

## (Mis)Misrepresentation of Palestinian-Israeli Conflict in the Lead Pakistani English Newspapers: An Application of Social Identity theory By Henri Tajfel

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Sumaira Azim<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Hafiz Javed ur Rehman<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

The present study investigates how the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is one of the longest-running issues of mode. This study uses Teun A. van Dijk's "Us versus Them" model to examine how the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is portrayed in editorials published in national and international newspapers via the lens of critical discourse analysis. The public's image of this war, which is rooted in historical, political, and cultural issues, has been greatly shaped by media narratives. Based on a thorough analysis of the editorial content on this topic in a few national big newspapers, including Dawn and The Express Tribune, the research has attempted to highlight how language shapes power relations and social identities in any media-mediated representation. The Palestinian-Israeli struggle is one of the most extended issues of modern times, as varied and extensive as the coverage it has received from world media. Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach shall be used in this research to probe discourse's cognitive and social dimensions.

**Keywords:** Palestine -Israel conflict, misrepresentation, social Identity, socio-cognitive approach

### INTRODUCTION

The present study investigates how the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is one of the longest-running issues of mode. This study uses Teun A. van Dijk's "Us versus Them" model to examine how the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is portrayed in editorials published in national and international newspapers via the lens of critical discourse analysis. The public's image of this war, which is rooted in historical, political, and cultural issues, has been greatly shaped by media narratives. Based on a thorough analysis of the editorial content on this topic in a few national big newspapers, including Dawn and The Express Tribune, the research has attempted to highlight

<sup>1</sup> M. Phil Scholar, Department of English, Qurtuba University of Science and Technology, Peshawar.

<sup>2</sup> Lecturer Department of English, The University of Agriculture, Peshawar.

how language shapes power relations and social identities in any media-mediated representation. The Palestinian-Israeli struggle is one of the most extended issues of modern times, as varied and extensive as the coverage it has received from world media. Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach shall be used in this research to probe discourse's cognitive and social dimensions. It tends to reveal ideological biases and power relations hidden in media texts (Hafiz& Condit (2022), Hafiz & Mustanir(2019), Waqar & Hafiz (2019).

Critical discourse analysis, according to Dijk (2001), is analytical research that identifies instances of social power abuse, domination, and inequality in a text or speech within a social and political environment, as well as how these inequalities are resisted, reproduced, and reinforced in texts or talks (p. 352). It is evident from this that language may serve a multitude of important purposes when examined in the right context. We may examine these key roles using the ideas and frameworks that discourse analysis offers. It aids in our comprehension of language beyond sentence structure. Investigating language in a foreign environment also aids in revealing any hidden beliefs it might hold. According to Dijk (1998), rather than the positive "us" (me and my allies), the negative "us" (opposition group and allies) is frequently at the core of the concept of accountability. He made his declaration by outlining the strength of "Us versus Them" in political debates.

According to Henri Tajfel's Social Identity Theory (SIT), people's sense of self is largely shaped by the social groupings they belong to. SIT can be used to analyze how news and editorials are framed by media outlets, particularly in conflict situations. These outlets frequently reflect the biases of the in-group while simplifying or adversely presenting the out-group. The editorial positions of Pakistani newspapers can be interpreted via the lens of Social Identity Theory as reflecting the dynamics of in-group (Muslim/Palestinian) and out-group (Jewish/Israeli). According to SIT, newspapers, as establishments belonging to the in-group, have a tendency to portray the conflict in a way that upholds the collective Muslim identity, portraying Palestine as a victim and the object of persecution by an outside "other" (Israel).

### **Problem Statement**

The way Palestine-Israel conflict is portrayed distorts public perception and serves to uphold deeply ingrained ideological narratives, societal divisions, and geopolitical objectives. The majority of these false beliefs divide audiences and create impressions that are biased toward one side, intensifying disputes and impeding fruitful discussion or compromise. At the national level, these skewed discourses aim to influence public opinion and political decisions while also upholding the prevailing power structure. Based on this, the current study critically examines editorial discourses in order to uncover the covert processes and linguistic techniques that may be used to implement such prejudices. It focuses on how the media affects local policies linked to the conflict, forms public opinion, and sustains conflict.

## **Research Objectives**

1. To analyse dominance, power abuse, and marginalization highlighted in the selected newspapers discourses.

## **Research Questions**

1. How is dominance, power abuse, and marginalization highlighted in the newspaper's discourses?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This section of the literature review examines how the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is portrayed in the media using Dijk's "Us versus Them" model and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a framework. Since CDA reveals the power structures and ideologies present in media texts, it expounds on the function of the media in influencing discourse and public opinion. This chapter examines how different national perspectives are presented in Pakistani newspapers like Dawn and The Express Tribune in order to identify variations in framing associated with geopolitical settings.

Overview of Van Dijk's "Us versus Them" Model and Critical Discourse Analysis Discourse, language, and communication are the subjects of the multidisciplinary field of critical discourse analysis. The emphasis lies in the way language portrays, maintains, and replicates social hierarchies, social ideologies, and social inequality. Since the main goal of CDA is to expose the fundamental forces that underlie power and dominance that are expressed through words and sentences, the field focuses on the role that language plays in the formation, maintenance, and modification of social behavior, social structure, and social inclusion and exclusion (Fairclough, 2013). A critical model of how speech is used to establish in-group ("Us") and out-group ("Them") identity, Teun A. van Dijk's Us versus Them model is an outgrowth of CDA. This concept places a strong emphasis on the function of language in the creation and maintenance of social boundaries as well as in the affirmative division of the in-group and the out-group. According to van Dijk, a few obvious forms of discursive strategies that control and regulate the development of group distinctiveness include victimization, negative other-presentation, positive self-presentation, and national self-glorification (Dijk, 1998). The socio-cognitive approach of Van Dijk takes into account the cognitive elements of discourse production and processing and emphasizes how social cognition both manages and is managed by discourse. This is essential to the analysis of media text because it makes it easier to understand how people are portrayed in media and how they shape public opinion and reinforce ideological representations. (Dijk, 2001).

The term "actor description" describes how various people or groups are portrayed in media writings. The way these performers are portrayed has the potential to reinforce stereotypes or worsen public opinion. For instance, certain media texts might refer to Israeli forces as "defending the homeland," while other media texts would refer to Palestinian combatants as "terrorists" or "militants." The audience's

assessment of who is and is not legitimate will therefore be based on these descriptors (Dijk, 1991).

A tactic used to draw boundaries between in-groups (US) and out-groups (THEM)—those against whom action is warranted and those who are demonized—is polarization. It can appear in stories about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict where one side is fundamentally good and the other is fundamentally bad. A summary of problems that is thus basic has the potential to exacerbate tensions and produce a wedge between communities (Dijk, 2008).

Propaganda and bias are commonplace in media discourse, frequently reflecting the goals and interests of those in charge of or influencing the media. A variety of behaviors can be indicative of bias, including the selective use of information, the framing of information, and the use of so-called "loaded language." According to Herman and Chomsky (1988), the terms "terrorists" and "freedom fighters" or "security operations" and "military aggression" have strong ideological connotations that influence public opinion.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The methodology section will provide the research design, data collection tools, and analytical procedures used in this study. In having such an approach, a coherent and systematic way through which media representations of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict are analysed will be established. The theoretical framework and methodology used in this chapter are fully explained by the current study on media and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Us against Them model of Van Dijk and CDA provide a sociocognitive framework within which language interacts to form and preserve social identities, power structures, and ideologies in media texts. This methodology secures a systematic analysis of the media representations. It allows a deepening understanding of the impact of the media in the particular context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on social norms and public opinion.

#### **Selection Criteria**

The selection includes *Dawn* and *The Express Tribune*, the most prominent and influential factors in Pakistani media that lend a peek into the national perspective on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

CDA refers to a methodology that charts the ways in which discourse is both produced and produced by power relations and social inequalities. For scholars such as Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak, and Teun A. van Dijk, CDA is too wide-ranging to be considered a methodology; rather, it is a critical perspective for the unmasking of hidden ideologies found within texts and utterances. Using CDA, researchers are better able to view the social scenario lying underneath the discourses and how they are represented and shaped. Wodak and Chilton (2005) further go on to add how contextual analysis has to be done by studying the discourses to realize properly how exactly these work in specific socio-political environments and to show how events took place during earlier times or various other social processes which contributed

towards the shaping up of meaning. Inherently, CDA is interdisciplinary, drawing on concepts and methods from linguistics, sociology, psychology, and political science. Such interdisciplinary guarantees that CDA shall be a versatile and total approach, capable of dealing with complex social phenomena. For example, Wodak and Meyer (2015) stated that it offers a view whereby insights from different disciplines are combined in a way that creates an in-depth understanding of how discourse works across different social domains, such as politics, media, and education. Merging these perspectives enables CDA to provide a solid framework that understands the complex nature of discourses and roles within social life.

Teun A. van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach, in contrast to previous methods, introduces cognitive processes as situated within both discursive and social analysis within a global framework. This highlights the function of mental models, which are generally believed to be cognitive representations of the actors or events that are associated with them in society, or simply in any particular location, as well as how discourses both influence and are shaped by mental models. Thus, it is by an approach aloft which interrelations are played between cognition, society, and discourse so as to arrive at nuanced understandings about the ways in which language can construct and perpetuate power relations and social structures.

### **ANALYSIS**

This chapter analysed editorials from a few national newspapers as its source material and apply a critical discourse analysis technique to analyze how the media depicts the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The research will examine how language and discourse transmit meanings that are used to create identities, offer justifications, and affect perception using Van Dijk's "Us versus Them" approach. This study looked at editorials that were printed in two Pakistani newspapers, Dawn and The Express Tribune.

### **Analysis of National Newspapers Editorials**

This section is solely dedicated to analyzing the editorials from two Pakistani newspapers, *Dawn* and *The Express Tribune*, to see how issues about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict are represented. The analysis uses Van Dijk's Us versus Them model to identify and deconstruct key themes, narratives, and discursive strategies. The aim is to uncover latent biases, ideologies, and rhetorical devices that shape public perceptions and narratives about the conflict in the Pakistani media. The semiotic analysis will focus on four significant indicators derived from Van Dijk's model: modality and evidentiality, categorization, national self-glorification and positive self-presentation, and negative other-presentation and victimization. Each of these significant indicators can help illuminate different semantic features that have to do with how the editorials frame the conflict: By applying these indicators, the following analysis illustrates how *Dawn* and *The Express Tribune* have been narrating the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

#### **1. Dawn Editorials**

This section analyses the editorials of the Pakistani newspaper *Dawn* using Van Dijk's Us versus Them model. The analysis will be based on the dominant themes and narratives that can be identified, applying the model's indicators to discourse and how it shapes reality about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

### **a. Modality and Evidentiality**

Modality in the *Dawn* editorials is used to convey varying degrees of certainty and doubt, often emphasizing the severity of the situation in Gaza. Evidentiality is employed to attribute information to credible sources, thereby enhancing the reliability of the statements made. For example, in the editorial titled "*Looming Massacre*", published in October 14, 2023, the use of modality is evident in phrases such as "*Israel has ordered over a million residents of northern Gaza to evacuate as a ground invasion of the besieged territory by Tel Aviv is imminent*" (*Dawn* Editorials, October 14, 2023, p. 1). The term "*imminent*" conveys a high degree of certainty about the impending ground invasion. Evidentiality is present in the statement "*As the UN has noted, the Israeli evacuation order is 'impossible' to carry out,*" which attributes the information to the United Nations, thereby lending it credibility (*Dawn* Editorials, October 14, 2023, p. 1). "*A fresh holocaust against the Palestinians is in the making as Israel has ordered over a million residents of northern Gaza to evacuate as a ground invasion of the besieged territory by Tel Aviv is imminent.*" (*Dawn* Editorials, October 14, 2023, p. 1) The term "*imminent*" indicates high modality, reflecting certainty about the ground invasion.

### **b. Categorization**

Categorization is a key tool used in the editorials to label and classify the involved parties, often in ways that reflect underlying biases and ideologies. In the *Dawn* editorials, Palestinians are frequently categorized as victims, whereas Israelis are labelled as aggressors. For instance, the phrase "*Gaza's bloodied and brutalised population*" (*Dawn* Editorials, October 14, 2023, p. 1) categorizes Palestinians as suffering and pressed. Conversely, Israel is categorized through phrases like "*Israel's war machine*" and "*a fresh holocaust against the Palestinians*", (*Dawn* Editorials, October 14, 2023, p. 1) which cast Israel in a negative light as the perpetrator of violence. According to Lakoff (2008), metaphors are not a way we say things but a way things are. This editorial has plenty of them: for example, "*Gaza's bloodied and brutalized population*" produces a powerful metaphor where the Palestinians find their place as the tormented victim. It corresponds to Lakoff, who argues that this metaphor can frame one group as oppressed and deserving of sympathy. Dijk (1998) explains that language may be used to legitimize power abuse by classifying groups in specific ways. Palestine is portrayed as a people victimized by systematic discrimination, displacement, and occupation. In SIT, in-group members are frequently portrayed as morally superior or more deserving of sympathy. Israelis are also presented negatively, with an emphasis on policies that define them as the oppressors of the out-group.

### **c. National Self-Glorification and Positive Self-Presentation**

National self-glorification and positive self-presentation are strategies used to depict Pakistan and its allies in a favorable light. The editorials often emphasize the moral high ground and humanitarian concern expressed by Pakistani leaders and other Muslim countries.

An example of this can be seen in the editorial stating, "*Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman discussed the crisis over the phone... highlighting the need to get help to civilians*" (Dawn Editorials, November 8, 2023, p. 1). This presents Pakistan's allies as compassionate and proactive in seeking solutions to the humanitarian crisis, thus enhancing their positive image.

According to Tajfel's Social Identity Theory (SIT), the Palestine-Israeli conflict is frequently articulated in Dawn newspaper editorials through national self-glorification and positive self-presentation. The articles emphasize themes of victimhood, justice, and resistance, portraying Palestinians as morally justifiable and resilient in their struggle against Israeli oppression. This strengthens a positive sense of belonging, particularly in line with Muslim unity. On the other hand, Israel is frequently depicted unfavorably, with its acts being justified as aggressive and unequal, further defining a clear moral gulf. By promoting a positive perception of Palestinians and denouncing Israeli policy, Dawn reinforces in-group solidarity and out-group difference.

### **d. Negative Other-Presentation and Victimization**

Negative other-presentation involves portraying the out-group, in this case, Israel, in a negative light, highlighting their actions as aggressive and unjust. Victimization is used to depict Palestinians as innocent sufferers of Israeli aggression. In the editorial "*Over 10000 souls*", published in November 8, 2023, Israel is negatively presented through statements like, "*Tel Aviv now seeks to do what it has always done without compunction: massacre men, women, and children to 'punish' Palestinian armed factions. This is a war crime by any definition yet Israel's Western friends choose to call it 'self-defense'*" (Dawn Editorials, November 8, 2023, p. 2). Conversely, Palestinians are victimized through phrases like, "*Gaza's people have been denied food, water, fuel, and adequate medical care in what could be described as a 21st-century holocaust*" (Dawn Editorials, November 8, 2023, p. 2). "*Tel Aviv now seeks to do what it has always done without compunction: massacre men, women, and children to 'punish' Palestinian armed factions. This is a war crime by any definition yet Israel's Western friends choose to call it 'self-defense'.*" (Dawn Editorials, November 8, 2023, p. 2) Israel is negatively presented as engaging in massacres without remorse, and its actions are framed as war crimes. The use of the term "*Western friends*" implies complicity and bias, further negatively portraying those who support Israel.

## **2. Express Tribune Editorials**

Using Van Dijk's model of Us versus Them, this chapter analyses editorials from the Pakistani newspaper The *Express Tribune*, published in 2023. It considers the main themes and storylines that emerge to the fore and uses indicators provided by

the model to explain how discursive articulation shapes representation concerning the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

### **a. Modality and Evidentiality**

Modality in the *Express Tribune* editorials primarily reflects a strand of solid certainty regarding Palestinian injustices and Israeli aggression. Evidentiality is used to prove these claims by citing authoritative sources to enhance the credibility of the arguments. For instance, in an editorial on the blockade of Gaza, the sentence "*It is clear that the blockade has led to severe shortages of essential supplies*" from an October 14, 2023, editorial in *Express Tribune* used a high modality to project the effect of the blockade as an unquestionable fact. Evidentiality is found in statements like "*According to reports from the United Nations, the situation in Gaza is deteriorating rapidly,*" (*Express Tribune* Editorials, 2023, October 14, 2023, p. 3) whereby information is attributed to some suppliant or reputable source to enhance its credibility.

The way Palestine-Israeli conflict is framed makes use of evidentiality and modality, both of which support Tajfel's Social Identity Theory (SIT) and serve to strengthen group identities. Modality is used to convey moral requirements and obligations, highlighting the necessity of international intervention and the validity of Palestinian resistance as necessary steps toward achieving justice. Evidentiality is the process of emphasizing reliable sources—like international organizations or firsthand accounts—in order to support allegations of Israeli aggression and Palestinian suffering. This language frame upholds the positive way that Palestinians portray themselves while denouncing Israeli policies. This strengthens in-group solidarity and further isolates the out-group, hence reiterating the intergroup dynamics that are at the heart of SIT.

### **b. Categorization**

Categorization in The *Express Tribune* editorials often involves labelling Palestinians as victims (In-group) and Israel as the aggressor (Out-group), which is also a key concept of Tajfel's Social Identity Theory (SIT). This distinction helps frame the conflict in a way that elicits sympathy for the Palestinians and condemnation for Israeli actions. For example, phrases like "*the suffering of Palestinian civilians*" categorize Palestinians as innocent victims, while descriptions of Israeli actions as "*military aggression*" categorize Israel as the perpetrator of violence. This clear categorization reinforces the Us versus Them narrative, where Palestinians are portrayed as the oppressed group and Israel as the oppressor (*Express Tribune* Editorials, October 14, 2023, p. 4).

### **d. National Self-Glorification and Positive Self-Presentation**

National self-glorification and positive self-presentation are evident in editorials that highlight Pakistan's and other Muslim countries' efforts to support the Palestinian cause. These narratives emphasize the moral and humanitarian actions taken by these nations, portraying them in a positive light. An example of this is seen in statements like "*Pakistan has consistently raised its voice against the atrocities committed in Gaza and has called for international intervention to protect Palestinian rights.*" (*Express*



*Tribune* Editorials, February 13, 2023, p. 5). This presents Pakistan as a proactive and compassionate actor on the international stage, advocating for justice and humanitarian aid. "Muslim nations have shown solidarity with the Palestinian cause, providing much-needed support and relief." (*Express Tribune* Editorials, January 27, 2023, p. 5). This statement highlights the positive actions of Muslim nations, portraying them as unified and supportive of humanitarian efforts.

### **e. Negative Other-Presentation and Victimization**

Negative other-presentation involves depicting Israel in a negative light, focusing on its aggressive actions and policies, while victimization emphasizes the plight of the Palestinians. For instance, the editorial might state, "Israel's relentless bombings have left countless Palestinians dead and many more injured," presenting Israel as the aggressor. Conversely, victimization is evident in phrases like "the Palestinian people continue to endure unimaginable suffering and hardship," (*Express Tribune* Editorials, January 27, 2023, p. 6) which highlight their victim status and evoke sympathy. In the given excerpt, "Israel's relentless bombings have left countless Palestinians dead and many more injured." (*Express Tribune* Editorials, 2023, p. 6) Israel is negatively presented as the aggressor through the use of terms like "relentless bombings," which emphasize the brutality of its actions. The impact on Palestinians is highlighted, framing them as victims of severe aggression.

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the comprehensive analysis of editorials from the Pakistani newspapers *Dawn* and *The Express Tribune*, using *Van Dijk's Us versus Them* model provides significant insights into how these media outlets represent the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Both newspapers prominently emphasize the humanitarian crisis faced by Palestinians, criticize Israeli policies and actions, and highlight the perceived bias of Western countries, particularly the United States, in supporting Israel. The key themes and narratives identified include the depiction of Palestinians as innocent victims and Israel as the aggressive oppressor. This dichotomy is reinforced through various discursive strategies: Both newspapers employ high modality to assert the severity of the conflict and use credible sources to enhance the reliability of their claims. Palestinians are consistently categorized as victims, while Israelis are labelled as aggressors, creating a clear moral dichotomy. The newspapers highlight the moral and humanitarian efforts of Pakistan and other Muslim countries, portraying them as compassionate and proactive. Israel is depicted negatively, with a focus on its aggressive actions, while Palestinians are portrayed as suffering and oppressed. These strategies serve to shape public perceptions, reinforcing solidarity with the Palestinian cause and condemnation of Israeli actions.

By examining how the Israel-Palestine conflict is portrayed in editorials from national newspapers, this study successfully answered its research questions. The results emphasized how different discursive techniques used by the media shape public attitudes. It was discovered that the humanitarian side of the conflict dominated Pakistani national press. International media, depending on the publication's

ideological position, provided more defensive or balanced viewpoints at the same time. The study emphasized the need for more responsible and balanced reporting to promote a nuanced view of international conflicts, highlighting the significance of ethical journalism and media literacy to identify and dismantle biased narratives.

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