CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

This chapter acts as the introductory section, offering a thorough basis for the thesis. The research begins by providing the background, which explains the context and importance of the research subject. Next, the research question is introduced, providing direction for the research. The following part provides an overview of the relevant literature, condensing prior research and pinpointing areas that this study intends to fill. A theoretical framework is developed to provide support for the analysis, which then leads to the formulation of the hypothesis. In order to guarantee the reliability of the study, this chapter also describes the research methods used. Lastly, a comprehensive analysis of the writing system is presented, explaining the arrangement of the thesis.

A. Background

A profound change in how Muslims and Islam were viewed and portrayed around the world occurred in the early 2000s, marking a turning point in their portrayal in the media (Farooq & Yousafzai, 2020). During this period, the Western world, particularly the United States, initiated a course of action that significantly transformed the prevailing public dialogue concerning Islam and the Arab region (Wahid, 2023). This change was prompted by a series of terrorist assaults conducted by extremist individuals and organizations, both before and during the 9/11 attacks (Dudenhoefer et al., 2021). Notable occurrences include the 1983 Beirut bombings by Hezbollah, the 1993 World Trade Centre bombing by a group led by Ramzi Yousef (Forest, 2021), and the 1998 U.S. Embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania by al-Qaeda (Prestholdt, 2020). These incidents, which culminated in the horrific 9/11 attacks planned by al-Qaeda, greatly increased fears and strengthened unfavorable perceptions about Muslims.

According to a 2007 survey conducted by the Pew Research Centre, the majority of Americans formed negative opinions of Muslims mostly based on the information they received from the media. Furthermore, they have provided evidence of the correlation between media information and the development of "stereotypic beliefs, negative emotions, and support of harmful policies" against Muslim Americans (Erick & Veen, 2022). As a result of media portrayals influenced by prejudice and cultural ignorance,

Muslims were portrayed as an all-encompassing danger to Western security and values, and the media narrative started to link Islam with terrorism (Abdellatif, 2023). In this modern era, the management of public consensus, the distortion of data, the manipulation of news, and the subtle art of brainwashing individuals have become prevalent features of the media discourse (Rezaei, Kobari, & Salami, 2019).

Regardless of the efforts of numerous Muslims worldwide to differentiate themselves from extremist groups, which do not precisely represent the 1.4 billion Muslims globally (Brown, 2020), the majority of Muslims are suffering the consequences of these isolated acts of terrorism. The widespread use of the extremist stereotype in Western society is largely due to the incorrect portrayal of Muslims and Islam by the Western mass media (Kamalipour & Pavlik, 2023; J. A. Khan & Ali, 2020), which falsely connects them with terrorism and fails to recognize their real identity. The Muslim Ban policy, which attempted to restrict entry into the United States for people from seven countries (Ira, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen) following Donald Trump's election as president in 2017 (Ali & Senouci, 2021; M. H. Khan et al., 2019), provided an illustration of the impact that the media can have. This policy sought to maintain national security and stability while protecting the United States from terrorist attacks carried out by Islamic extremist groups (Sahide, 2022).

Moreover, the rapid advancement of the media and the frequent use of phrases like "extremist groups," "terrorists," or "Islamic Jihad" have greatly supported the stigmatization of Islam as a religion and Muslims as those who practice it (Saleem, Yousaf, & Ali, 2021). This situation is especially worrisome because of the propagation of several misconceptions fostered by media outlets. A common fallacy is the mistaken belief that Islamic Jihad is equivalent to terrorism, falsely depicting it as being identical with violent extremism (Marath, 2021). These misconceptions not only distort the real essence of Jihad, which commonly refers to a spiritual endeavor for self-improvement within Islam, but also spread fear and bias toward Muslims. Moreover, media narratives frequently portray women who wear hijab, as enablers of terrorism, disregarding the various motivations behind individuals' decisions to adhere to religious clothing (Arafath & Arunima, 2022). Therefore, this oversimplification not only removes Muslim women's rights and freedom, but it also perpetuates discrimination against them. Likewise, depicting beards as a symbol

of terrorist identity perpetuates damaging generalizations, disregarding the cultural and theological importance of facial hair in Islam. These inaccurate portrayals not only sustain and promote Islamophobia, but also impede endeavors to cultivate intercultural comprehension and religious acceptance throughout society.

The designation of numerous Islamic organizations as terrorist organizations by the Western world persists more than two decades after the attack. On October 7th, 2023, the "Al-Aqsa Flood," a significant military campaign launched by Hamas, involved an unforeseen invasion into Israeli territory (Al-Jazeera, 2023b; Asharq Al Awsat, 2024). The history of this event can be traced back to the complex geopolitical dynamics of the region, characterized by long-standing conflicts and a lack of respect between Israelis and Palestinians. Arising from the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, the conflict has been marked by conflicting claims on land, resources, and national identity (Freedman, 2021). The Palestinian population, who were forced to leave their homes due to the establishment of Israel, have been striving for autonomy and the formation of their own nation (Shehadeh, 2021). Meanwhile, Israelis have been asserting their entitlement to safety and political control in response to continuous acts of aggression and danger. Throughout the years, the conflict has been characterized by military conflicts, rebellions, and attempts at establishing peace, with each event significantly influencing the shared awareness of the region.

Expert on Hamas, Matthew Levitt, notes that the organization has been connected to a number of violent acts, including rocket launches targeted at Israeli civilians, gun attacks, and suicide bombers. The organization's utilization of terrorist strategies has resulted in a significant amount of civilian casualties, showcasing its willingness to embrace such techniques in order to accomplish its goals (Gradstein, 2024). The situation emerged as a result of continuous dissatisfaction with Israeli policy, that includes recent acts of violence at the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, as well as more extensive resentment regarding Israel's treatment of the Palestinian people and the expansion of Israeli settlements (Reals & D'Agata, 2023). As per the report of Diakonia (2023), Hamas crossed the Gaza border and invaded Israeli territory via land, air, and sea, resulting in the casualties of Israeli soldiers and international citizens. IDF, Israel Defense Force (2023), claims that Hamas successfully used both pedestrian means and vehicles to breach the perimeter of the

security fence. Furthermore, some people used powered paragliders to go over the fence, and some people tried to sneak across the water to get to Zikim Beach in Israel. By the end of October 7th, 2023, Al-Jazeera (2023) reported that the strike conducted by Hamas resulted in the deaths of 250 Israeli civilians. Shortly thereafter, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu issued a statement in which he expressed his confidence that the rival is going to pay an unparalleled cost. Furthermore, the Israeli counter attack on the Gaza Strip has resulted in the deaths of at least 232 Palestinians, and this number is still increasing on a daily basis till the completion of this thesis.

B. Research Question

In order to conduct a comprehensive investigation, both in terms of scientific and conceptual aspects, it is crucial to formulate a precise research question that will act as the guiding principle for this thesis. Therefore, the following research question will serve as the primary focus of this thesis research proposal: "**How do Western and Middle Eastern media outlets differ in coverage of Hamas, and how do these portrayals influence public's reaction?**"

C. Literature Review

The view of Islam in the Western world underwent a major decrease throughout the colonial era. The colonial era fostered an extensive and everlasting hatred and lack of comprehension towards Islam. This negative view was reinforced by a number of circumstances, including European colonizers creating a "myth of the noble savage" around particular Muslim tribesmen, such as the Berber, Bedouin, and Pukhtuns. This misconception depicted these groups as barbaric and uncultured, perpetuating detrimental prejudices about Islam and Muslims. Furthermore, the colonial period resulted in the disintegration of Muslim societies and the establishment of a sense of estrangement between the ideal of Islam and the actual practices of Muslims. The estrangement was worsened by the colonial power's depiction of Muslims as primitive and uncultured, which further solidified negative perceptions of Islam. The unfavorable conceptions of Islam that resulted from the colonial period's impact on Muslim society are highlighted in Akbar S. Ahmed's book "Discovering Islam." Additionally, he observes that Western scholars frequently see themselves as neutral or unbiased observers—a practice Ahmed dubbed

"narcissistic anthropology." He contends that this method is impractical and would not provide any results, as it neglects to consider the intricacies and conflicts within Muslim civilizations (Ahmed, 2002).

A significant portion of scholarly literature on Islamic organizations focuses on attributing blame to these entities for the continuation or worsening of different current events or conflicts (Baker, 2019; Haner, Sloan, Cullen, Kulig, & Jonson, 2019). Frequently, this narrative portrays these organizations as the principal actors responsible for such conflicts. A study conducted by Javaid, Saeed, & Tayyab (2023) revealed that the discursive portrayal of Islam and Muslims in American media including journalism, radio, television, cinema, and newspaper articles displays a comprehensive trend in which 100% of the representations manifest in a predominantly negative, highlighting a concerning pattern of bias and stereotyping prevalent in media discourse.

A significant challenge in media portrayal of Arabs and Islam is the deep cultural differences between the Arab world and the Western world (Wiseman, 2021). When it comes to covering Arab societies or the Middle East, Western journalists often face the challenge of lacking an in-depth knowledge of Arab history, culture, and social dynamics (Mutsvairo & Bebawi, 2022). This lack of understanding often ends in the reliance on their reporting often includes oversimplifications, misinterpretations, or stereotypes that are deeply rooted in the Western paradigm (Anjum & Aziz, 2024). As a consequence, their narrative construction and interpretations of issues related to Arabs and Arab societies are influenced. Adding to this problem is the significant lack of fluency in Arabic among numerous journalists assigned to report on Arab countries, increasing the divide in cultural understanding and complicating journalism (Kirat & Slamene, 2024).

The research conducted by Suwarno and Sahayu (2020) seeks to uncover the media bias in the portrayal of Palestine and Israel during the conflicts in 2019 and 2020 by major national and international news organizations, notably The Jakarta Post and The New York Times. Palestine's reputation was effectively disguised by the dominant presence of the Israeli military and administration, whose messages were more prominent. Israel places great emphasis on verbal expressions that demonstrate a significant involvement in comments, announcements, intimidation, and statements through spoken communication. They argue that both The Jakarta Post and The New York Times portray the Israeli

government or military as playing a significant role in sparking the situation. As evidence, they cite Israeli warnings that take a firm stand against Palestine. Israel is being accused of deliberately provoking moves that have escalated tensions in the Middle East.

Taha and Al-Khanji (2020) conducted a study where they analyzed a total of 32 news pieces and eight articles. Upon analysis of the samples, it was then determined that the New York Times and Haaretz provided a significantly greater quantity of publicity to Israeli political and military personalities in comparison to their Palestinian rivals. The Guardian and the Jordan Times conducted interviews with Palestinian civilian actors, highlighting the humanitarian suffering and casualties. In contrast, Haaretz and the NYT reported these actors as encouraging deadly attacks, among other subjects. The use of negative themes, combined with unfavorable portrayals of Palestinian political figures, revealed biased attitudes towards Palestinian civilian actors. Moreover, the biased practices and adoption of a single-party narrative in the instance of the NYT, Haaretz, and the Jordan Times were evident through the use of reporting verbs, uneven distribution of quotations, and word counts of quotations from social actors. The Israel-Palestine conflict is a clear example of how ideology and political goals shape the way news is reported.

The analysis undertaken by Doufesh and Briel (2021) on media coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict, with a particular focus on The Times of Israel and Al-Jazeera, highlights the significant influence of framing and interpretation in forming public opinion and discourse. Despite the fact that the two media outlets utilized the exact same picture in their coverage, their analysis showed that there was considerable variation in how the image was interpreted, with The Times of Israel continuously displaying a clear bias against Palestinians. In the course of their reporting, Palestinians were frequently portrayed as an ongoing danger to security, labelled as terrorists, blamed for the failure of negotiations for peace, and widely dehumanized. On the other hand, Al-Jazeera's reporting was obviously biassed against Israel and supported the points of view of the Palestinians. Al-Jazeera strengthened the Palestinian narrative of discrimination and displacement by constantly portraying Palestinians as victims of Israeli aggression in its news.

Figure 1. Picture used by The Times of Israel & Al-Jazeera

Source 1. Doufesh & Briel, 2021

The media also never stopped blaming Islamic organizations, particularly Hamas for the violence in the Israel-Palestine conflict, portraying them as the main aggressors while Israel was portrayed as an innocent victim. The media's complicity in covering up Israel's genocide of Palestinians is nothing new; in fact, more than 500 journalists voiced their displeasure with the practice in an open letter they signed in 2021 (Bard, 2022). Additionally, scholarly research has demonstrated that Western media, such as The New York Times, exhibits a tendency to present a more positive portrayal of Israelis in comparison to Palestinians in its reporting. (Shunnar & Ismail, 2021). Consequently, it is critical to recognize that media framing has a greater influence on public perception due to the ease with which news pieces may be accessed in the digital age. Suwarno and Sahayu (2020) emphasize the transformative impact of digital technology, which not only facilitates the spread of knowledge to a wide range of people through media outlets but also allows for the creation of narratives that connect with diverse audiences. As one explores the topic of news media framing, it becomes evident that the media exerts significant influence over society, shaping the perceptions of the general population. Given this, it is possible to impact the content and connections of the conversation by changing either the vocabulary or the grammatical structure of the sentences presents in the news articles.

Although previous studies have provided useful insights into the biases and narratives present in news coverage, particularly regarding the portrayal of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the media, there is still a need for additional investigation and

examination. The complexity and influence of the conflict require a more thorough examination of several elements that have not yet been completely analyzed. More investigation is necessary, for example, on how media bias affects public attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors on a national and worldwide level. Future studies could contribute to promoting more empathy, dialogue, and reconciliation in the Israeli-Palestinian context by filling in these knowledge gaps and enhancing scholarly understanding.

D. Theoretical Framework

In regards to the portrayal of Hamas, the proposed framework recognizes the media's complex role in shaping public opinion. This theoretical framework provides a detailed approach for understanding the complex representations of the conflict presented by various media outlets. In a time period characterized by the widespread impact of mass media, theories such as agenda-setting and framing explain the ways in which media influence the thoughts and actions of their audience. By adopting this approach, it becomes evident that the media influences how society portrays Hamas. This emphasizes the criticality of comprehending the ways in which media patterns impact public discourse regarding contentious geopolitical issues.

1. Agenda-setting Theory

Agenda-setting in media studies refers to the media's ability to focus attention on specific problems and elevate their importance by featuring them frequently on the front pages of print media or by giving them priority in headlines in electronic media. It also refers to the frequency with which these topics are addressed in the media. The effect of agenda setting involves the audience, who are consumers of media products, giving emphasis and importance to the same topics that the media has highlighted. (Dalhatu & Shehu, 2020).

The theory of agenda setting has been a highly influential and productive concept in the field of mass media and communication effects research. The agenda-setting theory explores the connection between the mass media's focus on a specific topic and the level of importance that item holds on the public agenda. According to Brosius and Kepplinger, agenda framing is a dynamic process where changes in media coverage result in subsequent changes in problem awareness of topics. Put simply, when mass

media give priority and extensive coverage to an issue, the public tends to perceive this topic as more important. (Kassed & Mustaffa, 2017).

2. Framing Theory

Each news item has a theme that gives it shape and combines the semantic elements of a narrative into one cohesive unit (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Pan & Kosicki, 1993). Pan and Kosicki (1993) classify such concepts as "frames" due to their role in arranging information. Entman characterized framing as an intricate process that requires careful selection and emphasis of specific elements within a discourse. Within the context of framing, purposeful attention is focused towards certain features of the seen reality to establish a clear categorization of the problem, a causal explanation, a moral evaluation, or a proposal for resolving the subject being discussed (Entman, 1993).

Framing involves the deliberate arrangement of media messages to influence readers' understanding of an issue or topic. This process involves the identification of the problem, the identification of relevant causes, and the proposal of solutions. These solutions may involve implementing treatment strategies for the mentioned issues, supported by a rationale that clarifies how well they work (Wu, 2023). Lecheler and de Vreese (2019) define a news frame as a core concept or narrative that assigns meaning to a sequence of events, establishing a connection between them. The framing effectively communicates the fundamental subject matter and central point of the argument. An individual might be influenced by a new frame through the process of highlighting certain components of reality while diminishing others.

Singh (1978) emphasizes how media power is two-sided and implies that it involves more than just disseminating information. It involves altering human behavior, exerting influence on lifestyles, and shaping moral perspectives. The media has a detrimental impact on society by its dissemination of distorted information and a false portrayal of reality, leading to confusion among the general public. When interacting with the international community, it is inevitable that one would come across a manipulated representation of reality created by journalists and media organizations. However, the mass media give priority to a restricted range of subjects that are deemed significant,

mostly because of constraints in time and space. Over time, the sectors of public affairs that attract substantial media attention become more prominent in public opinion. The agenda-setting function refers to the role of the mass media in defining the most significant topics, individuals, and subjects of the day (McCombs & Valenzuela, 2007).

Figure 2. Conceptual Diagram of Framing
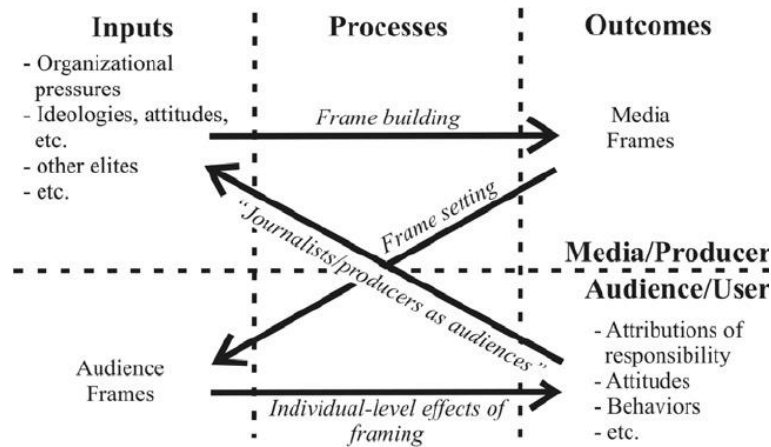
Source 2. D. A. Scheufele, 1999

The picture shows a conceptual diagram that shows how different components of media framing processes interact with one another. There are three primary sections: Inputs, Processes, and Outcomes, which are further divided into Media/Producer and Audience/User (Napoli, 2011). Under the Inputs section on the left side, many elements such as organizational pressures, beliefs, attitudes, and influences from other elites are listed. The inputs provided play a role in the activities that take place in the middle portion, which focuses on two main processes: frame building and frame setting (D. Scheufele, 2006). Frame building refers to the process in which journalists and producers create media frames, which are influenced by the inputs described earlier. The process is illustrated by a continuous arrow moving from Inputs to Outcomes (Hänggli, 2020).

The frame setting, illustrated by a diagonal arrow, shows how media frames are established and interpreted by audiences, implying that journalists and producers also function as audiences (DeConcini & Rice, 2021). The Outcomes section on the right side enumerates the consequences of these processes, encompassing media frames and

the individual-level effects of framing, such as attributions of blame, attitudes, and behaviors. The diagram illustrates that audience frames, shown by an arrow originating from the audience/user area, also have an impact on the media frames and individual-level impacts, demonstrating a mutual link. This comprehensive paradigm demonstrates the complex interaction between inputs from different forces and elites, the framing processes carried out by media producers, and the resulting outcomes that both influence and are influenced by public opinions and reactions.

E. Hypothesis

Media framing is a powerful instrument that shapes the focus of public discussions and influences which issues gain attention in society by constructing the story surrounding the conflict. The thesis argues that media framing is not free from bias and often reflects the unconscious biases of journalists or media organizations, potentially distorting public understanding. The author emphasizes the significant role of Western media outlets in shaping global discourse, as Western countries' historical political and economic power has led to the spread of Western values and ideologies, particularly through media platforms. Western media often portray themselves as neutral and authoritative, strengthening their impact and leading to an unequal influence in shaping public opinion, creating agendas, and framing global conversations. As a result, Western media outlets, because of their perceived credibility and power, have a significant influence on shaping conversations at both local and global levels. In addition, Middle Eastern media outlets, known for their frequent defense of their region against Western influence, also have a significant impact on shaping the conversations, both local and globally. However, the existence of language obstacles is a significant obstacle for global audiences seeking to access Middle Eastern news outlets, leading to a heightened dependence on and trust in Western media outlets.

F. Research Methods

This thesis employs qualitative research methods, with the author preferring to utilize secondary data. Secondary data refers to pre-existing information that has been adapted for the aim of addressing new research inquiries. The utilization of secondary material in this inquiry encompasses a diverse range of sources, including books, journal articles, media reports, and government websites that relate to the conflict between Israel

and Palestine. In addition, the use of the Scopus database enables a thorough examination of the relevant literature pertaining to the issue. The application of earlier academic research enhances the theoretical framework and establishes a firm foundation for the current research.

This research aims to analyze the portrayal of Hamas by media outlets, with a specific focus on how different regions shape the narrative surrounding the organization. In order to have a thorough understanding, the author has chosen 150 news articles for investigation, consisting of 75 articles from Western media and an additional 75 articles from Middle Eastern media. Through this comparative approach, it is possible to analyze the differences in media portrayals between these two distinct regions.

The selected media outlets for this thesis are the BBC, CNN, and The Guardian from Western media, and Al-Jazeera, Al-Arabiya, and Asharq Al-Awsat from Middle Eastern media. The selection of these publications was based on their popularity, credibility, and wide audience within their respective regions. They all share the characteristic of being important, popular news organizations in their own geographic and cultural contexts. This categorization ensures that the analysis is developed from sources that are highly regarded and have significant impact on public opinion.

Table 1. Total News Collected About Israel-Hamas War

Media Outlets	Website	Total News
BBC	https://www.bbc.com/	25
CNN	https://edition.cnn.com/	25
The Guardian	https://www.theguardian.com/	25
Al-Jazeera	https://www.aljazeera.com/	25
Al-Arabiya	https://english.alarabiya.net/	25
Asharq Al-Awsat	https://english.aawsat.com/	25

The news stories analyzed cover the period from October 7th, 2023, to December 7th, 2023. The selected time frame corresponds to the escalation of recent conflicts involving Hamas, offering a critical opportunity to comprehend how initial media

portrayals can influence public opinion. It is crucial to analyze the conflict's starting point in order to track the media's first reactions and framing strategies during this important time frame.

Following the collection of the news articles, the NVivo 12 Plus Software is utilized in order to offer the analytical process more straightforward. This software facilitates the methodical coding and analysis of data, ensuring a thorough evaluation of the media content. When it comes to how Hamas is portrayed, primary variables that influence how it is portrayed are the use of terms like "hero" and "terrorist," which represent different views held by the people and how the media covers its ideology and public image. Simultaneously, coverages of Hamas' hostage-taking practices are frequently centered around terms like "cruel" and "humane," highlighting different points of view about their actions in such situations. These keywords are crucial for comprehending the narrative and framing utilized by various media outlets, since they represent the underlying attitudes and biases present in the coverage.

G. Writing Systems

The following is the outline of the structure of this thesis:

Chapter I, introduces the case by situating the issue in its context. It states the research question, the theoretical framework, the proposed arguments or hypotheses, the research methods, and the systematic academic writing.

Chapter II, provides a thorough examination of the Israel-Palestine conflict, including its historical causes, important actors, geopolitical dynamics, and the current problematic situation that has escalated.

Chapter III, discusses the profile of each media outlets analyzed in this thesis

Chapter IV, focuses into the ways that the media affect public opinion and behavior on the portrayal of Hamas, specifically looking at instances of partiality and boycotts

Chapter V, provides a thorough summary of the research results by combining the important points made in the earlier chapters.