Araştırma Makalesi / *Research Article*

Analyzing Hamas's Media Narrative Post October 7: Themes and Effects

7 Ekim Sonrası Hamas'ın Medya Anlatısının Analizi: Temalar ve Etkiler

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Abstract: On October 7, 2023, the military wing of Hamas, the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, launched an unprecedented operation against the Israeli apartheid, codenamed "Al-Aqsa Flood." This operation was not announced through leaks or journalistic scoops but through two professionally produced videos disseminated by the Brigades' media unit. One featured the now-martyred General Commander and head of the military wing, Mohammed al-Deif, declaring the commencement of the operation. The other depicted elite Qassam forces breaching Israeli settlements near Gaza. An incident that took place for the first time in the history of the struggle on said day. This paper seeks to analyze the narrative themes depicted by Hamas through their media on October 7 and in the following period. It investigates the intentions behind these choices and touches upon their political ramifications. Additionally, the paper assesses the counter-themes of Western media portrayed through their coverage of the ongoing war. Specifically exploring if any of it was reactionary to the main themes of Hamas.

Keywords: Hamas, Media Framing, Palestine, Resistance, Western Media Bias

Öz: 7 Ekim 2023 tarihinde, Hamas'ın askeri kanadı İzz al-Din el-Kassam Tugayları, İsrail apartheidine karşı "El-Aksa Sel" kod adlı eşi benzeri görülmemiş bir operasyon başlattı. Bu operasyon, sızıntılar veya gazetecilik haberciliği yoluyla değil, Tugayların kendi medya birimi tarafından yayımlanan iki profesyonelce hazırlanmış video ile duyuruldu. Bir videoda, artık şehit düşmüş olan Genel Komutan ve askeri kanat başkanı Muhammed el-Deif operasyonun başlangıcını ilan etti. Diğer videoda ise elit Kassam güçlerinin Gazze yakınlarındaki İsrail yerleşimlerine sızması gösterildi. Bu, mücadele tarihinde ilk kez gerçekleşen bir olaydı. Bu makale, Hamas'ın 7 Ekim günü ve sonrasında medyası aracılığıyla sunduğu anlatı temalarını analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu tercihlerin arkasındaki niyetleri araştırmakta ve politik yansımalarına değinmektedir. Ayrıca, makale, devam eden savaşla ilgili Batı medyasının karşı-temalarını da değerlendirmekte, özellikle Hamas'ın ana temalarına karşı tepki niteliğinde olup olmadığını incelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Hamas, Medya Çerçevelemesi, Filistin, Direniş, Batı Medyası Ön Yargısı

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1. Introduction

The preeminence of the Palestinian narrative during the Al-Aqsa Flood events is hard to refute. Mass mobilizations, media coverage, and shifts in political discourse all point to the widespread global solidarity that has been consistently mentioned in journalistic and diplomatic arenas. According to the Pew Research Center, the American public's views of Israel have turned more negative over the past three years. More than half of U.S. adults (53%) now express an unfavorable opinion of Israel, up from 42% in March 2022-before October 7, 2023 (Silver, 2025). However, it is difficult to classify an advancement in the media narrative war as a success when the scenes unfolding in reality remain brutal and horrifying. It is acknowledged that a significant shortcoming of this paper is its tendency to become detached from the lived realities on the ground. Despite this, it appears that this topic has not yet been sufficiently explored from a decolonial perspective. Dominant media narratives frequently mirror colonial power structures, molding perceptions of conflicts in the Global South. A decolonial approach explores which people get heard and which are systematically ignored within these spaces. In this context, the change in global opinion is not just a response to events, and a shift in it can help native voices seize control of the narrative that status quo groups have held for decades. (Said, 1981) For example, this specific change is often dismissed as a mere coincidence or seen simply as a result of the passage of time. Some even, perhaps unknowingly, attribute the shift in narrative to the Israeli government itself, arguing that it came as a reaction to the documented crimes of the Israeli military. While indeed such crimes have played a role, it remains essential and fair to analyze how the resistance movement's media choices have contributed to this shift in public opinion. Furthermore, this article is, in essence, a study of the power of media, specifically resistance media, and its significant role in contemporary politics.

2. Methodology

This research paper implements thematic content analysis as its methodology since this qualitative method assists researchers with identifying and analyzing patterns and themes in qualitative datasets. Through its systematic yet open nature, thematic content analysis becomes a method that enables researchers to organize detailed descriptions of complex datasets, which yield sensitive insights into studied topics. One of its key benefits derives from its ability to adjust to different research scenarios because thematic analysis enables the natural identification of themes as data emerges from sources. The methodology remains open-ended, which makes it optimal for studies requiring free discovery of different perspectives independent of predetermined theoretical limitations. The interpretive value of thematic content analysis increases its usefulness because researchers combine data summaries with interpretive frameworks

that recognize complex depth in qualitative information. Using thematic content analysis, researchers eliminate one-dimensional analysis and simplistic interpretations of data. This methodology is particularly well-suited to the topic at hand, given the sensitive and layered nature of the Palestinian cause and the complex media narratives surrounding it. It accepts the complex nature of the issue by investigating multiple elements that create an extensive and analytically aware understanding. The analysis benefits from staying grounded in contextual learning and the original lived experiences showcased in media content. This approach leads to authentic knowledge acquisition from the available material.

In short, qualitative thematic analysis is used to study Hamas's approach to media during the Al-Aqsa Flood events. The analysis looks at events from October 7, 2023, to January 15, 2025 (The date of the first ceasefire agreement that Israel later breached), and the period is divided into five phases to highlight shifts in narrative themes. Each phase is around 3 months. At each stage, all speeches made by Abu Ubaidah, the spokesperson of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, were transcribed and reviewed to find recurring words and codes that could indicate a broader theme. Two formal written statements publicly released by Hamas were also analyzed for each phase to understand the narrative variations between different media forms. A detailed keyword search on Twitter was conducted using posts from both CNN and BBC to assess international reception. Representing American and British media perspectives, respectively.

This research aspires to achieve a rich, nuanced, and critically engaged account of the shifting media narratives surrounding the Palestinian cause, with particular attention to the contributions and themes of the resistance movement.

3. Literature Review

As mentioned before, this research aims to be a step towards closing the gap in the literature regarding studying the strategies behind Hamas's media narrative through a decolonial lens. It proposes that the dismissal of the effect of these strategies on real-world political and public opinion shifts should be mediated. Numerous articles have painted the picture of this research. However, three elements shaped its primary structure. The first article is "From jihad to resistance: The evolution of Hamas's discourse in the mobilization framework". The main point deducted from this article was also how the dynamics of Hamas's discourse are shaped by the environment in which the movement operates and how Hamas's master frames are not fixed or unchanging; instead, they are in a constant process of being reshaped, challenged, replaced, and redefined (Alsoos, 2021). This helps prove how important and valid it is to study the

changes happening post-October 7 in Hamas's media brain and not discard the flexibility shown by the movement. The second article is "Understanding October 7 through Hamas's adaptability and leadership structure". While this article does not focus on the media work of Hamas, it provides excellent insight into the flexibility of the movement. It can reference the claim that media narrative shifts are an extension of the political framework changes. In addition, Hamoud has provided content regarding how the adaptability of Hamas to socio-political changes has not made it identify with the status quo of mainstream politics (Hamoud, 2024). The third article is "Hamas charter: Changes and principles". This paper provided an objective context for the versatility aspect mentioned above. This is done by analyzing the changes between Hamas's old and new charters and studying what conditions led to such changes (Adwan, 2019).

Although these articles are not primarily focused on our research question, they nonetheless offer valuable insights into the underlying predispositions of this study. They also help validate several key issues under examination, while contributing essential objective knowledge needed to complete the research.

4. Overarching Narrative Trends

Before we proceed with the close-up thematic analysis of each stage, we need to take the chance to step back and gaze at the large image that emerges when we examine the material. There are definite trends in Abu Ubaidah's speeches and the official statements of the movement, not only in the tone and vocabulary they employ, but also in the strategic priorities that they indicate. These larger patterns suggest a strategy for rendering the resistance politically credible, morally justifiable, and historically grounded in past struggle and present need. These larger patterns place the more focused themes within the context of a resistance movement that is reacting to and attempting to determine how people speak about their cause within the regional and international conversation. One of the most significant themes in both Hamas speeches and official statements has been the interpretation of the historical and regional significance of the war. This struggle is repeatedly rendered not as an event but as a critical moment, "a turning point" in the history of the Palestinian struggle. Unlike former confrontations, in this war, the outcome is seen as one that goes beyond Palestine and influences the future of a whole region. The messaging is designed to emphasize that Palestine's destiny is inextricably bound to the greater Arab and Islamic world, raising the war's symbolic and strategic value. Another recurring theme is the critique of the religious fanaticism underpinning the Zionist story. Hamas repeatedly denounces the religious rationalizations that the Israeli state cites to legitimize violence and occupation, not as a critique of faith itself, but to expose what it views as the hypocrisy of a narrative

that casts Muslim resistance as inherently irrational or fanatical. This narrative is supported by the Israeli side's usage of terms such as "children of light" and "children of darkness," as they highlight how the religious framing originates from the Israeli side, thereby contesting Western portrayals that depict the conflict as a religious war instigated by Muslims. This criticism is also extended to the Western media and political arenas, which, as Edward Said shows in Covering Islam, usually neglects to mention the religious nature of Israel or its messianic arguments for taking territory. Muslim resistance, however, is commonly explained in orientalist tropes of backwardness or religious extremism. In this narrative, Israel is portrayed as a bastion of Western modernity and enlightened governance in the midst of an otherwise "uncivilized" Middle East. This narrative glosses over the colonial character of the conflict at stake and legitimizes Israel's alliances with regional dictatorships that further its geopolitical aims. This vicious loop perpetuates itself, a cycle of oppression that, according to Hamas's media discourse, has yet to be broken.

5. Themes and Evolution: Hamas

During the first phase of the timeline, Abu Obeida delivered five speeches. This number decreased to three in both the second and third phases. In the fourth phase, he issued only one speech. Moreover, during the fifth phase, no speeches were delivered. However, two additional speeches were released shortly after the end of the fifth phase, both addressing developments related to the ceasefire agreement.

5.1. A Sacred Struggle: Faith, History, and Identity

The central theme of the first stage (as defined in this study as spanning from October 7, 2023, to January 7, 2024) is historical and religious framing in the media discourse of Hamas. This theme is different from the references to Zionist religious justification raised above, in that it operates essentially as a rhetorical tool for mobilizing and strengthening the collective. Religious language was consistent in this phase, with Qur'anic verses recited in almost every speech, usually at the beginning and then again during the speech. Notably, Hamas's media output did not attempt to secularize or obscure its Islamic foundations in the interest of reaching broader audiences. On the contrary, speeches by Abu Obeida during this phase were unequivocal in their reliance on faith-based language. For example, the word "victory" was mentioned significantly but rarely singularly, usually in spiritual expressions like "victory from Allah" or "Allah's victory". There was also a repeated call to historical memory, drawing on periods of earlier waves of resistance in both Palestinian and wider regional history. These historical references sought to situate the events of October 7 and what followed as part of an extended tradition of resistance rather than an exceptional moment that exists in a

vacuum. This focus might be seen as an attempt to establish the conflict in a broader historical political context, producing a narrative of substance and unity for its supporters. Therefore, religious and historical framing were a predominant feature in the movement's messaging in the early stages of the conflict.

5.2. Fracturing the Enemy: Internal Israeli Tensions in Resistance Media

The second phase (January 8–April 7, 2024) started with the movement increasingly aiming at calculated political messaging and sophisticated psychological warfare. Unlike the first stage, which was more about rooting the resistance in its historical and religious tradition, this stage had a more fine-tuned sense of timing, rhetoric, and audience. The speeches, at this time, were not only aimed at internal mobilization but also addressed the Israeli public itself, revealing an acute awareness of the fractures within Israeli society. With popular demonstrations breaking out in Tel Aviv around the fate of captured Israelis and the larger failure of the Netanyahu government to achieve its "goals", Abu Ubaida reshaped the tone accordingly. The resistance began to capitalize on this moment of political unrest, repeatedly referencing the growing mistrust between the Israeli public and its leadership. His speeches were filled with language that emphasized government failure, moral decline, and internal chaos in Israeli politics, not merely as temporary setbacks but as manifestations of long-term instability. One of the more noticeable features of the psychological dimension in this stage was the employment of religiously loaded references directed for the purpose of disorienting Israeli collective memory and historical confidence. A prominent theme was the mentioning of the so-called "curse of the eighth decade", a messianic theory that no Jewish state in history has lasted more than 80 years. In citing this superstition, the resistance subtly positioned the ongoing war as the unraveling of Zionist continuity, feeding into pre-existing anxieties within Israeli society. This strategy was not merely rhetorical; it was based on a deeper comprehension of how fear, doubt, and historical consciousness interpenetrate during an extended crisis. The deliberate use of such themes suggests a dual strategy: Utilizing speeches to reaffirm a message of Palestinian steadfastness to their own public, while also trying to undermine the Israeli will from the inside. Rather than simply taking up external struggle, media discourse in this time of war turned into a psychological war zone, playing with language, timing, and images to shake the enemy's confidence to its foundations.

5.3. Exposing Double Standards: The West's Moral Dissonance

The phase reflects the persistent effort to take the moral high ground in the context of a war growing ever more brutal, and to further show, according to them, the hypocrisy and double standards of the West. During this period, the resistance discourse escalates

in denouncing the attacks on civilians, drawing attention to the disproportionality of the violence and the suffering of Palestinians under siege. The language of ethnic cleansing, of famine and genocide was consistently invoked to emphasize how the violence was systemic and thus reframe the conflict as a human rights rather than a security issue. With the comparisons to Nazism, the speakers attempt to flip the dominant historical narrative, in which Israel is the post-Holocaust savior, into one where it is instead the contemporary villain. This is a use of rhetoric to induce moral imagery and a play against Western historical consciousness. Forcing uncomfortable parallels. "Why is the world, particularly the West, tolerating something so reminiscent of the atrocities it claims to have overcome?" In the process, Hamas's media painted the Western governments, in particular the U.S., as enablers of these violations through their unwavering backing of Israel. A frequently referenced theme of the discourse is the failure of the United Nations and the selective implementation of international law; all that creates a larger narrative of Western hypocrisy. A noteworthy distinction was also made between Western governments and their people: in one speech, the resistance thanked the people of the United States for their student-led protests, signaling an attempt to appeal to the people themselves, and quasi-representing the Western populace as an ally against the policies of its own governments. This conscious separation cements the idea that justice for Palestine is a global issue.

5.4. Resistance under Fire: Asymmetry and Resilience in War

A notable shift post October 7 in media messaging revolved around paying more attention to events happening on the battlefield and how the fighting was asymmetrical. Al-Qassam Brigades' messages frequently pointed out the massive difference between Israel's advanced equipment and the Palestinian soldiers' technical limitations. The coverage highlighted how dedicated and tough the fighters in Gaza were, showing that material resources were not enough to stop them from fighting. Highlight how this endurance came from solid ideology and loyalty to their nation and faith. In contrast, the depiction of Israeli soldiers emphasized difficulty in the incising motif, as stories featured them hesitating, retreating, or lacking confidence during battles. This strategy aimed to present the struggle not only as an issue of armed forces but also as motivation and determination, focusing on the gap between the ideals of each side. It showed that being strong in a war involves having better equipment, handling pressure, and staying united. It is connected with the psychological techniques used in the earlier phase of the operation. By arguing that Israeli soldiers lacked morale and motivation, the message played into existing Israeli society's anxieties around the army's ability to fight and continue the war without motive or unity.

5.5. The Absent "Ally": Shifting Tones toward the Arab World

A rhetorical push and pull between confrontation and appeal was the media's dual approach to dealing with the Arab world during this time. On the one hand, terms like betrayal, cowardice, and collusion were used repeatedly to criticize Arab governments for their inaction, silence, or complicity. These criticisms served as a pressure tactic to highlight the discrepancy between the official state policies and the expectations of their constituents; they were not only symbolic. However, in addition to this accusatory tone, the rhetoric occasionally changed to invoke a common Arab and Islamic identity, drawing on a vast reservoir of historical, religious, and cultural unity to motivate action and solidarity. Terms such as honor, duty, and shared destiny were used to arouse collective memory and emotional resonance. Notably, specific, action-oriented calls were made as part of this mobilization effort rather than merely offering general encouragement. Some days were set aside for particular types of activism: Days for worldwide protests were publicized, others were tasked with launching a digital campaign, and still others were presented as days of communal prayer, encouraging people to congregate in mosques throughout the region. This methodical advice demonstrates a concerted effort to transform popular opinion into coordinated political and symbolic action. A media discourse that is keenly aware of the changing political landscape in the Arab world, one that aims to exert pressure on leadership while igniting public will, is revealed by the deliberate.

6. Themes and Narratives: Western Media

Close examination of Western media and Twitter discourse, especially from outlets such as CNN and BBC. Reveals persistent framing patterns that obscure the realities of the war and perpetuate a narrative imbalance. One of the most striking elements is what might be described as "cemetery framing", where the focus is often placed on the physical destruction or the number of casualties in a detached, almost abstracted manner, rather than engaging with the human and political context of those deaths. Terms like "buildings leveled" or "casualties reported in Gaza" are typical, but they seldom assign agency or responsibility, especially when it comes to Israeli strikes. This is compounded by the phenomenon of Palestinian people and voices being dehumanized, in which victims often appear in passive constructions ("people died", "families were displaced"), and in which Palestinians are characterized more as recipients of tragedy than as political agents or subjects with grievances. There is also a clear track record of denial or refusal to recognize war crimes in the face of overwhelming evidence. Words like "alleged" or "disputed" are commonly used, most especially when it comes to Israeli actions, but the same care is not applied when accusing Hamas of acts of violence. Probably most indicative, however, is the blatant asymmetry of sourcing and quotation.

In the data analyzed, no single tweet from either BBC or CNN contained verbatim quotes of any kind from any Hamas official, whether military or political. Their views were partially distilled, often rephrased in delegitimizing terms. In striking contrast, mentions of the Israeli story were amplified by always including direct verbatim quotes from senior officials such as the Israeli Prime Minister, President, military spokespeople, and former officials. This tactic alone is actively giving one side of the battle a voice and a source of legitimacy, while silencing the other, reinforcing a power imbalance in representation. The result is a media discourse that not only fails to provide equal journalistic ground but also contributes, willingly or not, to the broader devaluation of Palestinian narratives in the global public sphere.

7. Conclusion

This study has examined the evolving media narratives employed by Hamas during and after the October 7, 2023, Al-Aqsa Flood operation, highlighting how the movement's media strategy strategically intertwines religious, historical, psychological, and political themes to shape both internal and external perceptions of the conflict. From a decolonial perspective, it demonstrated how the Hamas media output attempts to project a morally legitimate and politically credible message of resistance, contesting mainstream Western representations and highlighting inconsistencies in Israeli society and international reactions. From framing the battle as a sacred one rooted in faith and history, to engaging in psychological warfare to divide the Israeli society, to highlighting the double standards of the West, as well as highlighting its resilience in asymmetrical warfare and speaking to the perceived betrayal by the Arab governments, the thematic shifts across the five phases illustrate the adaptability and sophistication of Hamas's media strategy to shifting political and social conditions. Simultaneously, the counter-narratives presented by Western media, with their tendency toward abstracted casualty reporting and detachment from the lived realities and political dimensions of the conflict, reflect ongoing structural imbalances in how the Palestinian cause is represented globally. Finally, the study highlights the importance of resistance media in challenging hegemonic discourses and framing international public opinion. It invites an even stronger connection with the voices of marginalised actors in media studies and conflict analysis. Emphasizing that shifts in global discourse are not merely reactive but are also driven by strategic communication efforts from within the resistance itself. As the conflict changes over time, understanding these narrative lines is essential for understanding the larger political and humanitarian consequences at stake.

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