

War of Opinions: Humanitarianism and Racism (Case Study of The Palestine-Israel Conflict)

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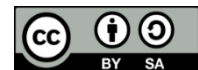
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ABSTRACT

This study explores the dynamics of the war of opinions within the ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict, which is extensively covered through both mainstream and social media. This longstanding conflict not only involves political and religious aspects but also pits humanitarian and racial issues against each other in the global public sphere. Employing a qualitative method and literature study approach, this research examines the narratives constructed by both parties—Israel and Palestine—and how media framing influences public perception. The findings reveal that media framing and the spread of propaganda on social media have triggered sharp polarization in international society, thereby widening the gap and hindering peaceful resolution. Such opinion polarization creates a black-and-white perception of the conflict, turning humanitarian issues into tools of justification and racism into a form of dehumanization. This study underscores the need for a holistic understanding and clear-headed analysis of the conflict to foster solidarity based on human values rather than identity-based fanaticism.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an endless conflict that is still ongoing to this day [1]. The development of the conflict continues to be reported globally, both through live broadcasts, video recordings, and articles that are deliberately circulated to reach the entire international community by utilizing sophisticated technology and enabling the delivery of information about the current situation at the location. Not only that, social media also supports news from both parties in describing their perspectives, thus worsening the situation and giving birth to propaganda from false information that has spread. This of

course continues to attract the attention of political observers and religious leaders, even other activists around the world because the issues presented by the media are very hotly discussed.

Then, the event about the existence of Zionists (representing Israel) or Hamas (representing Palestine) is still a mystery between the existence of X which is a response to Y or Y which is a response to X [2]. One of the founders of Hamas, Ahmed Yassin, has the goal of freeing Palestinian land from Israeli occupation claims and establishing an Islamic state in Palestine. Meanwhile, Theodor Herzl who is the founder of Zionists aims to claim the promised land and return to

the homeland. The arguments in defense of Zionists and Hamas are factual and can be traced from various references and views. That is why the global community is faced with confusion and prefers to call for a two-state solution at that time.

Nowadays, we can see the actions of demonstrators voicing their support for their choice by bringing down their opponents with negative narratives such as Hamas are terrorists and Zionists are invaders [3]. Apart from defending, this propaganda aims to attract the attention of neutral participants (even non-neutrals) to take sides or go to war. According to Mueller, it can be assumed that propaganda with negative narratives that seek to bring down, crosses the line [4] with the peace resolution on the principle of humanity that has been echoed at the state level. In addition, the process of spreading propaganda can spread quickly through social media (Instagram, Tiktok, X) which contain short videos with manipulative narrative constructions from social media users. Not many users investigate the truth of the short video, especially if the uploader is an influencer they admire.

This study aims to describe the war of opinions in the conflict holistically, namely looking at it from the Israeli and Palestinian camps by examining the views of both camps, and how opinions fight in viewing the issues of humanity and racism. In addition, this study is expected to be able to provide a comprehensive view from both parties to provide a collective understanding so that it can detect the patterns of thinking that occur.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers review several previous studies (the last 5 years) that discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The attacks carried out by Israel are violations of Human Rights and consider the Hamas attacks as a form of defense [5]. This article shows a strong defense narrative against evidence of Israeli attacks on Gaza which have claimed many lives and blockaded the Palestinian people's area from access to survive. However, the narrative that was built blackened Israel as the

party that needed to be responsible for this incident. On the other hand, the Zionist Israel claimed the land of Palestine theologically, namely the promised land. Then politically in the Balfour agreement where England promised to provide homes (in Palestinian land) to the Jews [6]. This became the forerunner of the formation of the state of Israel in the land of Palestine. The overlapping issues that occurred in the conflict made the UN take steps to reconcile the two parties by issuing a resolution to determine the legal status of the territory of both parties [7]. However, the resolution faced rejection from various countries because it was considered detrimental to other parties and caused endless wars until now.

3. METHODS

This study uses a qualitative method with a literature study approach and then analyzed descriptively. Researchers collect data from the internet such as e-journals and e-books that are relevant to the study needs. Then analyzed and presented in the form of articles.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 *How Opinion Wars Form*

Nowadays, opinions that are born from thoughts are often different and biased. Opinions can be formed through subjective momentary observations of data that is still relatively abstract and can be influenced by certain tendencies as initial provisions or other interests [8]. Departing from diverse human understanding, it gives birth to responsive intersubjectivity of views from external opinions, thus creating collisions and clashes.

The mass media tries to provide an important view and make it important to society [9]. As Maxwell put forward with his theory, agenda setting, that the media has the authority to determine which issues need to be considered by the public [10], [11]. It can be assumed that this

agenda setting theory is a media practice in influencing what the public should think, not telling the public what to think.

Not only that, in delivering news, the media presents and packages it by determining the framing. Framing news by choosing a certain narrative form with a certain word or point of view [12]. Framing theory is a continuation of the agenda setting concept popularized by Erving Goffman as a reference in analyzing media construction to influence public opinion. Simply put, news wraps up information that is designed in such a way that it is deliberately designed to provide a set of how the public interprets and understands an issue in the news [13].

On social media, opinions turn into information and circulate to influence the public which is then called public opinion [14]. How people begin to know and try to learn from an issue that then influences behavior, views and attitudes. Differences in perspective that have been influenced are mediated through the media by spreading news and triggering conflicts among the public or called opinion wars. Opinion wars and propaganda have a mutually influencing relationship. According to Lasswell, propaganda is a process of disseminating information to provide a certain influence to the public by indoctrinating and seeing a truth from a certain direction only [15], [16] if using information as a tool to influence the public, this strategy can be called an opinion war. The goal is none other than to win public opinion to achieve the interests of the war.

4.2 Opinion Wars: Media, Narratives, and Polarization

a. The role of the media in reporting the Palestine-Israel conflict

The media has a role that plays a role in shaping public opinion about the Palestine-Israel conflict. Media coverage is intervened by stakeholders based on politics, ideology, or biased views [17]. Media bias in reporting the Palestine-Israel conflict is very complex and influences public perception and understanding. In this case, the bias of the Western media towards Israel highlights Hamas rocket attacks on Israeli civilians while ignoring the conditions of Palestinians who suffer from Israeli airstrikes. On the other hand, Arab media are often biased towards Palestine by ignoring the violence carried out by Palestinian armed groups.

These differing narratives reflect how the media often displays bias based on geopolitical and ideological interests. This certainly exacerbates the polarization of global opinion and hinders efforts to reach a common understanding.

b. Social Media as a battlefield of opinion

On October 7, 2023, war broke out again and claimed many lives. Hamas fired thousands of rockets and Israel failed to protect itself, killing around 1,400 Israelis and injuring 4,562 others. Israel immediately responded to this as a state of war alert and attacked Hamas back by targeting public facilities such as hospitals, schools, places of worship that were suspected of being Hamas hideouts, killing thousands of victims, including

civilians [18]. As a result, 120 UN member states urged Israel and Palestine to resume a ceasefire. However, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in his speech rejected the ceasefire and would not surrender to terrorism and barbarism. Meanwhile, on the Hamas side, the attacks they carried out were a response to Israeli crimes that occurred at the Al-Aqsa Mosque complex.

Since the incident, the global community has been voicing their opinions by supporting their side (with the hashtags #FreePalestine and #IStandWithIsrael) and blaming the other side for this incident. Social media often represents views on conflict issues by reinforcing clichés and stereotypes of one party being responsible. The manipulation of opinion gives birth to propaganda to influence each other's reactions which can worsen the situation and distance us from a shared understanding [19].

4.3 The Impact of Polarization on Global Solidarity

Polarization of opinion on conflict is an obstacle that affects socio-global solidarity. That public opinion is created by an issue that is studied by society and information that influences attitudes, views and behavior [20][21]. Polarization in this case occurs when the global community is divided into two different poles viewing the issue of conflict based on views and is motivated by a strong commitment to an ideology that has an impact on the division of one camp with another. Therefore, polarization creates a group of global society that assumes that its principles are right and the opposing group is wrong (Wilson, 2005). In this case, groups that

support Israel are often based on historical and religious relations. While on the other hand, groups that support Palestine often ignore the complexity of the conflict. This black-and-white approach is found to cloud the view in highlighting humanitarian issues objectively. As a result, efforts to find solutions that contribute and are peaceful are often hampered by ideological tensions.

4.4 Opinion War on Humanitarian Issues

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has had a huge impact on civilians on both sides [22]. In the Palestinian territories (Gaza and the West Bank), civilians are often forcibly evicted and subjected to military violence resulting in many lives lost, infrastructure destroyed, and a humanitarian crisis. Meanwhile, on the Israeli side, they often face threats of military attacks and other forms of violence resulting in fear and trauma [23].

Of course, the suffering experienced by both sides has attracted international public attention, especially from a humanitarian perspective. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch often criticize violations of international law committed by both sides. However, the difference in scale and strength between Israel, which has sophisticated military equipment, and Palestine, which is limited to armed groups such as Hamas, often highlights the disparity in the level of suffering.

Israel's blockade of Gaza since 2007 has worsened the living conditions of more than two million people in the region. This blockade has caused a shortage of basic goods such as medicine, food, and fuel, creating a prolonged humanitarian crisis.

International efforts to deliver aid have often been blocked

by Israel, which believes that some of the aid could be used by Hamas to strengthen its position. In this context, global opinion is divided: some condemn the blockade as inhumane, while others justify it for the sake of Israel's security.

4.5 Opinion War on the Issue of Racism

a. Discriminatory Policies

Not a few activists or groups who call for human rights accuse Israel of implementing discriminatory policies against Palestinians. Strict restrictions on Palestinians to settle and carry out activities have not escaped monitoring [24]. In Israel itself, Arab-Palestinian citizens experience social discrimination in getting jobs, education, etc. 'Apartheid' is a term that refers to the separation of races or ethnicities that is famous in South Africa. This term is also often described for Israeli policies that differentiate ethnic groups with existing stereotypes. On the Palestinian side, Hamas calls on Palestinians around the world to kill Jews [25]. However, there is something odd about labeling Jews as a nation or as a religion.

b. Dehumanization

How both parties are labeled as 'racist' towards each other is also reflected in public discourse. The concept of dehumanization is often driven by several Israeli politicians against Palestinians on the

pretext that they are an inherent security threat. Meanwhile, several Palestinian groups also create rhetoric to promote hatred of Jews, even extending to anti-Semitism [26]. This dehumanizing language exacerbates the conflict by reducing empathy and reinforcing negative stereotypes. It also influences global opinion, where people tend to take sides based on group identity rather than broader humanitarian issues.

5. CONCLUSION

The war of opinions surrounding the Israel–Palestine conflict is shaped by media bias, narrative framing, and the rapid spread of information on social media, leading to deep global polarization. Traditional and digital media influence public perception by selectively presenting events, often reinforcing ideological divides. This polarization hampers global solidarity, as people align with opposing camps based on identity, religion, or politics, making it difficult to address the conflict objectively. The humanitarian toll on both Israelis and Palestinians is severe, yet responses are often filtered through biased lenses. Accusations of racism, apartheid, and antisemitism further deepen mistrust, with both sides dehumanizing each other. As a result, the pursuit of peace and understanding is overshadowed by propaganda, emotional partisanship, and fragmented truth.

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