victims. In their example, Weiner (1980) demonstrated that "victim" can elicit sympathy and mitigate blame, especially when their suffering is directly related to a violation. Bar Tal et al. (2009) support the argument that representation as a greater victim can justify the involvement of certain groups in acts of violence as a "defensive act" or preventative measure they must take.

Chatioui et al (2023) identified the framing strategies of the New York Times (NYT) newspaper with a focus on the attributes given to the parties represented in the Palestine-Israel conflict, namely: 1) The dimension of physical suffering, 2) The dimension of psychological suffering, 3) The dimension of legitimacy suffering and 4) The prominent frame. The dimension of physical suffering includes strategies with narrative framing of aggression, crime and cruelty/brutality experienced directly by the victims, such as mass murder, kidnapping, torture and so on (Noor et al: 2012). Claims about who experienced more physical suffering were raised by both parties, both by quantifying the amounts of losses and by belittling the suffering of other groups without considering the amount and level of physical suffering up to death experienced.

Noor et al. (2012) stated that narratives about physical suffering are one of the most obvious dimensions of suffering in the representation of victimhood, which consists of frames of aggression, criminality, and cruelty/brutality. One frame in the dimension of physical suffering is the aggression frame. According to the Great Indonesian Dictionary, aggression is an action

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involving hostility, attack, or destructive behavior to harm, harm, or injure another party. This action is driven by anger or a desire to dominate a particular party. Chatioui et al. (2023) identified the aggression frame by the NYT in the narrative of the Israel-Hamas war news through the narrative of the attack attached to Hamas. This framing describes Hamas as the instigator of the attack, exploiting weaknesses in Israel's security system. Several words used as attributes in this framing include brutal, brazen, devastating, and deep thirst for revenge. The aggressor narrative attached to Hamas is a strategy to represent the other party, namely Israel, as the victim. Similarly, the criminality frame strategy involves the repeated use of terms that label Hamas, such as gunmen and terrorists. Similar to the aggression and criminality frames, the cruelty frame highlights the violence and inhumane acts during the Israel-Hamas war. Hamas's actions are depicted through a cruel narrative, often through the phrase "desire to see Israeli blood," which casts Hamas as the cruel party and thus obscures the reality that many Palestinians also suffered. The cruelty frame applied to Hamas obscures Israel's violence and instantly diminishes Hamas and Palestine's position as victims.

The dimension of psychological suffering examines the psychological and emotional suffering suffered by victims, beyond physical and material suffering. This loss also affects those who did not directly experience the suffering but also share the suffering and loss, such as suffering passed down through generations. This suffering is then referred to as collective victimhood. The psychological suffering felt by victims is narrated by the media through a humanization frame. Chatioui et al. again identified that media coverage plays a crucial role in shaping the narrative of the Israel-Hamas war. This is evident in the in-depth and personal coverage of the conflict and how it impacted both the individuals and groups involved. Elmasry (2009) in Chatioui et al. describes humanization as the presentation of personal details about the killed individual, including information about their name, family, hobbies, and occupation. This serves not only to condemn the perpetrator's actions but also to garner public sympathy. In addition to describing the victim's personal information, the media also repeats the trauma of previous suffering, thereby reviving memories of victimhood. In the context of the Israel-Hamas war, the media presented the historical context of Palestinian suffering more concisely and did not delve deeper into the long-term psychological impacts experienced by Palestinians. Conversely, for Israel's suffering due to Hamas attacks, detailed personal information was used more frequently, leading readers to feel a sense of the emotions felt by the Israeli people. The impact of psychological suffering also includes a threat-of-danger frame. In conflict reporting, narratives often explain potential dangers, risks, or negative events by emphasizing the danger (Eriksson, J: 2020 in Chatioui et al.). In some cases, the threat-of-danger frame outweighs the immediate perceived danger, including the ongoing threat of being a victim of a terrorist attack or the threat of hostility from international parties.

The dimension of legitimacy of suffering means acknowledging each other's suffering while simultaneously legitimizing their own, greater and unfair suffering. This is an attempt to delegitimize the suffering of the other group. Chatioui et al. explain two types of framing used to explain the dimension of legitimacy of suffering: the self-defense frame and the accident frame. The self-defense frame is often used by the media to legitimize Israel's retaliatory attacks on Palestine. According to Elmasry (2009), when the media frames murder as a form of self-defense, they offer strong justification through word choices such as retaliation and response. This frame

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directly reflects the narrative that one party's actions are defensive measures to defend themselves, regardless of the number of casualties. Furthermore, through the accident frame, the media frames an action (murder) as an accident (unintentional) and justified. Elmasry explains that this creates the perception that the action is a forgivable mistake due to the element of unintentionality. In the context of the Israel-Hamas war, the narrative given by the media to Israel's retaliatory actions is that they are an accident in response to Hamas's attacks. This is also what Israel uses to legitimize or justify the consequences of civilian casualties and damage suffered by Palestine. Chatioui concluded that the media narrative portrays Israel as a victim forced to confront the conflict as a form of self-defense.

A prominent frame is the media's justification of a particular perspective, making it superior or more prominent than others. Patterns used include the placement or frequency of coverage. The media can legitimize or delegitimize one party by presenting their narrative more frequently or in greater depth, or vice versa. Not only does the frequency of narratives appear, but their placement also influences the formation of public perception. The media can portray the suffering of both parties, but the suffering of the party narrated first (narrative placement) also contributes to the framing of victimhood. In addition to placement and frequency, the prominent frame also occurs through the appearance or absence of credible sources/informants. Chatioui et al. explain that differences in perspective and source credibility can contribute to the narrative of conflict. Thus, even though there are two sides to a narrative from two sources, the public still questions the credibility of the informant. Therefore, highlighting credible sources is an effort to frame media narratives.

The label of victimhood assigned through media narratives is a powerful tool to shape and shift the public's perspective on an event, in this case the Israel-Palestine War. Through a number of framing strategies and patterns, such as storylines that specifically focus on violence and vulnerability, narrators can shift public moral judgments and foster emotional attachments that ultimately shape political views (Barton, 2025). Barton also explains that victim narratives can serve as strategic meanings that benefit political agendas that often fail to address the harm or ease the suffering experienced by actual victims.

2.4 Media Narrative and Public's Perspective

Media narratives are stories written by the media that contain a combination of values, beliefs, symbols, and communication representations that construct individual or group identities (Ricoeur 1991, Somers 1994, Anthias 2002, Lerner 2020, Demirel 2021). Victimhood narratives are persuasive and influential in politics, reminding others of the past, rekindling fear, inciting anger, and motivating cooperation (Jacob 2015, Wang 2008). Victimhood narratives can be used for manipulative and destructive purposes, under the right conditions, resulting in greater injustice and suffering (Ramanathapillai, 2006). The influence of media through narratives necessitates narrative analysis and an examination of the narrative strategies employed. Media plays a role in shaping public opinion. The significant influence of media narratives results in the formation of public perceptions of those responsible for the conflict, as well as forming a perception of sympathy for those who are narrated as experiencing suffering or victimhood. Therefore, the labels narrated by the media automatically have a significant impact on the overall context of the ongoing conflict between Palestine and Israel. Isiaka (2024) states that language

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can be a weapon in the context of war or conflict, "In times of war, language is often disguised/transformed into an instrument to gain power." (Merton 1968, Barnes 2003, Johnson 2012, Isiaka 2024).

Referring to Riessman (2005) in Narrative Analysis, which makes narrative text diverse, namely the existence of sequences and consequences in terms of how an event is selected, arranged, connected and assessed as something meaningful for a particular audience. Based on the definition presented, Riessman compiled a narrative analysis model, namely thematic analysis that focuses on the answer to "what" rather than "how"; structural analysis and performative analysis that emphasize how a narrative is delivered; interactional analysis is used in the context of narrative dialogue between speaker and listener. To analyze narrative texts in the media, the discursive strategy developed by Wodak is considered more relevant to the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA). Wodak's discursive strategy not only looks at the language used in the text as a communication tool, but also discusses historical discourse, political context and power relations that exist in society. Discursive strategies themselves are patterns used to construct, change or eliminate understanding of a particular reality. Wodak (2016) refers to DHA as "problem-oriented," meaning that understanding a discourse is part of the research and cannot be limited to linguistic elements alone. Comprehensive understanding requires context that includes analysis of linguistic aspects and their relationship to other texts and discourses, situational contexts, and historical and socio-political backgrounds. By connecting all these elements, the goal of DHA in the analysis process, understanding and explaining the complexity of the research object, can be achieved. Silva (2026) specifically explains that critical discourse analysis can reveal power relations between individuals, communities, or other political entities, thus demonstrating systemic inequality and oppression directed at certain actors.

Wodak's historical discourse approach consists of five discursive strategies: nomination, predication, argumentation, perspective, and intensification/mitigation. The nomination strategy is used to label or categorize the actors involved. Labeling is based on a particular ideology or perspective, particularly the narrative creator's ideology. Nomination often uses metaphors in naming the actors and events being narrated. The predication strategy is the assignment of attributes/characteristics in the form of adjectives, either positive or negative, to the actors being narrated. The argumentation strategy is a strategy used by writers to justify or discredit claims or views of one party by providing specific arguments to convince the audience. The next strategy is perspectivization, which means the strategy of placing the narrator's point of view or position on the discourse being discussed. In addition to the narrator's position, it can also be identified through the point of view emphasized or voiced in detail by the narrator/writer. The presentation of perspective can take the form of direct quotations, reporting (narration), or modality. Intensification and mitigation strategies are used to strengthen (intensify) or disguise/eliminate (mitigate) audience opinion on an issue or statement. This can be identified through exaggeration and repetition, as well as word choices that alleviate the impact of an event.

3. METHODOLOGY

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This study uses a qualitative analysis framework focused on the framing of victimhood representations in BBC News' coverage of the Palestine-Israel conflict between 2023 to 2025, following the Hamas attacks on October 7, 2023. The study focuses on the analysis and interpretation of lexical choices of actors in BBC articles. Of more than 5,000 articles related to the Palestine-Israel conflict published by the BBC between October 2023 to 2025, the researcher used a purposive sampling method to select 20 articles for this study. Articles were selected based on their publication date, which was deemed to best represent the media narrative during the conflict. The article selection criteria were divided into three: 1) Relevance of the topic, specifically related to the Palestine-Israel conflict; 2) The BBC's platform, which uses a digital news format (videos and images were excluded from the analysis to ensure consistency); 3) Articles were selected based on publication date.

The data collected were 20 BBC articles from the attacks of October 7, 2023, to May 2025. The author selected one article from the early date for each month to examine the narrative strategies developed based on the situation and developments on the battlefield. The analysis process began with identifying the lexical content of each article, specifically the lexical attributes associated with the actors. The word choices were then analyzed and interpreted based on Wodak's discursive strategy.

3.1 Table BBC News Articles "Palestina-Israel Conflict between October 2023- May 2025"

Published on	**Artikel BBC (Qty)**	**Title**	**Timeline**
October 2023	431	Hamas blindsides Israel with most serious attack in a generation	Initial Hamas attack, conflict peak
November 2023	473	Strikes on south Gaza: BBC verifies attacks in areas of 'safety'	Gaza invasion
December 2023	245	Blinken steps up call for Israel to spare civilians in strongest remarks yet	Initial ceasefire attempt
January 2024	220	Israel says war in Gaza expected to continue throughout 2024	Initial ceasefire attempt
February 2024	275	Israelis tell British MPs of evidence of Hamas sexual violence	ceasefire violation, Yemen attack
March 2024	250	Israel-Gaza war: More than 100 reported killed in crowd near Gaza aid convoy	ceasefire violation
April 2024	279	Israel: Benjamin Netanyahu protests put political divides back on show	ceasefire violation
May 2024	307	Students occupy UK university campuses in protest over Gaza	ceasefire violation
June 2024	210	No Gaza ceasefire until Israel war aims achieved, Netanyahu says	ceasefire violation
July 2024	184	Reform candidate accused of sharing antisemitic posts	Rafah Invasion
August 2024	231	Iran vows revenge after Hamas leader assassinated	Al-Mawasi Invasion

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		in Tehran	
September 2024	179	Netanyahu not doing enough to free Gaza hostages, says Biden	Attack on Hezbollah
October 2024	266	Hate crime rise abhorrent, Sadiq Khan says	One year after Hamas attack
November 2024	149	What happened to the young girl captured in a photograph of Gaza detainees	Israel-Lebanon ceasefire agreement
December 2024	113	UN suspends aid deliveries through main Gaza crossing	Israel-Lebanon ceasefire agreement
January 2025	167	The wars of 2024 brought together rivals - but created new enemies	Israel-Hamas ceasefire agreement
February 2025	118	British-Israeli hostage says Hamas held her at UN facilities	Israel-Hamas ceasefire agreement
March 2025	129	Illinois man convicted for hate crime murder of Palestinian boy	Israel-Hamas ceasefire agreement
April 2025	183	US says law applies to 'all parties' in Gaza after Israel kills medics	Israel Attack to Gaza strip
May 2025	252	Israeli reservists speak out against Gaza war as pressure on Netanyahu grows	Israel Attack to Gaza strip

After selecting 20 articles as data instruments for this study, the researchers analyzed the construction of victimhood through critical discourse analysis using Ruth Wodak's discursive strategies. Five discursive strategies formulated by Wodak were used to examine news texts within conflict discourse because they contain historical context and reveal how ideological bias can shape public perception of conflict narratives, particularly international conflicts. These five strategies are nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, and mitigation/ intensification.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of a lexical analysis of 20 BBC articles indicate narrative strategies to construct victimhood through lexical choices.

The first strategy involves **nomination** or portrayal the inhumane suffering experienced by individuals on both sides of the Palestine-Israel conflict. These depictions encompass humanitarian, military, and geopolitical contexts. The nomination of victimhood, based on this analysis, does not focus on states or institutions; instead, individual victimization is also included, as follows:

a. Individual Victimhood is the labeling of individual victims from both the Palestinian and Israeli sides. Several articles featuring individual victimization include in articles 5, 4, 17, and 18. Individual victims include Palestinian civilians (children) such as Julia Abu Warda, *"aged three"* and Wadea Al-Fayoume *"six years old"*, Agam Berger (an Israeli hostage held by Hamas),

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Hamas leader Adil Mismah, and victims of sexual violence (identity not disclosed). Mentioning the full name of Wadea and Julia Abu Warda is a way of BBC to validate the status of that individual as a victim, supported by the attribute in predication explanation below.

b. Collective Victimhood is a designation or label given to victims within a group, including Gazan civilians, the Muslim community, the Jewish community, and medical personnel (Article 19). The collective victim label does not include individual names. Victims are not limited to those killed or injured, but also to collective impacts such as damage to buildings and infrastructure.

c. Political Actors are victims affected by political issues circulating during the conflict, including protesters, both from the families of hostages who demand or criticize the policies of the Netanyahu government (Articles 7 and 20), and academic protesters, including students and university staff in the UK (Article 8). From the Israeli side, political victims also include Israeli reservists (Article 20).

d. Geopolitical Victimhood is the impact of actors affected by the country's geographic location relative to Palestine and Israel, as well as the impact of shared or opposing political ideologies. From the available data, geopolitical victim status was identified, including Iran, neighboring Syria, and Lebanon, as well as other international conflicts occurring at the same time, such as Ukraine and Russia. Geopolitical victim nominations are seen in articles 1, 16, and 20.

e. Institutional Victimhood/The status of institutional victims impacted by the Palestine-Israel conflict includes United Nations (UN) staff/medics, as well as Palestinian and Israeli civil society.

f. Diplomatic Victimhood/ The status of diplomatic victims covers the impact on the diplomatic policies of the countries involved, particularly the United States, which is impacted by its financial and ideological support for Israel.

Based on the nomination strategies used to analyze the BBC coverages, the attribution of victimhood was found overlap, even within the same article. While Israeli citizens were portrayed suffering as victims- with Hamas depicted as perpetrator of the initial attacks, Israel can still be labeled as victim while launching military strikes to Palestine, due to the legitimacy given accorded to act of self-defense. Consequently, the researcher systematically classified the victim nominations for each party as follows:

Table 4.1 Victimhood classification

Palestine side	Israel side	Third Party
Hamas Armed group Militants	Military Government IDF	Humanitarian actors UN WHO

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Terrorist Hamas leader Adil Mismah		NGOs BBC Journalists Medical Personnel
Civilians Julia Abu Warda Wadea Al-Fayoume Muslim community	Civilians Hostages Jewish historical memory/ community Agam Berger	US Iran Syria Lebanon

The strategy of **predication** serves to construct morality through the attributes inherent in the portrayal of the actors involved. The attributes used can intensify the victims' suffering and emphasize innocence, thereby eliminating responsibility. Attributes represent a number of predications, such as cruelty/brutality, civilian suffering, military framing, and geopolitical escalation. In article 18 for example, the victim is *a six year old* Wadea. This nomination is supported by its predication, *"stabbed 26 times"* showing how severe the suffering and justified the victimhood; **Argumentation** is a strategy used by the narrator to construct a narrative based on the types of arguments used by the BBC to justify or delegitimize an action (in the context of the Palestine-Israel conflict). This strategy is often seen in the interweaving of opinions, claims, and evidence, including claims of a threat/danger necessitating investigation and accountability for the attacks (Israel's claim: clear evidence), expert opinions that this conflict constitutes crimes against humanity, historical opinions/background, and evidence of casualties and damage from witnesses (I'm here to be their voice). A quoted sentence from Wael al Dahdouh, a journalist, "*no safe place in Gaza at all*" from article 2 is seen as strong argument that shows how intense the attacks launched by Israel. Through the **perspective** strategy, the BBC prioritizes the voices of victims, both individual and institutional. Of the 20 data sets, the author identified a majority of advocacy for Israeli victims, in the beginning of post attack period (2023 to 2024), to garner sympathy and concern from the global public. While the perspective highlights the core of the events being narrated, the priority is the victims' testimonies, both in the form of testimonies (direct accounts) and data reporting. Among the testimonies included in the data are those from Shari Mendes about the physical condition of female victims following the Hamas attack, and those from Greiniman, a volunteer from an Israeli organization who collected the remains of victims. In addition to the perspective of the parties directly involved in reporting the condition of the victims (Israeli citizens), perspectives also emerged from the Israeli police, third parties (the British government, the United States, and representatives of the United Nations (UN) who were directly at the point of conflict. The last one is **intensification**, which is a form of narrative strategy aimed at emphasizing information/horror situations or suffering that occurred in the Palestine-Israel conflict found in BBC articles, namely *the most serious attack, massive loss of civilian life, skies filled with missiles, chaotic scenes, bloodied, tensions, absolute horror, painful cases, truly catasthropic conflict, no safe place in Gaza at all*. The argument "*no safe place in Gaza at all*" is also form of intensification to highlight the suffering of people in Gaza and at the same time functions as a mitigation strategy to against Israel's claim about safe zone in Gaza. An intensification is also showed by number in narrating frequency of attacks such as *"stabbed 26*

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times". Meanwhile, **mitigation** helps the narrative to lighten, provide balance to even eliminate information about the perpetrators/responsible parties. Lexical terms that indicate mitigation strategies in this research data are not exceptionally tense, precautionary measures, not prepared, planning ahead, precautionary measures, no question, least painful (alleviating suffering), huge success but painful cases (balance efforts).

Based on the analysis of five discursive strategy by Wodak in 20 news articles, this study finds a balance in representing victimhood by BBC through different narrative. Instead of specifying one of the parties (Israel or Hamas/Palestine), the victim label is given by BBC to both individual and groups suffered in this event from both parties. The victimhood in this Israel-Palestine conflict is interconnected with political legitimation (for example Hamas as leading act in Palestine which makes Hamas acts represented as Palestine), international law (by United Nations) and global pressure (in this case the involvement of USA as Israel ally and Middle-East countries whom affected geographically).

4.2 Table BBC's Narrative Representation of Victimhood

Wodak's Discursive Strategy		**Data Code (article's no.)**	**Lexical**
Nomination	*Individual Victimhood*	4,5, 14,17, 18	Julia Abu Warda, Wadea Al-Fayoume, Agam Berger, Adil Mismah, sexual violence victims
	Collective Victimhood	2,6,13,15, 19	Gazan civilians, Jewish/Muslim communities, medics, aid workers.
	Political Actors	1,3,6,7,8,9, 12,20	Protesters, hostages, reservists
	Geopolitical Actors	1,11,16	Hamas, Gaza, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Iran, Syria, Iraq
	Institutional Victimhood	10,15,19	Israel civilians, Palestine civilians, UN
	Diplomatic Actors	3,4	Blinken's civilian protection benchmarks, IDF war planning.
Predication	*Brutality, Civilian suffering, Geopolitical escalation, Diplomatic caution*	2, 3, 4, 5,6, 11, 13, 14,16, 18, 19,20	*tragic Gaza, absolute horror, bloody, shredded underwear, abhorrent hate crime, moonscape of destruction.*
Argumentation	*Justice, political accountability, humanitarian, geopolitical*	3,4,5,13,15, 18,12,16, 19, 20	Competing topoi: *security* (Israel's retaliation, Hamas's defense of mosques), *justice* (hate crime convictions, UN humanitarian law), *humanitarian* (aid agencies, NGOs), *political accountability* (Netanyahu protests, Biden's criticism). Argumentation legitimizes victimhood while showing contested responsibility.
Perspectivization	*Victim, NGO, official voices*	5,7,8,9,14, 15,17,18, 19,20	Voices foregrounded: victims (hostages, protesters, reservists), NGOs (UN, WHO), officials (Blinken, Biden, Netanyahu),

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			witnesses (Wael al-Dahdouh). Perspectivization amplifies victim testimony and humanitarian voices, while including state narratives for balance.
Intensification/ Mitigation	*Intensification*	1,2,3,4,5,6, 14,16,18,19, 20	*most serious attack, no safe place in Gaza at all, massive loss of civilian life, skies filled with missiles, chaotic scenes, bloodied, tensions, absolute horror, painful cases*
	Mitigation	1,2,3,4,5,6,9 ,12,16,19, 20	*not exceptionally tense, precautionary measures, not prepared, planning ahead, precautionary measures, no question, least painful, huge success but painful cases.*

5. CONCLUSION

Wodak's discursive strategy, identified in 20 articles covering the Palestine-Israel conflict by the BBC, consistently labels victimhood as a humanitarian moral urgency, a political issue, and an international connection. The reporting prioritizes narratives of individual and institutional victims (Israeli and Palestinian civilians, children, women, medical personnel, and protesters) against the backdrop of collective suffering experienced across generations, from the Jewish community to the Palestinians. Victimhood is narrated using attributes of the brutality of Hamas attacks and the post-attack conditions, such as "absolute horror," "tragic Gaza," and so on. Israeli attacks are also narrated as a form of terror and brutality, but are legitimized or justified through the perspective of Jewish history, thus legitimizing victimhood. This is reinforced by the intensified narrative of the number of Hamas victims/hostages and the reports of victims' sexuality. Hamas' denial of the sexuality allegations is not voiced in the BBC article.

Based on the results of Wodak's discursive strategy analysis, this study interprets that the pattern of victimhood representation demonstrated by the BBC is dynamic and overlapping. It does create a tendency of reporting bias.

BBC nominates and has justification to construct each party: Palestine, Israel and the third party as victim. The representation is supported by a narrative of legitimacy of Israel's response, the urgent humanitarian needs of Palestinian civilians, while also providing space for political narratives with information on demands for a ceasefire agreement for the release of the hostages. In addition, pressure from global parties such as students, Muslim and Jewish communities and other countries is also presented as a form of narrative shift based on the development of the conflict in the period 2023 to 2025. Furthermore, the critical discourse analysis approach used in this study can be a reference in understanding the strategies and representations constructed by international media in framing the conflict and shaping public opinion on humanitarian issues.

AI Declaration

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author(s) used ChatGPT to improve language quality, enhance readability, or edit grammar. Following the use of this tool, the author(s)

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critically reviewed, verified, and revised the manuscript as necessary and assumed full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the published work.

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Author is candidate of Magister Humaniora of UNJ, in field of applied linguistics. Her interest in language and media took her to few studies about media's role in shaping people's perspective using the linguistics features. The critical discourse analysis approach helps her to broaden her mindset in perceiving every text, and hopefully it shows in her writing and therefore will support more academics in examine and identify a deeper meaning for each discourse.

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