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The Language of War: Lexicon, Metaphor, Discourse
Il linguaggio della guerra: lessico, metafora, discorso

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Children in *The New York Times*' Israeli-Palestinian War Coverage

A Corpus-Based Critical Analysis*

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the discursive use of children in *The New York Times*' coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from October 2023 to July 2024. Combining quantitative corpus-based methods with qualitative critical discourse analysis, the research identifies key lexical features and examines the framing techniques used by the newspaper to narrate the war. Findings indicate that the image of children is a powerful discursive tool to influence both emotional and cognitive responses. It serves various discursive purposes, such as humanising discourse, evoking emotions from pity to horror, framing the conflict in moral terms, legitimising political actions, and maintaining narrative cohesion. Particularly, the strategic use of children's images not only vilifies the opposing side by highlighting a stark moral contrast but also justifies military action, reinforcing the perceived righteousness of one's own cause. Furthermore, a significant disparity is noted in the individualisation of children: Israeli children are often depicted with detailed personal stories, enhancing their humanisation, while Palestinian children are more frequently represented through aggregated numbers, highlighting the scale of the tragedy but possibly diluting personal aspects of their suffering.

Keywords: corpus linguistics; critical discourse studies; Israel-Palestine war; media discourse; social actors.

* Although this article emerged from collaborative research, Laura Tommaso is responsible for writing sections 4 and 5, and Marianna Lya Zummo is responsible for writing sections 1, 2, 3 and 6.

1. INTRODUCTION

On 7 October 2023, the Palestinian Sunni Islamist militant group of Hamas fired a massive barrage of rockets from the Gaza Strip into southern Israel. This extreme event was part of a coverup for a large-scale infiltration, which allowed fighters to breach security barriers separating Gaza and Israel. Such an episode resulted in the beginning of the Israel-Hamas war and the killing of 1,143 people in Israel, mostly civilians. Israel responded by bombing the Gaza Strip and launching an invasion that has killed more than 34,000 Gazans, according to BBC News. Despite international attention and global concerns, the conflict is still ongoing at the time of writing this article (July 2024). It is part of a broader tension between Israel and Palestine that began in 1948, when a large part of the Palestinian people was expelled from their homes as effect of the arrival of Zionist settlers in Palestine. The core issues of the conflict are the borders, specifically the rights of Israeli settlements as well as the rights of the Palestinian refugees who remain displaced from their homes. Economic growth and political alliances have influenced the international attention on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and a security cooperation has been trying to stabilise the conflict, praised by international news media coverage.

The peculiarities of the conflict lie in the imbalance between the two parties, which is reflected in the disproportionate casualties it has produced. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for example, from both the Israeli and the Palestinian side, casualties are more among civilians than military forces, including children (20% Palestinian children and 12% Israeli children, Wayback Machine United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2010).

In this as in other contexts, children are often presented as victims of a particularly hideous nature. In the attempt to 'humanise' war, highlighting the human costs a war forces to reflect upon, children represent the most valued group because of its (large) number and because of the moral evaluations the responsibility for children carry. As victims, they are often represented as refugees, emphasising their displacement, physical trauma, and malnourishment (Bodineau 2014). What increases the painful representation of children as victims is often the absence of the adults who are supposed to take care of them: children are vulnerable because they do not have favourable conditions nor protective figures. This makes them a target of abuse and violence, reinforcing their status as society's most powerless members.

The impact of armed conflict on children has been extensively examined across various disciplines and cultural contexts, exploring how war shapes their worldview and experiences. Research has investigated children's roles as eyewitnesses and analysed how they interpret and reproduce their understanding of conflicts through media such as films, books, magazines, and the Internet (Meghdari and Stephens 2017; Błażek and Wasilewska 2021). These studies offer valuable insights into children's linguistic expressions and creative responses, revealing how they process and convey their experiences. Nevertheless, a significant research gap exists regarding children's representation and agency as social actors within conflict narratives. In fact, despite the many studies on war, only recently have children been the focus of conflict discourse as actors. While academic literature has dealt with children as *human beings*, so how they perceive conflicts or how they suffer from tragic events (Freh 2015; Wessels 2017), the rhetorical use of the children image to reach discursive goals is still an ongoing ground of exploration.

This paper employs a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to examine how childhood is represented in newspaper reporting within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It aims to determine whether the portrayal of children is employed to evoke emotional reactions, potentially for propaganda purposes, or to genuinely amplify their voices. Through the application of CDA frameworks on social actor representation, this study analyses how *The New York Times* – a prominent newspaper in the US with a global readership – positions Israeli and Palestinian children in the conflict, from its onset to July 2024. Although the conflict has attracted massive media attention across global news outlets with varying political and ideological positions, space constraints limited the study to *The New York Times'* coverage. Future research could productively expand this analysis to include comparative perspectives from other news sources, potentially revealing how different ideological, geographical, and political orientations influence the discursive construction of children in conflict zones.

The present article is structured as follows: sections 2 and 3 outline the background and theoretical framework as well as its relevance to understanding the portrayal of social actors, particularly children, in media reports. Section 4 presents the corpus and methods employed for the study, while a detailed analysis of *The New York Times* coverage is discussed in section 5. The final section summarises the key findings and reflects on the implications of these representations for public perception and discourse.

2. BACKGROUND

In case of conflicts, the promotion of children's safety and health is the goal of many humanitarian interventions that transcends national borders and relies on international solidarity in response to crisis situations. Rephrasing one of the most influential organisations (UNICEF): "by protecting children from attacks in armed conflict, we keep hope alive, we begin to prepare children to shape peaceful futures for themselves and their countries" (Children Under Attack, UNICEF website). It is already noticeable from this claim that children are conceptualised as the most important and yet vulnerable victims, and it is presented as an unnegotiable fact that their future is to be preserved. Based on this, studies across many fields have analysed the connection between war and childhood from a healthcare point of view, highlighting the effect of war on children, focusing on the dangers and horrors they endure, and which significantly affect their mental health (Freh 2015). Others have explored the collective understanding of the threats children encounter and the essential interventions needed to support those affected by war. These interventions operate on multiple levels, including community-based child protection, school-based support, psychotherapy, and other approaches (Wessels 2017). In 2024 the EU updated its guideline on "Children and Armed Conflict", taking a strong stance toward the protection of children across the world. The attention on these young victims is therefore (unfortunately), always a current topic, despite the many interventions targeting them.

On the other hand, such attention has faced criticism, as the suffering of children is sometimes exploited to manipulate and influence societal responses. Children do not have a voice, nor an identity if not a collective one, and emphasis is often placed on the great number of children involved in conflicts. The term "children" is employed broadly, without differentiation regarding age, gender, or ethnicity (excluding the cases in which this information adds significant detail for propaganda) since the attention is on their vulnerability as non-adults. If, on the one hand, such differentiation is useless when discussing intervention, on the other the collective noun reinforces the idea that children are a voiceless, anonymous, and abstract (passive) actor in the discourse of war.

In terms of passive actors, as pointed out by Bodineau (2014), academic studies have presented contradictions between claims at different levels. The author questions the representation of children analysing documents regarding protection intervention, focusing on the role of

children as actors within crisis contexts. Specifically, Bodineau investigates representations of childhood in documents produced between 1996 and 2011, during the crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo. She suggests that childhood is represented through, and is focused on, the figure of the child soldier, a dangerous and yet endangered figure that leads children to be seen as 'full adults'. In this case, the focus is more on the children's resilience than on their vulnerability, which widens the conceptualisation of victimhood from an inherent trait of youth to a number of factors that contribute to that specific situation. Bodineau claims that this narration shifted how interventions were conceptualised, moving from simple protection to a need to adapt to these new figures of children and adolescents as full adults. As the author points out, however, vulnerability and victimhood remain the dominant frameworks when referring to children, which positions them as ideal objects for international intervention and as discursive tools for propaganda, among other instrumental uses. In examining the discrepancy between stakeholders, programmes and beneficiaries' expectations, Bodineau analyses how children's rights discourse functions as an exploitative instrument within the neoliberal Western politics.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Language is acknowledged to never be neutral and to be used as a tool to reinforce and (re)produce ideologies, prejudices, and discrimination. The notion that a large part of what is said hides and presupposes further meanings is the starting point from which discourse analysis develops, with different aspects and perspectives according to theorists and currents. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) investigates discourse as a social practice (Wodak 2014) in which a context is framed, and frames an ideological perspective. Therefore, an event is represented through the lens of a particular ideology and, at the same time, it contributes to shaping the event itself. CDA enables the recognition of ideological forces that construct a particular discourse, highlighting inequalities and power relations with the aim of contributing to changes towards a (more) equitable society.

The way power and ideology are perceived and represented in discourse is inherently influenced by media content. In the CDA approach, social actors function as tools of discourse. These 'doers' (van Leeuwen

1996) are represented through two main strategies, namely exclusion and inclusion. Exclusion, which is the omission of the social actor in discourse through agent deletion or passivation, is often a deliberate choice to benefit from the lack of information or to move the attention to other aspects of the topic under discussion. Inclusion refers to the inclusion of social actors within discourse. This strategy has several subcategories (*ibid.*), all employed to address an active doer within the text. The use of inclusion also involves the assignment of responsibility to the community (e.g., passivation, where social actors are depicted as passive recipients of an action, and categorisation, where individuals are represented based on their unique identities are evidence of this).

Children are always seen in their collective identities. According to van Leeuwen (1996) and, more recently, Koller (2009), social actors must be analysed through various linguistic features – such as evaluation, modality, and process type – which reproduce and reinforce their portrayal in texts. Drawing from Fairclough (2013), these features are also understood as being shaped by the varying roles of discourse participants – such as text producers, distributors, and receivers – as well as by the power dynamics at play, both at the micro level of textual interactions and the macro level of broader social structures.

Context is therefore of paramount importance to interpret the representation of social actors. As mentioned before, the war reported in this case study does not derive from recent socio-political issues but is one of the latest episodes of a long and tormented history. In the narrative of the two opposite poles, Israel and Palestine, a third actor is added. The world is represented by the global gaze of those who passively attend the conflict observing the events and evaluating them, and the various organisations (the most important being the human rights official at the United Nations), which participate at a discourse level as observers, evaluators, or mediators with the goal of diplomatic peaceful solutions. Throughout time, the two poles have remained in a state of imbalance; while Israel is today a political force that moves significant amounts of economic interests, Gaza has a poor population with a difficult internal organisation, which leaves room for violence and terrorism. The conflict has generated global interest, and formed a polarised (and politicised) debate among observers, who are often text recipients of media contents.

From a critical perspective, the power relations between text producer and text recipient reinforce and/or question distribution of power as well as the social representation of actors, values, beliefs and norms.

Public opinion is accustomed to conflicts and their spectacularism. To increase the emotional impact of news reports, the vulnerability of a group must be highlighted to provoke stronger reactions. This study underscores the importance of examining how language and discourse shape our understanding of conflicts and the representation of social actors, particularly children, detecting the deep-seated ideologies and power structures at play.

4. DATA AND METHODS

This study examines the representational choices and power dynamics emerging from a selection of news articles published in *The New York Times* on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, highlighting the media's role in shaping public perception of such tragic events. Particularly, it investigates the representation of children, focusing on coverage of the war from its onset in October 2023 to July 2024. As a major and reputable American broadsheet newspaper with an extensive global readership, *The New York Times* is known for its liberal political leaning, which informs its editorial stance and coverage priorities. As argued by many, *The New York Times* does not merely report the news; it significantly influences what is considered important and shapes how news is understood. Moreover, it is important to consider the US as a significant ally of Israel, which may influence how *The New York Times* portrays Israel and the American support of the war. This notion is further corroborated by a recent incident involving leaked documents from the newspaper. According to an internal memo obtained by *The Intercept*¹, *The New York Times* journalists covering the conflict in Gaza are instructed to avoid the use of terms such as “genocide” and “ethnic cleansing”, and “occupied territory” when describing Palestinian land. In addition, the memo claims that words like “slaughter”, “massacre” and “carnage” are often too emotional to describe Israel's bombardment of Gaza. The memo was written by *The New York Times*

¹ *The Intercept* is an American left-wing non-profit news organisation founded in 2014 by journalists Glenn Greenwald, Jeremy Scahill, and Laura Poitras. See Jeremy Scahill and Ryan Grim, “Leaked NYT Gaza Memo Tells Journalists to Avoid Words ‘Genocide,’ ‘Ethnic Cleansing,’ and ‘Occupied Territory’”, *The Intercept*, April 15, 2024.

standards editor Susan Wessling and international editor Philip Pan and their employees, and says its aim is to “offer guidance” on terms the paper has “grappled with” since October, when Israel’s current siege of Gaza commenced. In this context, analysing *The New York Times* war coverage can provide valuable insights into the information disseminated to a broad audience. By focusing on the ideological implications of various linguistic means of realisation, this analysis has the potential to improve our understanding of the interplay between media, power, and discourse.

A total of 46 texts, including news articles, opinion pieces, and editorials were analysed, comprising approximately 65,000 words (*Table 1*).

Table 1. – *The New York Times mini-corpus.*

CATEGORY	NUMBERS	PERCENTAGE
<i>Size</i>		
Articles	46	
Tokens	78,634	
Words	64,498	
<i>Article length</i>		
Short (< 1,000 words)	9	19.6%
Medium (1,000-2,000 words)	32	69.6%
Long (> 2,000 words)	5	10.8%
Average article length	1,402	
<i>Temporal distribution</i>		
2023	28	60.9%
2024	18	39.1%

In retrieving data from the newspaper’s database, we chose to include articles containing references to “Gaza”, “child”, and “children” anywhere in the text, rather than limiting our search to headlines only. This methodological decision was made to ensure a more comprehensive and representative dataset, capturing both prominent and embedded discussions of children within the conflict coverage. This approach allows us to examine how children are represented not only in stories directly focused on them, but also in broader coverage where their presence might be more subtle but equally significant. These media texts have been analysed adopting a mixed method approach involving the integration of quantitative and qualitative methods. More specifically, given

the small size of the dataset, the quantitative corpus-based methods (keyword, collocation, and concordance extraction and analysis) offered an overview of the lexical items in the corpus and helped identify prominent and recurring discourses (Baker 2024). Nevertheless, our analysis remains fundamentally qualitative, as it involves interpretive (critical) discourse analysis of the data in relation to their context to better understand how keywords and their co-text are used to frame the conflict, its key actors, and ultimately to justify actions, and influence opinions. In the following section, key quantitative explorations will be conducted to assess the frequency and distribution of keywords and themes within the selected media texts. This preliminary investigation will be followed by a more fine-grained qualitative analysis aimed at uncovering the underlying narratives, rhetorical strategies, and framing techniques used in the media extracts to shape the public perception of the war, with particular attention to the representation of key social actors, including children. The analysis presented here emerges from detailed readings and collaborative discussions of the textual and discursive elements in each document comprising the corpus. While maintaining scholarly objectivity and acknowledging the young victims on both sides, this analysis adopts a critical stance that recognises sympathies with the Palestinian position. However, it is essential to consider that media language plays a significant role in agenda-setting and in shaping the representation of important events, with systemic patterns frequently mirroring broader political alignments. In the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, recent assessments (e.g. Johnson and Othman 2024) have scrutinised the coverage of the war by *The New York Times* and other leading Western media outlets, highlighting a pronounced alignment with the Israeli narrative.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1. *Keywords identification*

A keyword analysis was initially carried out as an entry point into the data to identify the most salient words appearing in the *The New York Times* corpus (78,634 tokens). Given the corpus size and the study's focus on substantive patterns rather than rare occurrences, a minimum frequency threshold of ten occurrences was established. This threshold

helped eliminate occasional or idiosyncratic uses while retaining words with sufficient frequency to indicate meaningful patterns. For the keyword analysis, the News Genre sub-corpus (2,420,719,017 tokens), derived from *EnTenTen21* within Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff *et al.* 2014), was employed as the reference corpus. While the reference corpus is substantially larger, this methodological choice follows established corpus linguistic practices, with statistical measures automatically adjusting for size differences between corpora. *Table 2* presents keywords as lemmas, sorted by score, occurring in at least 20 of the 46 news articles. This distribution threshold (appearing in > 43% of articles) ensures that the selected keywords are sufficiently representative of *The New York Times*' discourse on the issue, rather than being concentrated in a few articles.

Table 2. – Top keywords in *The New York Times* mini-corpus.

	KEYWORD	FREQUENCY	DOCF	SCORE
1	<i>Gazan</i>	74	26	451,785
2	<i>Gaza</i>	605	46	235,331
3	<i>Hamas</i>	250	40	166,396
4	<i>hostage</i>	135	28	147,215
5	<i>Israeli</i>	397	43	57,495
6	<i>airstrike</i>	37	20	53,245
7	<i>Palestinian</i>	165	37	37,463
8	<i>civilian</i>	148	30	29,972
9	<i>Israel</i>	396	46	28,189
10	<i>Palestinians</i>	55	23	27,731
11	<i>strip</i>	44	20	17,658
12	<i>humanitarian</i>	32	20	14,745
13	<i>hospital</i>	218	27	14,141
14	<i>aid</i>	86	21	11,981
15	<i>child</i>	342	45	9,911
16	<i>kill</i>	193	40	9,577
17	<i>military</i>	180	33	8,613

While it is not surprising that the words *Gaza* and *child* occur prominently as they were used as search terms in *The New York Times* archive, the remaining terms draw our attention to additional significant aspects of the media coverage. To identify common traits among them, the

keywords were arranged into distinct semantic categories, allowing for a deeper understanding of the underlying narratives and focus areas within the reports. These include (1) geopolitical entities (*Gaza, Gazan, Hamas, Israel, Israeli, Palestinian, Palestinians, strip*), (2) conflict and violence (*hostage, airstrike, kill, military*), and (3) humanitarian concerns (*civilian, humanitarian, hospital, aid, child*), reflecting the discourse's focus on locations, actors, military actions, and the humanitarian impact. From a CDA perspective, these terms may highlight power dynamics, framing of the conflict, and the identities of involved parties. Although this paper mainly examines how children are portrayed in the news texts being analysed, it is equally important to consider how the war and its primary participants – such as the different factions, governments, or leaders – are represented throughout the corpus. In this view, it becomes essential to recognise that words belonging to the first semantic grouping, such as “Gazan”, “Hamas” and “Israeli”, can carry different connotations and implications depending on the writer's stance, and may be used to construct narratives around legitimacy, victimhood, and aggression in relation to the various social actors and their actions. Furthermore, these preliminary data seem to suggest that civilians, children, and humanitarian issues are frequently mentioned within the corpus, implying a framing of the conflict that emphasises human suffering and moral responsibility. Conversely, war-related terms (e.g. *airstrike* and *kill*) might be used to justify or condemn actions taken by the involved parties.

We begin our exploration by analysing the contextual background of several keywords, to examine how the collocations contribute to their meaning and usage. In all three semantic categories attributed to the keywords, various social actors can be identified. However, a more comprehensive analysis of the discourse participants involves a qualitative examination of the roles they are assigned, as well as of the actions ascribed to them. This entails paying particular attention to the processes used to describe their actions and examining the attributes associated with them. Although some relevant insights will be provided about each social actor, due to space limitations and the specific research questions of the study, this analysis will be focused on civilians and, more specifically, children.

5.2. *Palestinian, Gaza/n, Israel and Hamas*

On a more general basis, quantitative evidence indicates that *The New York Times* rarely uses the word *Palestine*, which counts only 15 occurrences within the corpus, to merely signify political or social movements and affiliations, such as in references to “Free Palestine” T-shirts, and organisations like “American Muslims for Palestine”. The omission of the word may be part of a wider stylistic and ideological choice of silencing the Palestinian question and recognition of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, in particular their right to independence. As the keyword list shows, more frequent references to social actors are *Gazan*, *Gaza*, *Hamas*, *hostage*, *Palestinian(s)*, *Israel*, *Israeli*, *civilians*, and *child*. Then, it is otherwise evident that Palestine-related terms such as *Palestinian* and *Palestinians* are not entirely absent from the coverage. However, as their collocational profile shows (Figure 1), these words are mainly used to connote some of the key participants involved in the conflict, while fewer mentions (n. 5) to the Palestinian “cause” are made. These are distributed in only two of the source texts comprising the corpus.

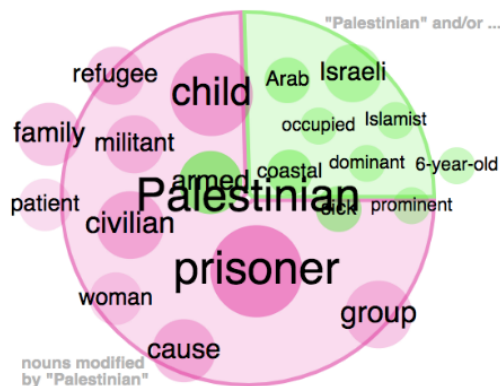


Figure 1. – Collocational profile of the keyword “Palestinian”.

Moreover, by looking closely at the concordances including *Palestinian* + *cause*, it appears quite obvious that in these contexts, the Palestinian cause is represented as a tool or a point of leverage for various actors, each using it to serve their agendas – whether it is maintaining political relevance, justifying actions, or shaping geopolitical dynamics:

- (1) The initial global outpouring of support for Israel has been replaced by a flood of sympathy for Palestinians. Hamas has succeeded in one of its aims, putting the **Palestinian cause** back on the global agenda. Revulsion at the Palestinian loss of life has jeopardized the stability of neighbors like Jordan and put off any hope for now of an accord between Israel and Saudi Arabia. ("So Many Child Deaths in Gaza", *The New York Times*, Dec. 6, 2023)

As *Figure 1* illustrates, the keyword *Palestinian* tends to occur with *group* (n. 6) and *militant* (n. 4) to connote members of Hamas who attacked Israel on October 7, 2023:

- (2) The Red Crescent said it had coordinated the movements of the ambulance with the Israeli military, which invaded Gaza after the Oct. 7 attack on Israel by Hamas, the **armed Palestinian group** that controls the territory. ("Gaza Rescuers Go Missing on Mission to Save Girl Trapped in a Car", *The New York Times*, Feb. 3, 2024)

This example demonstrates how the Palestinian cause is often framed through the actions of Hamas. By referring to Hamas as an "armed Palestinian group", *The New York Times* shapes the narrative around the Palestinian cause, associating it solely with militant actions and conflict, potentially overshadowing other aspects such as political aspirations and cultural identity.

Gaza, which occurs more than 600 times across the corpus, is the preferred choice by *The New York Times*. This choice suggests an ideological framing that potentially depoliticises the context of the conflict. By using *Gaza*, the newspaper may be focusing on a geographical area rather than engaging with the broader national and political implications associated with the term *Palestine*. This could imply a reluctance to address the full scope of Palestinian identity and claims to statehood, thereby influencing readers' perceptions of the conflict in a way that aligns more closely with certain political narratives or sensibilities:

- (3) Not only is **Gaza** tiny when compared with conflict zones like Iraq, Afghanistan or Ukraine, but the territory's borders have also been closed by Israel and Egypt, giving civilians few, if any, safe places to flee. More than 60,000 buildings have been damaged or destroyed in the **Gaza Strip**, satellite analysis indicates, including about half of the buildings in **northern Gaza**. ("Big Bombs in Urban Areas Raise Civilian Toll in Gaza", *The New York Times*, Nov. 26, 2023)

This is also confirmed by the way the keyword *Gazan* is used across the corpus. *Figure 2* visually represents the collocational profile of "Gazan":

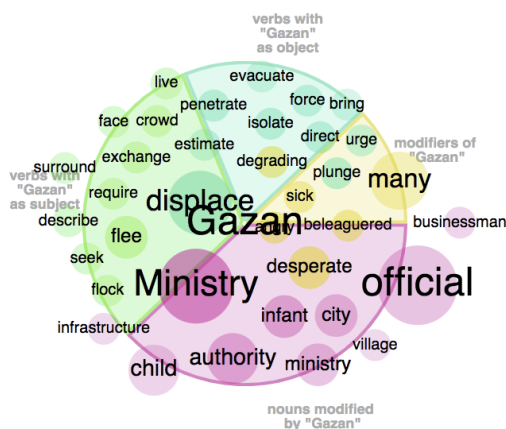


Figure 2. – Collocational profile of the keyword “Gazan”.

“Gazan” can be used as an adjective to describe something or someone from Gaza or as a noun to refer to a person from Gaza. As *Figure 2* shows, the grammatical relation (nouns modified by *Gazan*) suggests that as a modifier it is used in association with governance structures and institutional contexts (e.g. *Ministry*, *officials*, *authority*) or tends to qualify the geographical and urban aspects (e.g. *cities*, *infrastructure*, *town*, *village*), framing Gaza as a geo-political entity as well as a densely populated area. The grammatical relation (verbs with *Gazan* as object) indicates instability and crisis, portraying Gazans as people on the move due to the conflict, e.g., “displaced Gazans”, “evacuated Gazans”. In addition, modifiers such as *desperate*, *beleaguered*, and *sick* underline the vulnerability, the severe living conditions and the suffering faced by the population, including children. Although the concordance analysis of these co-occurrences confirms that the dire humanitarian situation is frequently reported underscoring the impact of the conflict on health-care infrastructure and civilian lives, evidence related to casualties and death tolls is often presented alongside competing claims from each side involved in the conflict. This is particularly evident in an article published in February 12, 2024, titled “A Tunnel Offers Clues to How Hamas Uses Gaza’s Hospitals”. The headline serves as a revealing example of how focusing on Hamas’s alleged use of healthcare facilities might potentially frame these sites as legitimate military targets, affecting how the audience perceives their role and importance in the ongoing conflict. This framing appears to be reinforced within the article, as evidenced by the following excerpt:

- (4) **Israel launched its war in Gaza after the Hamas-led attack on Oct. 7**, in which at least 1,200 people were killed and more than 200 were taken hostage. Since the start of the war, more than 28,000 people have been killed in Gaza, according to **health officials there**. In the face of **international opprobrium** over its raids on hospitals, **Israel has publicized evidence that it says shows** that Hamas hid fighters among the ill and injured, and held hostages in the facilities. The Israeli military said that before entering Al-Shifa, it warned the **buildings' occupants**, opened evacuation routes and sent Arabic-speaking medical teams along with the soldiers. Hamas and **Gazan health officials** say the hospitals have served only as medical facilities. But beyond accusing the Israeli military of planting evidence at hospitals, **Hamas and Gazan officials** have not directly refuted the evidence presented by Israel.

By attributing responsibility to Hamas (“the Hamas-led attack on Oct. 7”; “Hamas hid fighters among the ill and injured, and held hostages in the facilities”) and providing evidence to justify Israeli actions (“The Israeli military said that before entering Al-Shifa, it warned the buildings’ occupants”), the narrative may influence perceptions of legitimacy and agency in the conflict. Specifically, the juxtaposition of international criticism (“In the face of international opprobrium over its raids on hospitals”) with Israel’s evidence serves to address and potentially counteract negative perceptions, while the response from Hamas and Gazan officials is depicted as insufficiently detailed in countering the evidence presented. In this context, it is worth noting the use of the verb “publicized”. This choice implies that Israel is actively disseminating its evidence (although subject to interpretation, “that it says shows”), suggesting a strategic effort to influence public perception. Conversely, the verb “say” is used for “Hamas and Gazan health officials” which are framed as a unified or coordinated entity. The use of “say” tends to be employed as an objective reporting verb in journalism, but in this context it may also imply that their statements are claims rather than definitive rebuttals supported by proof. This can subtly undermine their position by presenting it as less substantiated compared to the information disseminated by Israel. Furthermore, the usage of the generic and impersonal term “building’s occupants” to describe people, presumably patients and medical staff, within the Al-Shifa hospital, can lead to a dehumanisation of the individuals involved, reducing them to mere inhabitants of a physical space rather than acknowledging their specific roles and human experiences.

As the frequency and distribution of the keyword *hospital* indicates, healthcare emerges as a prominent theme in the reporting of the conflict². As shown in the previous example, the reference to healthcare facilities is connected with their strategic significance during the war. The military implications of their use, whether as targets or as sites of alleged misuse, are a crucial aspect of the narrative. Furthermore, healthcare facilities are critical in providing medical care to the wounded and sick, making them a focal point in discussions about the humanitarian impact of the conflict. Finally, hospitals serve as symbols of civilian life and humanitarian concern. Their prominence in the dataset tends to be linked to their role as symbols of the broader human cost of war, possibly influencing public perception and evoking emotional responses:

- (5) According to the medical authorities in Gaza, **which Hamas controls**, workers at the hospital were digging a **mass grave for bodies** there that had started to **decompose**. The hospital's director, Dr. Mohammed Abu Salmiya, had said that **doctors there performed surgeries** on Monday **without anesthesia and oxygen** and that **multiple people had died at the medical complex**. He added that **health workers had been forced to bury bodies inside the grounds**. ("Israel Says Military Has Entered Gazan Hospital Grounds to Root Out Hamas", *The New York Times*, Nov. 14, 2023)

Moreover, this text not only conveys the dire state of Gaza's healthcare system ("doctors there performed surgeries on Monday without

² During the Israel-Hamas conflict, Gaza's healthcare infrastructure was severely damaged by Israeli strikes on hospitals and health facilities, the deaths of healthcare workers, and the blockade preventing medical supplies from entering Gaza. This led to the collapse of the healthcare system, contributing to a broader humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip. Hospitals struggled with fuel shortages due to the Israeli blockade, relying on backup generators for the first two weeks of the conflict. By October 23, 2023, hospitals in Gaza began to shut down as they ran out of fuel, starting with the Indonesia Hospital. The complete loss of power in hospitals resulted in the deaths of several premature babies in NICUs. By the end of May 2024, reports from the World Health Organization and International Rescue Committee indicated that only one-third of Gaza's hospitals were still at least partially operational. The conflict also resulted in the deaths of numerous medical staff, and the destruction of ambulances, health institutions, medical headquarters, and multiple hospitals. Médecins Sans Frontières reported extensive damage to or destruction of numerous ambulances and medical facilities. By late October, the Gaza Health Ministry announced that the healthcare system had "totally collapsed", with only 13 out of Gaza's 36 hospitals remaining partially functional by January. By May 2024, the World Health Organization had recorded 450 Israeli attacks on Gaza's healthcare infrastructure.

anesthesia and oxygen”), but also frames it within a politically charged context (“According to the medical authorities in Gaza, which Hamas controls”), affecting how the information might be perceived and understood by readers.

In other analogous instances identified within the corpus, the attribution of credibility and evidence regarding bombings and their repercussions lie at the heart of the reporting. For instance, the keyword *airstrike* is also surrounded by a complex interplay of military, humanitarian, and legal perspectives, often highlighting the severe consequences and the justifications provided by military actors, public commentators and *The New York Times* itself. The following excerpt is representative of the various sources used in the coverage of the war:

- (6) Israel executed one of its deadliest airstrikes on Oct. 31 on a dense neighborhood in Jabaliya, in northern Gaza. **Israel said** its main target was a senior Hamas commander, Ibrahim Biari, who it **said** was central to the Oct. 7 attacks that killed more than 1,200 people in southern Israel. He and other Hamas members were using a building complex and a tunnel under it as a “military fighting compound,” the **Israel Defense Forces told** *The New York Times*. The final death toll is still unknown, but **The Times found video evidence** of dozens of people in the rubble, many of them women and children. The **Hamas-run Gaza media office reported** that a total of nearly 200 people died in the Oct. 31 strike and in another one in Jabaliya the next day. **An assessment by Airwars, a British conflict monitor, found** that at least 126 civilians were killed on Oct. 31. **The director of the nearby Indonesian Hospital said** in a news conference that evening that the number of dead and wounded was nearly 400. **An I.D.F. spokesperson told** *The Times* that they only conduct attacks when the expected damage to civilians is not excessive in relation to the anticipated military advantage. But the strike has raised questions about a wartime calculus known as “proportionality,” which weighs civilian harm against military advantage. “The willingness to accept this level of harm to civilians is far beyond what I have seen in operations in the past,” **said Larry Lewis, a former U.S. State Department senior adviser on civilian harm**. The strike killed Mr. Biari and other Hamas members, and destroyed a tunnel and command center, **the I.D.F. spokesperson said**. There was no individual warning to civilians, **they said**, because that would have allowed Mr. Biari and others to escape. **Hamas has denied** that a commander was in the area at the time of the strike. (Anjali Singhvi *et al.*, “The Civilian Toll When the Israelis Targeted a Strike at a Hamas Chief”, *The New York Times*, Jan. 26, 2024)

The usage of sources extends beyond merely including or omitting them. Caldas-Coulthard (1997, 93) offers a taxonomy of the verbs of saying which allow us to consider how speakers and their words are evaluated. By looking more closely at the verbs with both Hamas and Israel as subjects it becomes evident that we can see how they are discursively constructed through actions of asserting, stating, and denying. More specifically, various speech reporting verbs are used, ranging from neutral structuring verbs (*say, tell, speak, ask, report*) to metapositional and metalinguistic ones (*agree, find, show, call, describe, verify, cite, warn, believe, mean*). In the example above, neutral structuring verbs are used to include official statements, reported findings, and evaluations, providing a multi-faceted view of the events. The prevalent use of neutral reporting verbs such as *said* and *told*, especially in relation to Israel's statements, suggests an objective and official communication on their part ("The Israel Defense Forces told The New York Times"; "An I.D.F. spokesperson told The New York Times"). Conversely, presenting Hamas's statement as a reaction to an accusation rather than an independent assertion of fact, the verb *denied* contributes to cast doubt on their credibility and truthfulness. This is particularly frequent within the corpus as this further example shows:

- (7) Hospitals have become a particular flash point in the war as **Israel has accused Hamas** of turning medical facilities, including Al Rantisi and Al-Shifa, into safe houses and command centers. **Hamas and hospital officials have denied the allegations.** (Sharon LaFraniere and Erica L. Green, "Fleeing Battle While Fighting A Deeper One", *The New York Times*, Nov. 15, 2023)

Furthermore, the use of *accused* serves to emphasise Israel's stance and the gravity of the allegations against Hamas. The choice of *denied* once again conveys scepticism and places the burden on Hamas and the hospital officials to prove their claims, as denial alone does not equate to disproof. Thus, the evaluation of Hamas and the hospital officials tends to be cautious and implies potential suspicion regarding their statements. Both actors engage in communication to assert their respective narratives, but the nature of their communication differs. Israel's verbs, such as *cite* and *publicize*, suggest a formal and authoritative mode of communication, aligning with its role as a state actor with institutionalised channels. In contrast, Hamas's use of the verb *issue* reflects a more grassroots and mobilisational approach, indicative of its role as a non-state actor seeking to consolidate support and communicate its position.

The exploration of the verb collocates of Israel and Hamas are also particularly useful to identify the processes in which both social actors are involved in (Figure 3).

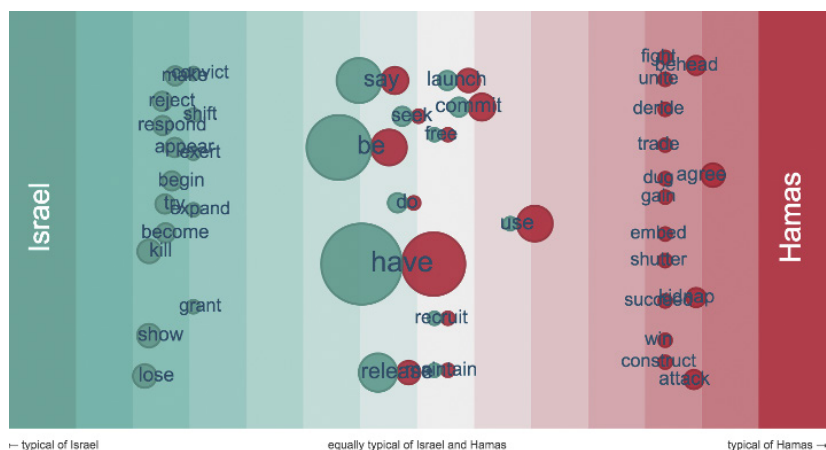


Figure 3. – Verbs with “Israel/Hamas” as subject.

They are associated with verbs denoting violent actions, such as *kill*, *behead*. For instance, the extract below, retrieved from an article published on October 16, 2023, employs the active voice predominantly, assigning clear agency to both participants (“killed”). Additionally, by quantifying the casualties (“more than 1,300 Israelis” and “about 1,900 Palestinians”), the text emphasises the severity of the conflict:

- (8) The latest war began after a **Hamas attack on Israel killed more than 1,300 Israelis** last Saturday. **Israel has responded with airstrikes in Gaza that had killed about 1,900 Palestinians** as of Friday night. (Karen Zraick, “At a Brooklyn Mosque, Palestinians Express Their Anguish and Find Fellowship”, *The New York Times*, Oct. 16, 2023)

However, the text implies causality through the use of “after”, as seen in the sentence, “The latest war began after a Hamas attack on Israel killed more than 1,300 Israelis”. This structure indicates that the Hamas attack is the cause of the war. The use of temporal markers like “last Saturday” and “as of Friday night” helps establish a clear timeline of events, constructing Hamas as the instigator of violence and Israel as a defensive responder (“responded”), reflecting its role in addressing threats. This is also evident in the collocational profile above, where Hamas is the

subject of *fight* and *attack*. These verbs are material processes that underscore the role of Hamas in initiating and engaging in violent actions, which contributes to the overall narrative and perception of the conflict.

In analysing the collocational profiles of “Israel’s” and “Hamas’s”, distinct narrative frames emerge that reflect how each participant’s military actions are portrayed. For Israel, the frequent use of terms such as *campaign*, *action*, *assault*, *offensive*, *invasion*, *bombardment*, *retaliation*, *response*, *airstrike*, *operation*, and *defense* conveys a sense of formal military engagement, highlighting Israel’s structured approach to military activities, which are planned to minimise collateral damage. While *assault*, *bombardment*, and *invasion* convey significant force and intensity, suggesting decisive and impactful military actions, more frequent terms including, *campaign*, *operation*, and *offensive* suggest planned, strategic military actions with specific objectives. Consistent with other evidence from the corpus, the words *retaliation*, *response*, and *defense* indicate actions taken in reaction to aggression, framing Israel’s military activities as protective measures. Furthermore, political and administrative terms such as *minister*, *order*, *policy*, and *cabinet* highlight the governance and decision-making processes behind Israel’s actions. Conversely, the collocational profile for Hamas frequently includes the presence of explicitly aggressive terms such as *attack* and *massacre* which place emphasis on Hamas’s role in initiating violent actions. In particular, the latter refers to the indiscriminate and brutal killing of a large number of people, typically civilians. It evokes a strong emotional response, pointing to a high level of cruelty and inhumanity and influencing the audience’s moral judgement of the perpetrators. The collocational profile of Hamas also includes terms related to leadership and organisation, such as *leader*, *network*, *wing*, and *leadership*, indicating its capacity to orchestrate actions. This differential usage of nouns shapes the reader’s perception, portraying Israel’s actions as legitimate and defensive, while framing Hamas’s actions as aggressive and plotted.

5.3. *Civilians, child, children*

Having examined the key social actors in the conflict coverage, we now turn our attention to analysing the keyword *child*. To ensure statistical significance while maintaining analytical manageability, we focused on the top 20 collocations occurring at least three times in the corpus. These collocations are detailed in *Table 3*.

Table 3. – Top 20 collocates of *child* as a lemma sorted by score.

	WORD	CO-OCCURENCES	CANDIDATES	SCORE
1	<i>women</i>	43	57	11.95
2	<i>have</i>	29	282	10.67
3	<i>were</i>	30	309	10.66
4	<i>killed</i>	21	175	10.50
5	<i>her</i>	21	200	10.43
6	<i>been</i>	17	224	10.05
7	<i>more</i>	13	151	9.88
8	<i>Palestinian</i>	11	137	9.69
9	<i>many</i>	9	93	9.55
10	<i>reported</i>	7	42	9.39
11	<i>Gaza</i>	17	574	9.32
12	<i>including</i>	7	68	9.28
13	<i>young</i>	6	21	9.26
14	<i>injured</i>	6	25	9.24
15	<i>hospital</i>	6	47	9.15
16	<i>particularly</i>	5	11	9.04
17	<i>all</i>	8	198	9.04
18	<i>especially</i>	5	18	9.01
19	<i>cancer</i>	5	21	9.00
20	<i>SOS</i>	4	4	8.75

The collocate “Palestinian” indicates that children are often specifically identified by their nationality or ethnicity. Moreover, collocates such as “Gaza”, “Hospital”, and “from” specify the geographical and institutional settings where children are discussed. Quantifiers such as “many”, “more”, and “all” show that numerical descriptions and comparisons are common. This likely highlights the scale of the impact on children, providing quantitative context to the stories. Other words such as “cancer”, and “especially” suggest that specific cases or conditions affecting children are often highlighted, possibly to draw attention to unique or severe instances of suffering or need, evoking empathy and highlighting the vulnerability of children. Throughout the concordance lines, children are consistently depicted in situations where they are acted upon (“killed”, “gunned down”, “abducted”) rather than acting themselves. This lack of agency reflects their position as innocent victims within the

larger narrative of conflict and violence. The frequent pattern, “more women and children have been reported killed”, further reinforces their passive role, as it highlights their status as casualties in reports and statistics, rather than as individuals with agency. The repeated emphasis on numbers and comparisons (e.g., with other conflict zones) in patterns such as “far more children have been killed” and “more children have been killed” serves to highlight the scale of the tragedy affecting children, again focusing on their victimhood.

While there are moments that touch on their symbolic importance in political contexts or their active roles in desperate circumstances, the dominant narrative emphasises their vulnerability and the severe impact of the Gaza war on their lives. The discourse employs quantitative data (9), emotional appeals (10, 11), and political and ethical discussions (12) to create a comprehensive and impactful narrative about the plight of children in the war zone:

- (9) Consider that in the first 18 months of Russia’s current war in Ukraine, at least **545** children were killed. Or that in 2022, by a United Nations count, **2,985** children were killed in all wars worldwide. In contrast, in less than five months of Israel’s current war in Gaza, the health authorities there report more than **12,500** children killed. Among them were **250** infants less than 1 year old. (Nicholas Kristof, “Israel, Gaza and Double Standards”, *The New York Times*, March 3, 2024)
- (10) **So many children are brought into the morgue** at Al-Aqsa Hospital in Deir al Balah that the morgue director, Yassir Abu Amar, says he has **to cut his burial shrouds into child-size fragments** to handle the **influx of corpses**. “**The children’s bodies come to us broken and in pieces**,” he said. “It’s chilling. We’ve never seen **this number of children killed**,” he added. “We cry every day. Every day, we cry while we’re working to prepare the children”. (“Smoldering Gaza Becomes A Graveyard for Children”, *The New York Times*, Nov. 19, 2023)
- (11) In the emergency room of Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City, Dr. Ghasan Abu-Sittah said that **many children had been brought in alone and in shock, with burns, shrapnel wounds or severe injuries from being crushed by rubble**. In many cases, he said, **no one knew who they were**. (Raja Abdulrahim, “The War Turns Gaza Into a ‘Graveyard’ for Children”, *The New York Times*, Nov. 18, 2023)
- (12) **There is a distinction: Hamas deliberately killed and kidnapped children on Oct. 7. Israel is not deliberately killing Palestinian children; it is simply bombing entire neighborhoods with far too**

little attention to civilian life. There is a moral difference there, but I wouldn't want to try to explain it to grieving parents in Gaza. (Nicholas Kristof, "So Many Child Deaths in Gaza, and for What?", *The New York Times*, Dec. 7, 2023)

Furthermore, collocates such as *killed* and *injured* clearly provide further evidence that children are often discussed in relation to violence and casualties, framing them as victims of these harmful, material processes. This choice of language emphasises their passive role and vulnerability in the war context. Across the corpus, relational processes are used to establish comparisons and define the severity and magnitude of the situation in Gaza by contrasting it with other conflict zones:

- (13) **Health officials in Gaza say** that 5,000 Palestinian children have been killed since the Israeli assault began, and possibly hundreds more. **Many international officials and experts** familiar with the way death tolls are compiled in the territory **say** the overall numbers are **generally reliable**. **If the figures are even close to accurate, far more children have been killed** in Gaza in the past six weeks **than** the 2,985 children killed in the world's major conflict zones combined – across two dozen countries – during all of last year, even with the war in Ukraine, **according to U.N. tallies** of verified deaths in armed conflict. ("Smoldering Gaza Becomes A Graveyard for Children", *The New York Times*, Nov. 19, 2023)

In this example and many similar ones, this evaluative stance is designed to elicit a strong emotional response from the audience, potentially encouraging a call for intervention. However, when addressing the sheer scale of the numbers, the articles often cite sources that provide evaluations rather than direct observations, as seen in the example above ("Health officials in Gaza *say*" and "Many international officials and experts *say*"). Within this particular excerpt, the adverb "possibly" and the phrase "generally reliable" introduce an evaluative element regarding the accuracy of the death toll. This appraisal implies that, despite some uncertainties, the reported numbers are credible. In a similar vein, the conditional phrase "If the figures are even close to accurate" introduces a hedging element, acknowledging potential uncertainties about the exact numbers. This hedging balances the assertion of severity with a recognition of potential limitations in the data. Overall, the critical stance on reliability suggests a cautious acceptance of the figures, which may influence how the audience perceives their validity.

The comparative framework and quantitative focus are also evident when the recurring pattern "women and children" is used, with the aim

of generating sympathy and concern for the civilian casualties in Gaza by placing them in stark contrast to casualties in other conflicts:

- (14) **More women and children** have been reported killed in Gaza in less than two months than the roughly 7,700 civilians documented as killed by U.S. forces and their international allies in the entire first year of the invasion of Iraq in 2003, according to estimates from Iraq Body Count, an independent British research group. And the number of **women and children** reported killed in Gaza since the Israeli campaign began last month has already started to approach the roughly 12,400 civilians documented to have been killed by the United States and its allies in Afghanistan during nearly 20 years of war, according to Neta C. Crawford, co-director of Brown University's Costs of War Project. (Lauren Leatherby, "Big Bombs in Urban Areas Raise Civilian Toll in Gaza", *The New York Times*, Nov. 26, 2023)

By citing authoritative sources and presenting large numbers of casualties as a collective entity, this text aims to illustrate the humanitarian impact of the conflict and to present the situation in Gaza as exceptionally dire.

Although collectivisation strategies are more prevalent in the data, the use of individualisation strategies has also been identified across the corpus. For instance, the possessive pronoun "her" tends to suggest a focus on individual families and personal stories, foregrounding the personal and human side of the conflict, with the aim of engaging readers' empathy and concern more deeply:

- (15) Concern for **members of the Bibas family – a mother and her two young children** who have become symbols of the hostages held in Gaza – deepened on Wednesday afternoon when Hamas's armed wing, the Al Qassam Brigades, claimed the three had been killed in Israeli airstrikes. (Talya Minsberg, "Fears Grow Over Fate of Mother and Her 2 Sons", *The New York Times*, Nov. 30, 2023)

As extract 15 shows, there seems to be a tendency for individualisation strategies to be applied predominantly to Israeli victims, emphasising personal stories and specific families. This approach highlights individual tragedies, providing a detailed and personal perspective on their suffering. In contrast, victims from Gaza are often collectivised, represented through aggregated numbers and general terms. This disparity in representation underscores a significant imbalance: while the experiences of Israeli victims are depicted with emotional depth and specificity, the suffering of Gaza's victims is presented in broader, less

personalised terms. This uneven treatment not only amplifies the emotional impact of individual stories on one side but also risks obscuring the personal dimensions of the suffering endured by the other side, thus reinforcing a skewed and less nuanced portrayal of the conflict:

- (16) Some or all of the at least 36 children taken to the enclave as captives on Oct. 7 are expected to be freed. But the announcement raised anxieties about who might make it out. A **12-year-old** forced to make a propaganda video for his kidnappers. A **9-year-old** snatched while visiting a friend's house for a sleepover. A **3-year-old** whose last memory of her parents was seeing them both murdered. And an infant, now all of 10 months, who has spent about a tenth of his life in captivity. They are among the more than **30 children abducted** from their homes and taken to Gaza during the Hamas-led assault on southern Israel on Oct. 7. Their faces have appeared on signs at marches in Israel and on fliers posted in cities around the world. And their plight has both galvanized a nation at war and forced Israel's leaders to negotiate, albeit indirectly, with Hamas, the armed group they have vowed to destroy. About 240 people were abducted by gunmen that day. Among them were individuals gravely injured in the attack or who suffered from chronic illnesses, **infants** and grandparents, peace activists and soldiers, citizens of Israel and foreign nationals. "Each one of them is a person, not a number or a statistic," said Eylon Keshet, a cousin of Kfir Bibas, the now 10-month-old. "Each one is a part of our lives and has dreams and ambitions." The **captive children**, especially, have had an immeasurable emotional impact on the traumatized country. Their fate has put the hostages at the center of the national agenda, complicating the military's war strategy in Gaza and dividing the government about whether a deal to secure the release of at least 50 captives goes far enough and if the agreed pause in fighting would spell a premature end of the war and leave Hamas intact. At least **36 children and teenagers**, ranging in age from infancy to the final year of high school, are being held in Gaza. (Isabel Kershner, "Deal for Child Hostages Stirs Hope and Anguish", *The New York Times*, Nov. 24, 2023)

This text employs several strategies to create a cohesive and emotionally impactful narrative that humanises the political discourse surrounding Israel's response. Firstly, the inclusion of personal stories ("A 9-year-old snatched while visiting a friend's house for a sleepover. A 3-year-old whose last memory of her parents was seeing them both murdered") makes it more challenging to question the legitimacy of Israel's actions without appearing insensitive to the victims' plight. Additionally, the repetition of key, quantitative information ("Some or all of the at least

36 children taken to the enclave as captives”; “the more than 30 children abducted from their homes and taken to Gaza”; “at least 36 children and teenagers, ranging in age from infancy to the final year of high school, are being held in Gaza”) and the use of lists (“A 12-year-old [...]”; “A 9-year-old [...]”; “A 3-year-old [...]”; “And an infant [...]”) ensure the reader’s focus remains on the children and Israel’s military defence. This cohesive structure not only strengthens the emotional impact but also underscores the innocence of the child captives and the brutality of their “kidnappers”. By appealing to moral values (“Each one of them is a person, not a number or a statistic”), the text supports an ideological position that justifies Israeli actions while delegitimising Hamas. However, the broader geopolitical context is only minimally addressed, potentially leading readers to view the situation in isolation rather than as part of a more complex, long-running conflict. Moreover, the text constructs a national Israeli identity (“national agenda”) as one that is protective, responsive, and united in the face of external threats. The references to national symbols and collective action (“marches in Israel”, “forced Israel’s leaders to negotiate”) emphasise a unified national effort, suggesting strong internal solidarity.

When individualisation strategies are employed in relation to Gaza civilians, distinct strategies adopted by *The New York Times* can be observed. A representative example is evident in the following extract, which differs in focus, emotional appeal, and framing when compared with the previous excerpt:

- (17) The **Israeli military said** it had been **targeting militants** who were hiding in the complex in an effort to evade attack. The former U.N. school was housing 6,000 displaced Gazans. An Israeli airstrike on Thursday hit a United Nations school complex in central Gaza that had become a shelter for thousands of displaced Palestinians and, Israel said, Hamas militants. **Gazan health officials said** dozens of people were killed, including women and children. The strike was the latest in a deadly surge of fighting in central Gaza, where Israeli forces have announced an offensive against what they describe as a renewed insurgency by Hamas. The strike hit a compound that had been operated by UNRWA, the main U.N. body that aids Palestinians in Gaza. About 6,000 displaced Palestinians were sheltering in the complex, located in the central Gaza area of Nuseirat, when the strike took place, said Juliette Touma, an UNRWA spokeswoman. The **Israeli military said** its fighter jets had **targeted** three classrooms in the school building that held 20 to 30 Palestinian militants affiliated with Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, a smaller militia that, like Hamas, is backed

by Iran. Israeli forces had twice **postponed the strike** to reduce civilian casualties, the military said. The precise toll could not be verified, but the Gaza Health Ministry said that of the roughly 40 people killed in the attack, 14 were children and nine were women. Later in the day, The Associated Press reported different numbers, saying at least 33 people died, including three women and nine children, citing the hospital morgue. **Crowds gathered at the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in the central Gaza city of Deir al Balah to weep and pray over the dead. A local Palestinian videographer posted footage showing a young woman with the body of her small son.** Lt. Col. Peter Lerner, an Israeli military spokesman, said he was “not aware of any civilian casualties” resulting from the strike. “We conducted a **precise strike** against the terrorists where they were,” he said. He said the militants had used the compound to plan attacks on Israeli forces, although he did not provide specific examples. Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, another Israeli military spokesman, said Israeli forces had followed the militants for three days before opening fire. “They **pinpointed** the three classrooms, waited three days and then killed,” he added. Israeli security agencies have so far verified the identities of nine militants killed in the strike, “some” of whom participated in the Hamas-led Oct. 7 attacks, Admiral Hagari said. “We are now busy with confirming the identities of the additional terrorists killed,” he said. A State Department spokesman, Matthew Miller, said Israel had conveyed to the United States that it was **targeting Hamas militants with precision weapons**. But, he added, if reports that children were among those killed in the strike were accurate, “then those aren’t terrorists”. He said the United States expected Israel to be “fully transparent” in releasing more information. (Aaron Boxerman *et al.*, “Israelis Attack Civilian Shelter And Kill Dozens”, *The New York Times*, June 7, 2024)

In this extract, an Israeli airstrike on a UN school complex in Gaza is reported. Although casualties involving civilians, including women and children, are mentioned, the emotional impact is mitigated by a more objective tone, creating a comprehensive but less emotionally charged narrative. To achieve this effect, the article uses detailed accounts of the strike, including specific locations, numbers, and official statements, especially from military officials such as the Israeli assertion that they were targeting militants hiding among displaced civilians. Although the scene at Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir al Balah, where crowds gathered to mourn, powerfully underscores the deep personal losses experienced by civilians, and the poignant image of a young woman grieving over her child serves as a stark reminder of the human toll of the conflict, this portrayal is balanced by the inclusion of the Israeli military’s

perspective, particularly their emphasis on efforts to minimise civilian casualties and target Hamas militants. For instance, by describing the military action as “precise”, “targeted”, “pinpointed”, and “postponed” it is implied that the operation was carefully planned and executed to hit specific targets, at the right time, ideally minimising unintended damage. By framing the strike as an unfortunate but unavoidable outcome of a well-intentioned operation, the article may seek to reassure the public and international observers that the military is making deliberate efforts to avoid civilian casualties.

Overall, the analysis reveals that *The New York Times* employs discursive strategies that doubly victimise Palestinian children. First, through systematic collectivisation and anonymisation strategies, the newspaper renders these children invisible as individual subjects, reducing them to an undifferentiated mass and stripping them of their personal experiences and identities. Second through a failed estrangement from Hamas, a discursive extension that implicitly transfers responsibility for the conflict’s devastating consequences onto all Gaza residents, including children. This rhetorical merging appears to position Palestinian children as both invisible victims and implicit participants in the conflict, potentially creating a paradoxical representation that may undermine their status as protected subjects under international humanitarian law.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study underscores the critical importance of examining the ways in which media language and discourse influence our understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the representation of social actors, particularly children. The preliminary analysis of the keywords has helped the identification of recurring patterns across the corpus. The frequent use of “Gazan” and “Gaza” over “Palestine” suggests a tendency to emphasise the immediate geographical and humanitarian aspects of the conflict rather than the broader political and nationalistic dimensions. This framing can depoliticise the Palestinian struggle for statehood by reducing it to a regional crisis rather than a legitimate national aspiration. The choice to highlight “Gaza” might also be a strategic decision to align with certain political sensibilities or avoid the complexities associated with Palestinian statehood and its international implications. The analysis has also revealed how *The New York Times* tends to construct

narratives around key actors and events. The distinction between terms related to conflict and violence (“airstrike”, “kill”) and those related to humanitarian concerns (“civilian”, “hospital”) underscores how the narrative can be shaped to either justify or condemn actions. The usage of “airstrike” often carries connotations of precision and targeted military operations, potentially framing these actions as calculated and legitimate responses. In contrast, terms related to humanitarian issues tend to evoke sympathy and highlight suffering, which may be used to galvanise public opinion against perceived aggressors.

The differential media portrayal of Israel and Hamas is particularly striking within the available data. The analysis reveals that Israel is frequently associated with terms such as “campaign”, “operation”, and “defense”, which convey a sense of structured and legitimate military engagement. This framing suggests a level of justification and strategic intent behind Israel’s actions, presenting them as calculated responses to perceived threats. In contrast, Hamas is often depicted using terms like “attack” and “massacre”, which emphasise aggression and brutality. This disparity in language contributes to a narrative that casts Israel’s actions as defensive and strategic while framing those of Hamas as indiscriminate and violent.

By characterising Hamas’s actions as disruptive, *The New York Times* aligns itself with the existing political order, typically represented by state actors and governmental structures. This framing can effectively delegitimise the grievances and motivations of non-state actors like Hamas, reducing their actions to mere disruptions rather than recognising them as expressions of resistance or claims for rights. In this context, actions taken by state actors, including military operations, are often deemed legitimate and necessary for maintaining order and security. This dichotomy simplifies complex political realities into a binary struggle between “order” and “disorder”, thereby reinforcing existing power structures. Such portrayals not only distort the public understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict but also obscure the deeper socio-political issues at play, which warrant a more nuanced discussion. The portrayal of healthcare facilities as both strategic targets and symbols of humanitarian concern further complicates the narrative. On the one hand, reporting on the alleged use of hospitals by Hamas for military purposes can be seen as an attempt to justify attacks on these sites. On the other hand, highlighting the dire state of healthcare infrastructure in Gaza underscores the severe humanitarian impact of the conflict. This dual narrative approach can lead to a complex and often contradictory

representation of the situation, where the focus shifts between strategic justifications and humanitarian concerns.

The critical examination of collocational profiles has revealed that the use of the verbs “accused” and “denied” in relation to Israel and Hamas, respectively, reflects a power dynamic in reporting. The prevalence of neutral reporting verbs for Israel’s statements and more sceptical verbs for Hamas’s responses suggests a subtle bias in how different actors are portrayed. This can affect the perceived credibility and legitimacy of each party’s claims and responses. Furthermore, the analysis of verbs associated with each party highlights how language constructs the perceived nature of the conflict. The formal and strategic language associated with Israel contrasts sharply with the more aggressive and emotional language used for Hamas. This linguistic disparity reinforces the narrative that frames Israel as a disciplined, defensive force and Hamas as a violent and unpredictable actor.

A particularly striking finding of the study is how children are often discursively used to legitimise the war. The rhetoric surrounding children serves to invoke emotional responses that can bolster support for specific narratives or justifications for actions taken during the conflict. This usage not only frames children as deserving of protection but also positions them as symbols around which various agendas are constructed. Thus, children’s images and identities are often co-opted to serve the needs of conflicting parties, complicating their roles as genuine victims and transforming them into discursive tools that fuel the conflict. This is achieved through several key framing strategies: children are represented to humanise discourse, evoke strong emotional responses, frame the conflict in moral terms, legitimise political actions, and maintain a cohesive and focused narrative structure. They are often categorised based on their relational identification, such as being sons and daughters of deceased or injured parents (mostly mothers), to emphasise their vulnerability. It seems that in the newspaper’s preferences, children as social actors are used to activate the emotionality of the information, such as in the example of “high concentration of civilians, particularly children”. The indefinite number, the term “civilians” with the connotation of non-military individuals already creates contempt that is maximised by the specification of the victims as highly vulnerable. These victims are represented as particularly passive, they are “abducted”, “murdered” and “held”. To increase their victimhood, some articles address the brutality of killing hospitalised children, which adds horror to the already mentioned contempt.

More specifically, children are predominantly represented as passive victims of violence. This framing reinforces their position as innocent and helpless, drawing a sharp contrast with the active, often violent roles ascribed to other actors in the conflict. The narrative frequently employs quantitative terms to emphasise the large scale of child casualties. This approach aims to highlight the severity of the humanitarian crisis but may also risk reducing individual suffering to mere statistics. Particularly, by comparing the number of child casualties in Gaza with those in other conflict zones, the coverage underscores the exceptional nature of the tragedy, yet this comparative framework can also obscure the unique and multifaceted aspects of the conflict. The specific mention of terms such as “Palestinian”, “Gaza”, and “hospital” situates children within a defined geographic and ethnic context. This identification underscores the particular hardships faced by Palestinian children but may also contribute to a perception of their suffering as part of a broader, impersonal conflict narrative.

The coverage uses emotional appeals to highlight the plight of children, often through graphic depictions of suffering and personal stories. This strategy is evident in reports detailing the influx of child casualties into morgues or the poignant images of grieving families. There is a noticeable disparity in how children from different sides of the conflict are individualised. Stories involving Israeli children often include detailed personal narratives, emphasising individual experiences and specific families. This seems to increase the humanisation of the victim, or in other words a honorification, with the specification of their names and belongings. In contrast, Palestinian children are frequently represented through aggregated numbers or broader terms, which, while highlighting the scale of the tragedy, may also dilute the personal and individual aspects of their suffering. This seems to be aligned with the quantifiers that occur within the word children, that are presented as “thousands”, or “many”, and “more than [number]”.

In conclusion, the representation of children in the data primarily frames them as victims of conflict, emphasising their passivity, the scale of their suffering, and their ethnic and geographic context. While this portrayal aims to elicit sympathy and highlight the humanitarian crisis, it also reflects a broader tendency to depict children as symbols of war rather than as individuals with rights. Particularly, the analysis suggests that Palestinian children emerge as doubly victimised in *The New York Times* coverage: they are rendered anonymous through collective representation while simultaneously bearing transferred culpability through

the newspaper's discursive merging of Gaza's civilian population with Hamas.

This study underscores the crucial role of media discourse in shaping public perceptions of conflict, particularly in its portrayal of vulnerable populations such as children. By analysing the representation of children in conflict coverage, this research highlights the impact of narrative framing on empathy, understanding, and policy responses, potentially influencing audiences' emotional and cognitive involvement.

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