Comparing the Conflict Narrative of Palestinian and Israeli Journalists through Instagram Posts: A Multimodal Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is visually and ideologically framed in Instagram posts by two prominent journalists, Motaz Azaiza from Palestine and Gili Yaari from Israel. Drawing on Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar, the research adopts a qualitative multimodal discourse analysis to examine the representational, interactive, and compositional meanings embedded in the journalists' posts. This research also critically engages with UN Resolutions 242 and 338 as a political backdrop, assessing how grassroots visual narratives align with or critique the principles of these resolutions and the peacekeeping role of the UN. Ten Instagram posts (five from each journalist) were selected based on their multimodal richness, thematic relevance, and audience engagement. The analysis reveals stark contrasts in how each side represents victimhood, agency, and justice. Motaz Azaiza's content foregrounds the suffering of civilians in Gaza, using emotionally charged imagery, captions, and direct appeals to the global conscience. Conversely, Gili Yaari's posts emphasizes national solidarity, civic protest, and hostages' rights, presenting a more structured and institutionally aligned narrative. The findings show that while UN Resolutions 242 and 338 call for peace, withdrawal, and negotiation, they are largely absent from real-world implementation and visual representations. This study contributes to the broader discourse on visual activism, digital counter-narratives, and the growing importance of individual agency in shaping the global understanding of conflict on social media.

Keywords: Israel–Palestine Conflict, UN Resolutions 242 and 338, Instagram Journalism, Visual Activism

INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, social media has become a powerful tool for shaping public discourse, particularly in the context of conflict and human rights violations (Howard and Parks, 2012). The ability to share real-time updates, images, and narratives has revolutionized how global audiences engage with ongoing crises. Activists, journalists, and individuals use these platforms to challenge mainstream media narratives, document real-life experiences, and amplify marginalized voices (Papacharissi, 2015). Among these digital tools, multimodal communication integrates visual, textual, and interactive elements that play a crucial role in influencing perceptions and mobilizing support (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001). Consequently, the study of social media activism has gained increasing attention, particularly regarding its capacity to challenge dominant geopolitical narratives and institutional frameworks such as UN resolutions (Chouliaraki & Blaagaard, 2013).

One of the most prolonged and contentious geopolitical struggles is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which has persisted for decades despite various international peace efforts (Khalidi, 2020). The United Nations (UN) has played a leading role in mediating the conflict, with resolutions such as 242 and 338 serving as key frameworks for peace negotiations (Farsakh, 2016). These United Nations resolutions emphasize the withdrawal of Israeli forces from occupied territories and the recognition of state sovereignty, but their implementation has been met with significant challenges. The continued expansion of Israeli settlements, military operations, and blockade of Gaza have called into question the effectiveness of these legal instruments, which were presented by the United Nations (Rababah & Hamdan, 2019).

In response to institutional documentation, grassroots activism has emerged as a powerful opposing force, leveraging digital platforms to provide alternative narratives (Gerbaudo, 2012). This study conducts a comparative multimodal analysis of Instagram content from two journalists: Motaz Azaiza, a Palestinian journalist based in Gaza, capturing all the events happening there, and Gili Yaari, an Israeli photojournalist, to examine how their narratives frame the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Through the strategic use of multimodal elements, such as powerful imagery, emotionally charged captions, and audience engagement, both journalists construct distinct narratives that either align with or challenge UN resolutions and their perceived effectiveness.

This study aims to analyze the interplay between visual and textual content in Motaz Azaiza and Gili Yaari's Instagram content to assess how their work critiques the shortcomings of UN Resolutions 242 and 338 while shaping global perceptions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This study contributes to the broader discussions on social media activism, digital storytelling, and the role of individual agency in challenging geopolitical narratives. Ultimately, this research provides insights into how visual media serves as an important tool for political critique, grassroots advocacy, and the documentation of lived experiences in conflict zones through the following questions:

- How do Motaz Azaiza and Gili Yaari use multimodal elements to frame the Israel-Palestine conflict?

- How do the multimodal elements in Motaz Azaiza and Gili Yaari's Instagram content align with or diverge from the UN resolutions on Palestine?

- In what ways do Motaz Azaiza and Gili Yaari's posts reflect or challenge the perceived effectiveness of UN peacekeeping efforts in the region?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Israeli–Palestinian conflict has been widely studied through the lens of media analysis, focusing on how different platforms represent both sides. A common thread among these studies is the use of multimodal and critical discourse analyses to understand and analyze how language and images work together to construct specific narratives. These analytical approaches provide insights into how social media constructs ideological positions and shapes public perception. However, these studies have examined media framing and often overlooked how grassroots journalists on social media create counter-narratives that challenge the institutional discourses. This study fills this gap by analyzing how Instagram, as a non-traditional media platform, is widely used by independent journalists to critique dominant narratives surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Shreim (2014) analyzed how the BBC and Al Jazeera reported on the 2009 UNRWA school attack in Gaza, revealing how media framing differs based on institutional and political alignment. His study highlights how Al Jazeera emphasized the humanitarian crisis, while the BBC maintained a more neutral stance,

illustrating the role of linguistic and visual choices in shaping audience interpretation, perceptions, and narrative building. The contrast in reporting styles underscores the broader issue of selective representation in conflict journalism. While this study provides valuable insights into mainstream media bias, it does not address how individuals outside traditional media construct alternative narratives. This study bridges this gap by focusing on how independent journalists such as Motaz Azaiza and Gili Yaari use Instagram to provide alternative perspectives that challenge or reinforce mainstream media representations.

Further expanding on this research idea, Jungblut and Zakareviciute (2019) examined the 2014 Israel-Gaza war, focusing on both textual and visual elements in online news articles. While textual content often aimed for neutrality, their research found that images were more emotionally charged, depicting destruction and civilian suffering. This finding supports the argument that visual elements can intensify the emotional impact of a news story, sometimes contradicting or reinforcing the written narratives. However, this study primarily focuses on institutional media and does not explore how individuals use visual media to shape their narrative. This study addresses this limitation by analyzing how grassroots journalists leverage multimodal storytelling on Instagram to evoke emotions and construct alternative narratives about the conflict.

Social media further complicates the media representation landscape. Amer (2024) investigated Twitter narratives surrounding Hamas and Israel and analyzed the role of hashtags in constructing the digital discourse. His findings revealed that Twitter serves as a battleground for competing narratives, with posts alternately framing Hamas as freedom fighters or terrorists. This study also highlights social media censorship, particularly in cases where pro-Palestinian content is removed or suppressed, raising questions about the neutrality of the digital platforms. While this study highlights the importance of social media in shaping narratives, it focuses primarily on Twitter. This study extends this analysis by examining Instagram as a platform for visual activism, where images, captions, and audience engagement contribute to shaping global perceptions.

El Damanhoury, Saleh, and Lebovic (2025) contributed to this discussion by comparing Al Jazeera English (AJE) and the BBC's coverage of the 2023 Gaza war. Their study found that AJE prioritized Palestinian voices and the humanitarian impact of the conflict, whereas the BBC was more cautious in its language and avoided directly blaming Israel. This comparison demonstrates how media outlets reflect the political and cultural contexts in which they operate, influencing their construction of narratives of war and suffering. While this research offers an important comparative analysis of institutional media, it does not account for how independent journalists construct competing narratives on social media. This study fills this gap by providing a comparative multimodal analysis of independent journalists from both sides of the conflict and analyzing how their Instagram content frames the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in relation to UN peacekeeping efforts.

Looking beyond Western media, Adawiyah, Junining, and Tabiati (2020) analyzed regional newspapers, Daily Sabah (Turkey) and Iran Daily (Iran), using a multimodal critical discourse analysis. Their study found that both newspapers framed Palestinians as victims and freedom fighters, while presenting Israelis as aggressors. The use of specific headlines, emotionally evocative images, and descriptions of violence reinforced these perceptions. This aligns with Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) argument that images are ideological tools that shape meaning as powerfully as words. While this study effectively demonstrates how regional media frame the conflict, it does not explore how digital platforms enable individuals to construct narratives outside state-controlled media. This study fills this gap by analyzing how Instagram enables journalists to create real-time, independent narratives that challenge institutional frameworks such as UN resolutions.

These studies collectively reveal that media coverage of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is deeply influenced by political, cultural, and ideological factors. The framing of events through linguistic and visual choices not only informs public understanding but also reinforces existing biases. While existing research has examined institutional media and political discourse, this study extends the conversation by focusing on grassroots journalism on Instagram and its role in challenging dominant narratives. Through a comparative multimodal analysis of Motaz Azaiza and Gili Yaari's Instagram content, this study explores how independent journalists from opposing perspectives use visuals, text, and interactive engagement to challenge or reinforce institutional narratives, thus filling a critical gap in social media discourse analysis.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach grounded in Multimodal Discourse Theory (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) to interpret how images, captions, and hashtags on Instagram construct narratives about the Israel–Palestine conflict and UN Resolutions 242 and 338. This approach allows for a detailed analysis of how semiotic resources convey ideology, activism, and resistance in digital journalism. Drawing on Kress and Van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar, the study analyzes meaning through three meta-functions: Representational, Interactive, and Compositional. UN Resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) are used as political and legal reference points, respectively. Resolution 242 demands Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories, while 338 calls for a ceasefire and for negotiations. These serve as benchmarks for evaluating whether visual narratives align with or challenge UN peace discourse.

The dataset consisted of Instagram posts from two journalists documenting the 2024 conflict, Motaz Azaiza (Palestinian) and Gili Yaari (Israeli). A purposive sample of 10 posts (five from each) was selected from January 2024 to January 2025 based on their engagement, thematic relevance, and multimodal richness. Posts were chosen for relevance (direct or indirect reference to UN Resolutions 242 and 338), multimodality (combination of visuals, captions, and hashtags), engagement (significant likes, comments, and shares), and recency (coverage of current conflict developments in the media). Hashtags such as #FreePalestine and #StandWithIsrael were analyzed as ideological and organizational tools. They amplify visibility, shape global conversations, and reveal audience alignment and divisions. Engagement levels indicate the reach and emotional resonance of the narratives in this study. The data were analyzed using a coding sheet based on Kress and Van Leeuwen's meta-functions (Appendix A).

DATA ANALYSIS

This section presents a multimodal visual analysis of four major events (Jabalia Displacement Corridor, Rafah Evacuation Order, Tel Aviv Hostage Protests, and Raanana Bombing Aftermath) from the 2024 Israel–Palestine conflict, as represented through Instagram posts by Palestinian and Israeli photojournalists. Drawing on Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar framework, this section examines how these images communicate narratives of trauma, displacement, protests, and national identity through their representational, interactive, and compositional elements. The analysis incorporates perspectives from both sides of this conflict. This section aims to approach these visual texts with analytical objectivity, acknowledging both the civilian cost of military retaliation in Gaza and the social and political consequences of Hamas's counterattacks in Israel. Together, these four events provide a balanced and comparative lens on Instagram-based visuals. The analysis seeks to remain attentive to the emotional, ideological, and symbolic functions of each image.

Post by Motaz Azaiza (Palestinian)

Rafah Has Been Ordered to Evacuate

This Instagram post combines cartographic representation, urgent typography, and captioning to communicate an emergency military order to evacuate the Palestinian city of Rafah. It fuses visual, verbal, and spatial semiotics.
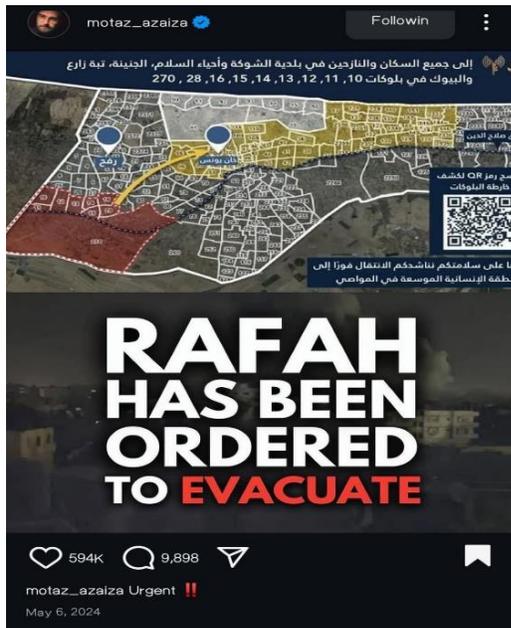
Caption Analysis

The map layout depicts the fragmented urban geography of Rafah and Khan Younis, which are outlined in numbered blocks. Red zones mark immediate danger areas and signal evacuation; yellow zones indicate temporary relocation or "safe" areas; and white spaces suggest relative neutrality. The arrows moving from Rafah to Khan Younis symbolize forced displacement, portraying civilians' involuntary movement. A QR code implies digital surveillance and coordination, linking technology with military control, whereas blue circular icons mark the key urban centers. A prominent Arabic banner addresses residents of specific Rafah neighborhoods, functioning as a directive speech act and military order framed as a public announcement, demonstrating spatial and bureaucratic control. The lower section's bold English text, *"RAFAH HAS BEEN ORDERED TO EVACUATE,"* uses all-caps typography, white and red colors, and a stark black background to evoke alarm and urgency. The red "EVACUATE" visually connotes crisis and blood, intensifying the viewer's emotional response. Motaz Azaiza's caption, "Urgent!!," reinforces immediacy through minimalism and digital semiotics, with red exclamation marks amplifying an emergency tone. Dated May 6, 2024, during the Rafah ground invasion, the post's massive engagement (594 K likes, nearly 10 K comments) exemplifies how Instagram functions as a space of digital witnessing, where visual urgency translates into global solidarity and online activism.

Visual Analysis

Representational Metafunction: The map signifies structured violence, not chaos, but the planned spatial cleansing of the area. The arrows represent institutionalized control guiding civilian flow. No people are

shown**,** but the human narrative is implied through absence**,** a discursive strategy that centers on systemic displacement rather than individual tragedy.

Interactive Metafunction: There is no gaze vector; therefore, the viewer is positioned as an external agent or digital witness, not a participant. This distant, satellite-like perspective encourages a surveillance viewpoint, suggesting that this is how authorities or the world might view Gaza through top-down maps rather than ground-level suffering.

Compositional Metafunction: Salience is achieved through a sharp contrast between the map and the dark lower half using red, yellow, and white color blocks. The evacuation message placed in the lower third heightens urgency. Framing divides the image into two zones: the upper map symbolizes logic and order, whereas the lower text evokes panic, creating a striking contrast between rationality and emotional distress.

Jabalia camp

The image shows a large group of displaced Palestinians walking in single file through rubble-strewn ruins. A visible Israeli tank (Merkava-type) was stationed on the right side of the image. The route is lined with destroyed buildings on both sides. The photo was taken from an aerial or elevated perspective, providing a top-down surveillance view.
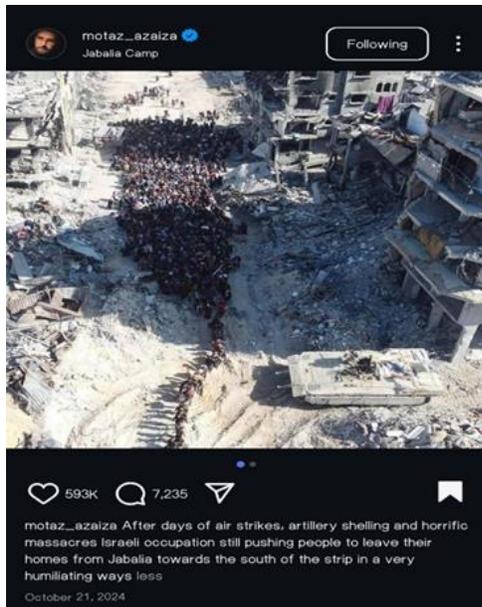
Caption Analysis

The caption employs a charged lexicon of horror: "air strikes," "shelling," and "massacres" to depict relentless violence, while the phrase "still pushing people" conveys ongoing coercion and the absence of choice. The word "humiliating" adds emotional intensity, emphasizing dehumanization. Ideologically, the discourse is counter-hegemonic, rejecting official Israeli claims of evacuation for safety and reframing the act as forced displacement under duress, thus reinforcing Palestinian victimhood and moral injustice.

Visual Analysis

Representational Metafunction: The image portrays a displacement scene in which civilians move from Jabalia in the north to the south under coercive circumstances. The densely packed civilians at the center appear organized yet helpless, emphasizing their vulnerability. An Israeli tank positioned higher and overseeing Palestinian movements symbolizes militarized domination and control over the Palestinians. The setting, a devastated Jabalia Camp filled with debris and flattened buildings, underscores the context of war rather than a normal life. This action represents forced displacement rather than voluntary migration, as civilians move along constrained paths flanked by a military presence.

Interactive Metafunction: The image employs no direct eye contact, as all figures face away or keep their heads bowed, positioning the viewer as a silent observer rather than a participant and evoking feelings of guilt and helplessness. Captured from a long-distance aerial perspective, the shot adopts a surveillance-like view typical of military or documentary imagery, emphasizing the vast scale of displacement while erasing individual identities. The high angle further reinforces powerlessness among the displaced civilians,

Compositional Metafunction: The image's composition conveys forced displacement through its spatial hierarchy: the top shows a mass of people amid destruction, while the bottom reveals the tank and caption exposing coercion, reinforcing Motaz's critique. Salience emerges from the contrast between the crowd, the tank, and the rubble, with a diagonal line leading the viewer's gaze upward. The framing places both subjects within a confined space, where the ruined buildings act as barriers, visually evoking a sense of oppression and entrapment in the viewer.

 Gaza Strip

The image depicts a lifeless child, severely injured and covered in blood and dust, being carried by an adult's hands to an ambulance. The word "AMBU" (from "AMBULANCE") is partially visible in the background, anchoring the ad's emergency setting to the hospital. The child's body is limp, bloodied, and held upside down, her face pale, eyes half-open, a visual of violent death and innocence lost. The composition is raw, direct, and emotionally shattering.

Caption Analysis

The phrase transforms personal memory into collective testimony; "I cannot forget" turns trauma into a moral statement rather than private grief. Referencing "international media" situates the image within the global discourse of witnessing and framing it as a universal emblem of Palestinian suffering. The ellipsis conveys silence and incompleteness, echoing unresolved pain and the absence of justice.

Visual Analysis

Representational Metafunction: The image shows an action in which an unseen rescuer carries a lifeless child, symbolizing the human cost of war and civilian vulnerability. The child embodies innocence and loss, while the faceless hands convey urgency and collective despair. The ambulance in the background represents an institutional response but underscores its tragic futility. The child's bloodied, dust-covered body and limp posture reflect the violent impact, while the chaotic setting and the presence of emergency responders emphasize the aftermath of an airstrike and the ongoing crisis.

Interactive Metafunction: The image's gaze, though lacking direct eye contact, captures attention through the child's half-open eyes and haunting expression, drawing viewers into an involuntary act of witnessing that provokes both empathy and moral discomfort in them. The close-up shot creates intimacy and confrontation, removing all contextual distance and compelling focus on the child's fragile form. Taken at eye level, the angle establishes visual equality between the viewer and victim, evoking shared humanity and deep sorrow rather than detached pity.

Compositional Metafunction: The child, positioned at the center of the image, becomes both the visual and emotional core, while the surrounding adult hands, anonymous and partial, symbolize a collective yet distant intervention. The sharp contrast between blood and pale skin, and the shadow heightens salience, making the child's body and face unavoidable focal points that signify violence and urgency. The tight framing, devoid of a horizon or openness, generates a sense of confinement, mirroring the civilian entrapment within Gaza's relentless conflict.

Worldwide

The image depicts a person caught in a devastating fire surrounded by collapsing household items, pillows, furniture, and torn fabric. The individual appears to be either on fire or severely threatened by it, seated, or trapped in a reclined position. The arms are raised upward in an involuntary reflex, possibly shielding the face or caught in mid-motion during a moment of agony. The inferno dominates the entire frame, glowing orange-yellow and evoking an apocalypse rather than mere destruction.

Discursive and Ideological Analysis

This image wordlessly embodies the erasure of home, safety, and humanity, rejecting sanitized notions like "collateral damage." It stands as a stark visual counter-narrative to political euphemisms. The domestic setting and unarmed victim defy claims of "surgical" warfare; the burning figure becomes a symbol of collective suffering and resistance, representing a people repeatedly consumed by conflict with no refuge.

Visual Analysis

Representational Metafunction: The image shows a central human figure engulfed in flames, seated and partially turned away, embodying fear and helplessness. The faceless, skull-like head heightens dehumanization, while burned objects, such as mattresses and fabric, evoke a once safe home that is now destroyed. Fire acts as a violent force, turning the victim into both the subject and witness, and pulling viewers into emotional complicity. The confined, flame-filled space suggests the bombing of a civilian home, transforming a place of life into a death zone.

Interactive Metafunction: The figure's face is turned away or obscured by flames, creating a non-demand image that does not meet the viewer's gaze but compels emotional engagement. The close, intimate shot, likely captured during or immediately after the strike, intensifies the sense of intrusion into a private and tragic event. The slightly elevated angle positions the viewer as a powerless spectator, close enough to witness the suffering but unable to intervene, evoking feelings of guilt and helpless empathy.

Compositional Metafunction: The human figure at the center embodies suffering amid the surrounding flames and chaos. The strong contrast between the dark silhouettes and fiery tones intensifies the pain and danger. The burnt objects and confined setting suggest a domestic space that was violently destroyed during the fire. With no visible escape or boundaries, the image feels claustrophobic, reflecting the victim's inescapable fate and the war's consuming nature.

Raanana Bombing

This is a still frame from a video (reel) posted by Motaz Azaiza in Gaza. It shows a lifeless child's body, severely injured, covered in dust and blood, lying amidst the rubble. A visibly emotional journalist or rescuer kneels beside the body, one hand clutching his chest and the other touching the child gently. Chaos in the background: smoke, damaged buildings, and people moving frantically around.

Caption Analysis

The caption, *"I don't know why I'm reposting this…"* acts as an internal monologue showing emotional exhaustion rather than a political stance. Unlike earlier posts with explicit framing, this post foregrounds raw emotion. Using Instagram Reels, a platform for entertainment, creates a striking moral disruption, while the "original audio" enhances realism. The child's silent body stands as a collective symbol of suffering, countering the visual norms that erase victims.

Visual analysis

Representational Metafunction: The image centers on two participants: the dead child and a kneeling man. The child symbolizes destroyed innocence, while the man in a press vest embodies both witness and mourner, emotionally and physically engaged with the tragedy. The scene represents a reactive process, focusing on the man's grief and embodied pain rather than physical action, illustrating how witnessing it becomes a form of suffering.

Interactive Metafunction: There is no direct gaze from any participant, which objectifies the tragedy and casts the viewer as a silent witness to the violence. The close-up framing of the child's body creates intense emotional proximity, denying the viewer distance or detachment. Shot from a high, slightly tilted angle, the image positions the viewer with the power to see but not to act, an unsettling reminder of helpless observation amid the unbearable loss.

Compositional Metafunction: The child lies at the lower center, with the man bending toward him, evoking a guardian-like figure in a state of mourning. Rubble and smoke surround them, situating human loss amid total devastation. The child's wounds and gray skin draw immediate focus, while the man's posture anchors this emotional weight. Chaotic framing, without clear separation, blurs the line between life and death, innocence and violence.

Post by Gili Yaari (Israeli)

Tel Aviv

This photo was taken by Gili Yaari, a verified Israeli photojournalist, showing a peaceful public demonstration in Tel Aviv, Israel. The participants' relatives and supporters of hostages hold signs with messages such as:

"BRING DAFNA BACK!"

"BRING ELA BACK!"

The event was part of an ongoing movement in Israel to demand the return of hostages reportedly held by Hamas in Gaza.

Caption Analysis

The caption uses charged terms such as terrorists,' hostage," and "event," reinforcing state-aligned narratives of victimhood and moral clarity, in contrast to Motaz Azaiza's emotionally uncertain tone. The post fits Instagram's soft activism style, using aesthetic order, clarity, and composure to normalize civic protests. It upholds the democratic ideals of visibility and collective voice while subtly contrasting Israel's "civilized self" with Gaza's "violent other," exposing implicit visual Othering within wartime media discourse.

Visual analysis

Representational Metafunction: The image shows men and women holding placards with hostage photographs, turning the absent into present figures. Their solemn yet resolute expressions portray civic protests rather than victimhood. The act of raising placards is a symbolic appeal to authority and conscience, while their gestures reflect grief, solidarity, and hope, projecting unity and legitimate civil engagement.

Interactive Metafunction: Most participants avoided direct gaze, suggesting authenticity rather than performance, a protest rooted in lived struggle. The medium shot maintains public distance while keeping the viewer engaged, highlighting collective rather than individual emotion. The low angle subtly empowers the protestors, lending them moral authority and dignity as they appear composed and resolute in their demands for justice.

Compositional Metafunction: The placards with hostage photos dominate the center, anchoring the scene's meaning and linking the protest to Israel's civic identity through an urban backdrop. The red and white text on black placards and the raised, symmetrical arms create a strong visual salience, guiding the viewer's gaze upward. The tight clustering of participants underscored unity, inclusivity, and collective ownership of the cause.

Tel Aviv

This photo by Israeli journalist Gili Yaari, taken during a rally in Tel Aviv on August 31, 2024, captures a powerful moment: a stage packed with demonstrators, most of whom are holding placards featuring the faces of Israeli hostages. A woman speaks passionately at the podium, and behind her is a massive screen showing enlarged hostage portraits and her live image. The tone is solemn yet resolute, with the message "Bring Them Home NOW" emphasized both visually and textually.
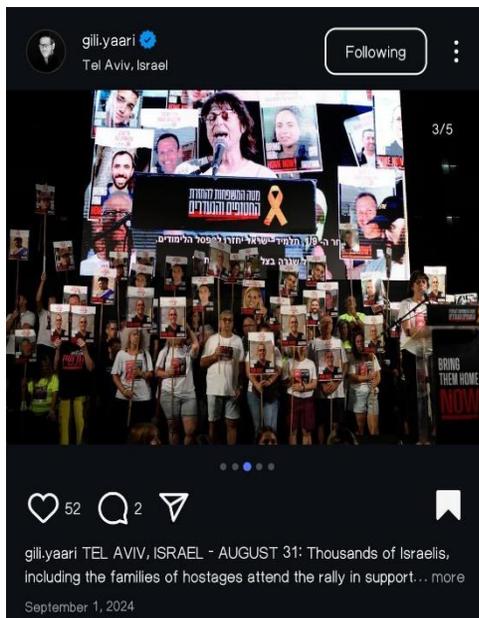
Caption Analysis

The caption ("Thousands... attend the rally...") frames the event as large-scale, inclusive, and morally grounded. While neutral in tone, it subtly implies Hamas's culpability without an explicit accusation. The image, presented within an Instagram carousel, aligns with digital activism aesthetics: curated, emotional, and easily shareable. Unlike war imagery, it depicts a peaceful, orderly space, reinforcing the contrast between Israeli civic unity and Gaza's chaos, and positioning the protest as morally elevated and institutionally legitimate.

Visual analysis

Representational Metafunction: The image centers on a woman at the podium, surrounded by supporters and hostage photographs that act as stand-ins for the absent, restoring their visibility and voices. The scene unfolds as a symbolic, mental process marked by stillness and reflection rather than physical action, embodying collective remembrance and pleas. Visual symbols such as orange ribbons and uniform placards evoke unity, shared grief, and national solidarity, while the repeated slogan "Bring Them Home" reinforces moral urgency and emotional resonance.

Interactive Metafunction: The speaker gazes outward, not directly at the viewer, and her expression conveys emotional appeal to both the live audience and the broader public. The hostage portraits, facing passively forward, deepen this collective plea. Captured from a medium-long shot, the image balances collectivity and intimacy, while the slightly low angle adds moral weight and dignity, framing the families as the legitimate voices of conscience.

Compositional Metafunction: The image is structured with the crowd and placards densely filling the lower half, symbolizing unity and determination, while the upper half features an enlarged screen of faces, amplifying the urgency and scale. Visual salience centers on the speaker and screen, heightened by vivid text ("Bring Them Home NOW") against a dark backdrop. The tight framing and overlapping bodies convey collective grief and solidarity, with the screen serving as a symbolic extension of their voices.

Raanana

This photograph, taken by Gili Yaari, documents the aftermath of a terror attack in Raanana, Israel, on January 15, 2024. It shows Israeli police officers and forensic personnel at the scene, marked off by red-and-white security tape. A dark vehicle was parked partially on the curb near what appeared to be evidence or debris. Bystanders observed from across the street. An atmosphere of tension and investigation, not direct violence, was created.

Caption Analysis

The caption is fact-based, neutral, and time-stamped, using the phrase "terror attack" to frame the event within state security discourse. The image emphasizes institutional legitimacy: security forces control the scene and forensics work meticulously, with no visible victims or blood, reflecting responsible, public reporting. Power is represented through visibility—police, tape, and protocols dominate while the victim remains unseen–promoting an ideology of order, protection, and state authority.

Visual analysis

Representational Metafunction: The image portrays Israeli security forces as the central participants, with the forensic officer kneeling to inspect evidence, symbolizing institutional authority and control. Civilians in the background represent the wider public affected by the event, thereby emphasizing collective anxiety.

The absence of visible victims shifts the narrative from human suffering to the institutional management of violence, with the red caution tape and black uniforms symbolizing state power and order amid chaos.

Interactive Metafunction: No participant made eye contact; their gaze was inward, focused on the investigation, positioning viewers as distant observers rather than participants. Moderate social distance reinforces the bystander perspective, creating formal detachment compared to the intimate imagery from Gaza. The slightly elevated angle further emphasizes a neutral and journalistic viewpoint, presenting the scene with factual objectivity.

Compositional Metafunction: The foreground features official personnel, with red tape signaling a crime or terror scene, while the background situates the event in everyday urban life, showing how violence disrupts the normality of everyday life. The kneeling officer is visually central, highlighted by contrasting elements such as the black vehicle, red tape, and orange first-aid bag, which guide the viewer's eye. The red tape also literally and metaphorically frames the scene, delineating zones of authority and public exclusion from the controlled response area.

Tel Aviv

This image, taken by Gili Yaari, documents a protest or solidarity rally held at "Hostages Square" in Tel Aviv, Israel. It centers on the families and supporters of Israeli hostages taken by Hamas in Gaza. The demonstrators held signs with hostage faces, including children, and demanded their return.
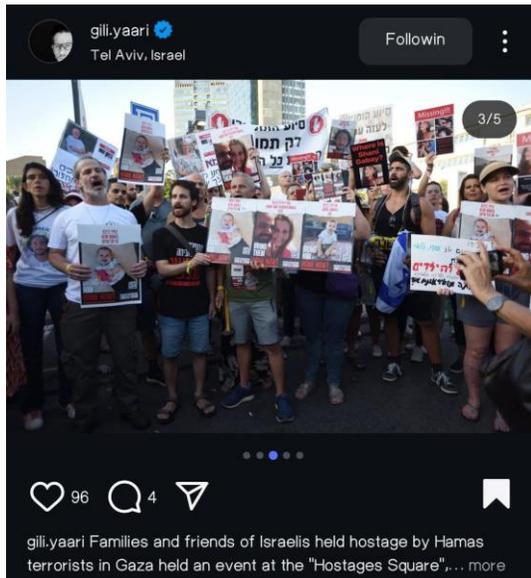
Caption and Narrative Voice

The caption names Hamas as the culprit and Gaza as the location, framing the image within a geopolitical conflict and emphasizing the hostages' powerlessness and injustice. Victims appear only through posters, highlighting children and reinforcing a moral economy of innocence that appeals to public and international sympathies. The Israeli flag and chants situate the protest within a national and humanitarian context, portraying the public as grieving, concerned citizens seeking the safe return of hostages, rather than political actors.
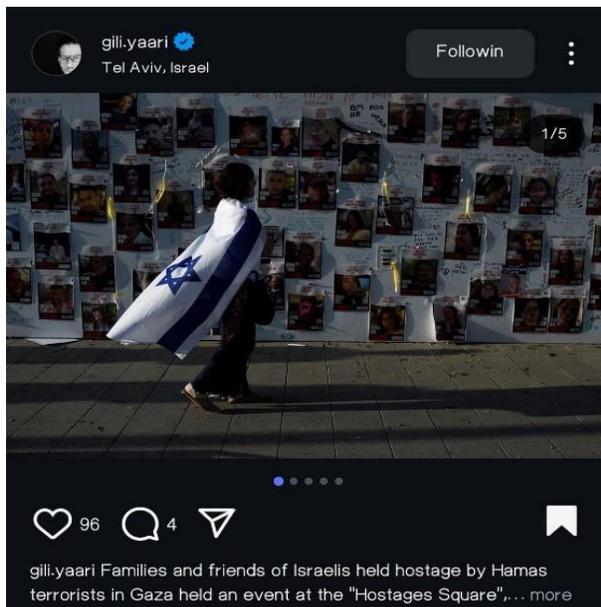
Visual Analysis

Representational Metafunction: The crowd consists of ordinary civilians, likely relatives of the hostages, while the hostages themselves are represented symbolically through posters and placards, including images of women, children, and infants. Participants engaged collectively, holding signs, chanting, and expressing visible emotions, signaling protest as both resistance and mourning. The signs, featuring slogans like "Bring Them Home Now!" frame the action within justice and human rights discourse, while repeated images of babies emphasize innocence, vulnerability, and family trauma.

Interactive Metafunction: Most participants faced the viewer or looked slightly aside, creating a demanding gaze that called for attention and action, fostering direct engagement. Close, personal framing immerses the viewer within the protest crowd, enhancing emotional identification and solidarity. Shot at eye level, the angle provides an equal perspective, emphasizing grassroots power and an authentic collective voice.

Compositional Metafunction: The image is densely composed, with baby posters as visual anchors and slogans along with the Israeli flag, providing a clear context and meaning. Repeated baby posters dominate salience, directing emotional and interpretive focus, whereas handwritten signs add personal authenticity and grief. The close clustering of participants conveyed unity and shared trauma, with flags and signs framing the protest within national identity and moral urgency.

Tel Aviv

This image, taken in *Tel Aviv, Israel*, shows a lone figure walking past a wall covered with portraits of Israeli prisoners. The individual is wrapped in an Israeli flag, and their silhouette is partially shadowed.

Caption Analysis

The Israeli flag envelops the figure, merging individual and state grief and enacting a discourse of national victimhood and solidarity, as if "we are all hostages." The image exclusively represents Israeli suffering, omitting the broader political context and Palestinian experiences, producing a one-sided moral narrative.

Set in a public, stage-like urban space, the wall of faces transforms private grief into visual rhetoric, appealing to domestic and international audiences.

Visual Analysis

Representational Metafunction: The image centers on a single Israeli figure, anonymized yet symbolically charged, draped in a flag, while dozens of hostage portraits, handwritten messages, and candles represent the absent victims and collective grief. The walking figure enacts a narrative of continuity and resilience, moving past memorials in a gesture of witnessing and mourning. Although set in a public urban space (Hostages Square), the visual cues transform it into a sacred space of remembrance.

Interactive Metafunction: The walking figure and portraits avoid direct gaze, creating emotional distance and emphasizing symbolic weight, positioning the viewer as a contemplative bystander. The medium shot allows recognition of expressions in the photos while preserving reverence, and the figure's anonymity encourages viewers to see them as representing "any Israeli," fostering national identification with mourning. Eye-level framing maintains neutrality, reinforcing a documentary tone that presents the scene for observation.

Compositional Metafunction: The wall of hostages fills the background, providing context and ideological weight, while the flag-draped figure in the foreground embodies both resilience and identification. The Israeli flag dominates visually, cutting diagonally across the image, and the red and white tones of the portraits create a repeated visual chorus of absence. The tight framing of the hostages emphasizes collective captivity, contrasting with the unframed mobile figure that symbolizes freedom.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

This chapter analyzes how Palestinian and Israeli photojournalists on Instagram visually frame the 2024 Israel–Palestine conflict using Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar framework. It also interprets these representations through UN Resolutions 242 and 338, highlighting the gap between international law and the lived realities. The findings reveal a clear asymmetry in portraying suffering and legitimacy, exposing the UN's inaction and positioning Instagram as an alternative space for witnessing and resistance. The study also shows how captions, hashtags, and visual composition work together to construct powerful counter-narratives. Overall, this emphasizes the role of social media in shaping public perception and moral discourse during conflicts.

Key Multimodal Findings Based on Kress and van Leeuwen's Framework

Representational Meaning: Narratives of Asymmetry

Palestinian visuals focus on trauma, death, and displacement, often depicting civilians, especially women and children, as victims, such as a man carrying a burned child or displaced crowds monitored by an Israeli tank, highlighting the forced vulnerability under occupation. In contrast, Israeli imagery emphasizes hostage protests, forensic work, and civic order, portraying resilience, national unity, and moral authority while largely omitting direct trauma from the imagery. This contrast reveals a striking asymmetry in narrative construction, where Palestinian suffering is foregrounded and Israeli suffering is mediated through controlled symbolic acts. These images collectively serve to shape public perception, elicit empathy, and mobilize audiences along distinct political and moral lines.

Interactive Meaning: Viewer Positioning and Emotional Engagement

Palestinian imagery avoids direct gaze, using close eye-level shots to create emotional intimacy, making viewers silent witnesses compelled to empathize yet powerless to act. In contrast, Israeli visuals keep viewers at a moderate distance, portraying figures absorbed in action and framing the audience as neutral bystanders rather than emotionally involved participants. This contrast highlights differing narrative strategies: Palestinians emphasize human vulnerability and moral urgency, while Israelis stress order, civic engagement, and institutional legitimacy. It underscores how visual framing shapes perception of agency, suffering, and moral authority in the conflict.

Compositional Meaning: The Visual Layout of Power

Palestinian posts are visually dense, chaotic, and emotionally raw. Salient features include centralized suffering**,** dark color tones, debris, fire, and lack of spatial escape. These compositional elements reflect both entrapment and erasure. Israeli images, however, are visually balanced and ideologically cohesive. Institutional signs, flags, podiums, and protest placards are framed clearly and symmetrically, foregrounding themes of civic unity, state response, and public memory**.**

Cross-Referencing Findings with UN Resolutions 242 and 338

Legal Commitments of the UN: Resolutions 242 and 338

- UN Resolution 242 (1967) called for Israel's withdrawal from the occupied territories and reaffirmed the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all regional states.

- UN Resolution 338 (1973) urged a ceasefire and the immediate implementation of Resolution 242, establishing a pathway to peace through negotiation and demilitarization.

Dimension	Palestinian Narrative (Motaz Azaiza)	Israeli Narrative (Gili Yaari)
Theme	Civilian trauma, displacement, and child deaths	Hostage advocacy, civic protest, institutional control
Representational Meaning	Actional and reactional processes showing helpless victims	Non-trans active civic engagement and protest
Interactive Meaning	Proximity, no gaze; viewer as empathic witness	Social distance; viewer as rational observer
Compositional Meaning	Claustrophobic framing, emotional salience, chaotic scenes	Orderly protest layouts, national flags, balanced composition
Legal Reference	Implied alignment with 242 & 338 (call for end of occupation)	Absence of legal framing; focus on internal appeals
Platform Function	Instagram as archive, resistance, and global court of conscience	Instagram as an advocacy tool for national solidarity

Public Engagement	Extremely high (millions of likes/comments); emotional solidarity	High engagement (especially hostage protests); focused on return appeals

Notably, throughout the visual discourse, especially within Palestinian representations, there is no visual trace of UN personnel, peacekeeping, or humanitarian intervention. This absence is not merely coincidental but highly symbolic: the blue helmets, white vehicles, and UN insignia symbols of global accountability are absent from these crisis zones. No image captured or referenced in this dataset included UN aid, presence, or operational involvement. This visual invisibility effectively exposes the UN's diminishing relevance in the eyes of the affected communities, suggesting institutional withdrawal from its own mandates.

CONCLUSION

This study examines how the Israel–Palestine conflict is visually framed on Instagram through the multimodal narratives of Palestinian and Israeli photojournalists, particularly Motaz Azaiza and Gili Yaari. Applying Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar framework, this study uncovered significant contrasts in representational strategies, viewer positioning, and compositional meanings. Palestinian visual discourse has emerged as a deeply emotional, raw, and graphic testimony to trauma, displacement, and state violence. These images often centered on civilians, especially children and women, who bore the brunt of military aggression. By contrast, Israeli imagery constructed a narrative of civic engagement, procedural justice, and emotional appeal for hostage return framed within national symbols and institutional structures. A key analytical lens in this study was the role of UN Resolutions 242 and 338. While these resolutions reflect a long-standing international consensus on the need for Israeli withdrawal and a just peace, the visual data strongly suggest that these legal instruments remain largely unimplemented. Their absence in both visual content and real-world outcomes underscores the broader crisis of institutional authority and enforcement. The United Nations, tasked with upholding international peace, has become symbolically and operationally absent from the territory it claims to govern. Instead, Instagram has emerged as a surrogate space for witnessing and resistance. In the void left by formal institutions, social media platforms now document trauma, shape global perceptions, and hold power structures accountable through viral engagement. Journalists such as Motaz Azaiza have transformed digital platforms into repositories of real-time history, moral testimony, and collective grief.

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CODING SHEET FOR DATA ANALYSIS

The coding sheet is designed to systematically capture the key features of multimodal content in each Instagram post. The sheet helps identify how visual elements, textual elements, and interactive engagement contribute to the narrative framing of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the critique of UN Resolutions 242 and 338.

Category	Feature/Strategy	Description/Details
Visual Narrative	Action/Reaction Images	Action-based images (e.g., bombings, protests) and reaction-based images (e.g., civilians' expressions of grief) are categorized. These visuals are used to elicit emotional responses from the audience, illustrating the immediacy and urgency of the conflict.
Participants	Represented Figures	Key individuals or groups featured in the visuals. This can include Palestinian civilians as victims, Israeli soldiers as aggressors, and international actors like UN peacekeepers or political leaders.
Gaze	Direct/Indirect Gaze	How the subject in the image engages with the viewer. A direct gaze may imply confrontation or a call to action, while an indirect gaze might suggest detachment, helplessness, or resignation.
Angle	High/Low/Eye-Level	The angle of the shot is used to convey power dynamics. High-angle shots may symbolize vulnerability or defeat, while low-angle shots can suggest strength, power, or dominance.
Color Scheme	Dominant Tones	Analyzing the dominant colors in the visual content.
Salience	Central Visual Focus	The central figure or subject in the image, such as a Palestinian child, a destroyed building, or an injured protester. This determines the emotional impact of the visual and its relevance to the overall message.
Caption Type	Personal Account/Call to Action	Captions that offer personal narratives (e.g., "This is my cousin after the bombing") or provide direct calls to action (e.g., "Stop the massacre") will be coded for their emotional appeal and their role in framing the conflict.
Hashtags/Emojis	Symbolic Elements	Use of hashtags such as **#FreePalestine** or **#StandWithIsrael** to symbolize solidarity or resistance.

		Emojis can also play a role in conveying emotion and reinforcing the message of the post.
UN Framing	Mention/ Implication/ Absence	Posts that directly mention or critique the UN's peacekeeping role (or lack thereof). Whether the UN is presented as an impartial body, as ineffective, or as complicit in the violence will be coded.
Ideological Stance	Victim/Hero Dichotomy	Posts will be coded for how they frame Palestinians as victims or heroes and Israelis as aggressors or defenders. Additionally, the role of the UN in either exacerbating or mitigating the conflict will also be analyzed.