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A Framing Analysis of Global Political Cartoons on Gaza War (October 7, 2023 – February 7, 2025)*

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Abstract

Israel's attack on Gaza received extensive media attention from the early days of its outbreak. Media coverage of the news on the war was incomparable to previous Israel attacks in 2009, 2012 and 2014 due to the length and intensity of the conflict, Arab journalists' presence in Gaza and widespread use of social media to share information about the war. 'Gaza war' rapidly emerged as a focal point of graphic journalism, among other journalism genres, to express artistic and political perspectives on the multifaceted realities of the conflict. Meanwhile, the transformative influence of online media on communication plays a crucial role in sharing information and content. Among all media effects, framing is a process whereby people develop conceptualizations of an issue. This study focuses on political cartoons published in global online media between Oct. 7, 2023 and Feb. 7, 2025 to investigate how the war has been framed online through visual representation. 120 political cartoons were studied. Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) model of news frames analysis was used to answer the research question. Findings reveal that human interests frame, morality frame, responsibility frame, conflict frame and economic consequences frame received the greatest amount of attention by cartoonists, respectively. The manuscript elaborates on the specific thematic elements identities within each frame.

Keywords: Framing Theory, Gaza War, Graphic Journalism, Online Media, Political Cartoons

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1. Introduction

The October 7, 2023 events and Israel's attacks on Gaza elicited a significant amount of emotions and controversies in world media. 'Gaza war' soon became the subject of political discussions in media and academic circles: no days were global media void of its coverage and analysis. While mainstream western media are criticized for their biased coverage of the news in favor of Israel, social media have become indispensable instruments for providing alternative narratives and filling the information gaps of the former (Khamis and Dogbatse, 2024). Besides news, reports and interviews, the war has been the subject of other genres of media content production including graphic journalism. As an emerging genre of journalism, graphic journalism uses a combination of illustration and text to convey message (Hodra, n.d.). Also known as illustrated journalism, visual reportage, comics journalism, nonfiction cartooning, the medium is powerful in encoding complex and controversial issues into comic language (Meier, n.d.). It can help resensitize "familiar topics in media which have become desensitized" (Smyth, 2020) and "offer journalism new ways of portraying information, in line with audience expectations" (Koch et al., 2023, p. 31).

As a major product of graphic journalism and with the rise of visual culture, 'political cartoons' "provide metalanguage for discourse about the social order by constructing idealizations of the world, positioning readers within a discursive context of "meaning making" and offering readers a tool for deliberating on present conditions" (Greenberg, 2002, p. 182). According to Koren (1963, in Zemmal and Zoghbi, 2023/2024, p. 30), a cartoon is a blend of visual and verbal humor which portrays life in a quick and succinct manner. Edwards and Winkler (1997, p. 360) define a political

cartoon as a “graphic presentation typically designed in a one-panel, noncontinuing format to make an independent statement or observation on political events or social policy”. As Gondwe and Walcott (2024, p. 3) state, editorial cartoons "have a rich and diverse history that permeates various cultures worldwide". They are significant because of their "unique ability to convey complicated political ideas with bold, exaggerated imagery (Shaikh et al. 2019, in Gondwe and Walcott (2024, p. 3).

The issue of Palestine has for long been interesting for cartoonists as a way to express their views on the social and political aspects of occupation and its consequences. One of the most fruitful efforts to graphically portray the subject was Joe Sacco's (2001) 'Palestine' in which the author provides a graphic novel regarding the first Intifada from 1991 to 1992. He further published 'Footnotes in Gaza' in 2009, in which the Khan Younis and Rafah killing of Palestinians by Israeli troops in 1956 is depicted in form of a graphic narrative. The publication received special attention and market demand in the wake of the 2023 Israel-Hamas conflict (Barnett, 2023). Given the widespread use and growing impact of digital media, the ways in which international topics are disseminated to the public has undergone profound transformations in terms of *global reach, accessibility, engagement and interactivity*. The Israel – Palestine conflict, has also been extensively represented in graphic forms by cartoonists with varying perspectives and ideological inclinations across different digital platforms. This study aims to investigate the way in which the war on Gaza has been visually framed in global digital media from October 7th 2023 to the present. Political cartoons are studied using Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) model. In the following sections a literature review, as well as the study's theoretical/methodological frameworks will be represented.

1. 1. Review of Literature

Political cartoons' coverage of the war on Gaza has been formerly studied by scholars interested in graphic journalism. Sharaf Eldin (2024) has written about the way in which political cartoons shape discourse on the war on Gaza. Focusing on the power of political cartoons, he applies Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to uncover the persuasive strategies, power dynamics, and ideologies embodied in the cartoons. Examining cartoons from both Arab and international newspapers, Sharaf Eldin (2024) provides a comparative analysis of the ways in which different cultural and ideological perspectives are represented and conveyed through visual imagery. He analyzes cartoons at contextual, visual, ideological and linguistic levels, and tries to provide insights into the cartoons' persuasive strategies, power dynamics themes and ideological content.

In 'Victims or villains? How editorial cartoons depict the 2023 Israel – Palestine war', Gondwe and Walcott (2024) analyze online editorial cartoons depicting the Israel- Palestine conflict through visual, symbolic, metaphorical, and textual analysis. They study global editorial cartoons' portrayal of the 2023 Israel-Palestine conflict, using Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) and Multimodal Semiotics (MS) theories. Their analysis revealed a prevailing anti-war sentiment across editorial cartoons, with a pronounced tendency to express support for Palestine in cartoons originating from the Global South, particularly Sub-Saharan Africa. Their findings also uncovered more support for Israel and criticism of Hamas in *The Washington Times* and *The Washington Post* cartoons from the United States.

In another study, Somia et al. (2024) analyzed political cartoons published in a period of three weeks (October 8, 2023 to October

28, 2023) in Pakistani and British newspapers “*The Dawn*”, “*The News International*”, “*The Telegraph*” as well as “*The Independent*” to investigate which ideological aspects are represented in Pakistani and British newspapers through editorial cartoons regarding the war on Gaza. Their findings reveal that Pakistani cartoons tend to use “symbolic imagery” to emphasize the story of confrontation. They highlight “the victimization of Palestinians, criticize western support for Israel, and advocate Islamic and international solidarity against the policies of Israel” (Somia et al., 2024, p. 7). On the other hand, British cartoons, which mostly criticize political leadership and larger international issues through humor and satire, present “a balanced view, compare both sides of the war, and focus on the legal and moral consequences” (Somia et al., 2024, p. 7).

Zemmal and Zoghbi (2023/2024) provide a social semiotic analysis of Carlos Latuff’s political cartoons to investigate the ways in which different semiotic modes interact to fulfill Israel’s agenda during the “*Toofan Al Aqsa*” operations. Latuff is a famous Brazilian freelance political cartoonist born in 1968, who defined himself and “a leftist with a special interest in social and humanitarian issues” (Najjar, 2012, in Zemmal and Zoghbi (2023/2024, p. 24). Applying Kress and Van Leeuwen’s (2006, in Zemmal and Zoghbi (2023/2024, p. 2) social semiotic framework, they examine the ways in which these cartoons communicate messages through a combination of texts and images.

Salim and Syed Ismail (2025) interestingly present a semiology of visual representations of Palestinian children in political cartoons on Twitter displaying theory victimhood, emotional appeal and social response, cultural symbols and references, political commentary, resilience and resistance, and unaligned representation (blames on Israel or Hamas or both for the war).

The war on Gaza has also been covered by Guta and Eissa (2025), Liaqat et al. (2024), Zararsiz et al. (2024) and Yasmin et al. (2024). Most researchers have touched the issue through semiotics or discourse analysis.

However, despite the extensive body of research on the visual representations of the Gaza conflict, the application of 'Framing Theory' as a theory for categorizing cartoons' content, appears to be less touched by scholar attention on the topic. Moreover, most previous studies have focused on a limited number of cartoons published in specific platforms or in limited time spans. Some have even limited the scope of their study to media published in specific countries or by specific artists. While respecting the findings of the above-mentioned studies, the author claims that since any limitations to the sample, confines authors' arguments on the findings, this research has been conducted to gain a wider and more in depth insight into the ways in which graphic journalism has contributed globally to the war on Gaza. This paper tends to investigate the way in which the various aspects of the war have been framed in political cartoons produced and published online in the recent sixteen months, that is, since the outbreak of the conflict in October 2023.

1. 2. Theoretical and Methodical Framework

This study employs Framing theory as a theoretical framework to address its research question. Framing analysis is mostly associated with Erving Goffman. Goffman (1974) believed that people frame experiences in order to organize and understand the world around them. The concept of media framing refers to "the way in which the news media organize and provide meaning to a news story by

emphasizing some parts of reality and disregarding other parts" (Pedersen, 2017, p. 476). According to Chong & Druckman (2007, p. 104), "the major premise of framing theory is that an issue can be viewed from a variety of perspectives and be construed as having implications for multiple values or considerations". Framing theory suggests that frames are abstractions that work to organize or structure the meaning of a message. The basis of framing theory is that the media focuses on certain events and then places them within a field of meaning (Mass Communication Theory, n.d.). A frame in a communication "organizes everyday reality" (Tuchman 1978, p. 193, in Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 106). This article uses Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) model to investigate cartoon frames presented by online media on Gaza war. Semetko and Valkenburg (2000, pp. 95-96) identify five news frames used by media to capture and retain audience attention:

a) *Conflict frame*, which emphasizes conflict between individuals, groups, or institutions. 'Conflict' is noticed by Neuman et al. (1992, pp. 61–62, in Semetko and Valkenburg (2000, p. 95) as the most common frame in the US media. 'Conflict' is usually inferred and framed from political discussions and controversies among the elite and is thus extensively visible in media content.

b) *Human interest frame*, which focuses on the human face or the emotional aspect of events and issues. This is also common because journalists seek to attract audience and influence them through dramatization of content and emotionalization of news.

c) *Economic consequences frame*, which emphasizes the economic consequences of events on individuals, groups and society.

d) *Morality frame*, which regards issues through religious or

moral lenses and implicitly or explicitly puts the audience in a judgment position on whether or how something is right or wrong/ moral or immoral/ legitimate or illegitimate.

e) Responsibility frame, which "presents an issue or problem in such a way as to attribute responsibility for its cause or solution to either the government or to an individual or group" (Semetko and Valkenburg (2000, p. 96). In these frames, social or civic problems are described and certain people or governments or groups are said to bear responsibilities for their occurrence.

Table 1 summarizes the ways in which news media frames are categorized by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000, pp. 95-96).

Table 1. News Frames and Their Items in Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) Model

No.	News frames	Framing items
1	Conflict frame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Reflecting disagreement between parties-individuals-groups-countries – Stating that one party-individual-group-country reproaches another – Referring to two sides or to more than two sides of the problem or issue – Referring to winners and losers
2	Human interest frame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Providing a human example or "human face" on the issue – Employing adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy, or compassion – Emphasizing how individuals and groups are affected by the issue/problem – Going into the private or personal lives of the actors – Containing visual information that might generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy, or compassion

No.	News frames	Framing items
3	Economic consequences frame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Mentioning financial losses or gains now or in the future – Mentioning the costs/degree of expense involved – Referring to economic consequences of pursuing or not pursuing a course of action
4	Morality frame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Containing moral messages – Making reference to morality, God, and other religious tenets – Offering specific social prescriptions about how to behave
5	Responsibility frame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Suggesting that a certain level of government has the ability to alleviate the problem – Suggesting that a certain level of government is responsible for the issue/problem – Suggesting solution(s) to the problem/issue – Suggesting that an individual (or group of people in society) is responsible for the issue-problem – Suggesting that the problem requires urgent action

Source: Author, Adapted from Semetko and Valkenburg (2000, p. 100)

Framing theory has been widely used to analyze media news texts. Generally speaking, the ability of visual communication to function as an agent of framing has been a matter of controversy. Messaris and Abraham (2001, pp. 215-226) argue that due to the three distinctive properties of images, they are capable of functioning as media of communication: 1) the analogical quality of images, 2) the indexicality of images, and 3) images' lack of an explicit prepositional syntax. the idea that images can serve as framing devices is also stated by other scholars such as Gitlin (1980 in Lam & Tiung, 2024) and Rodríguez & Dimitrova (2011), with Rodríguez & Dimitrova (2011) providing a four level model of visual framing for analysis of images, drawings, illustrations, photographs,

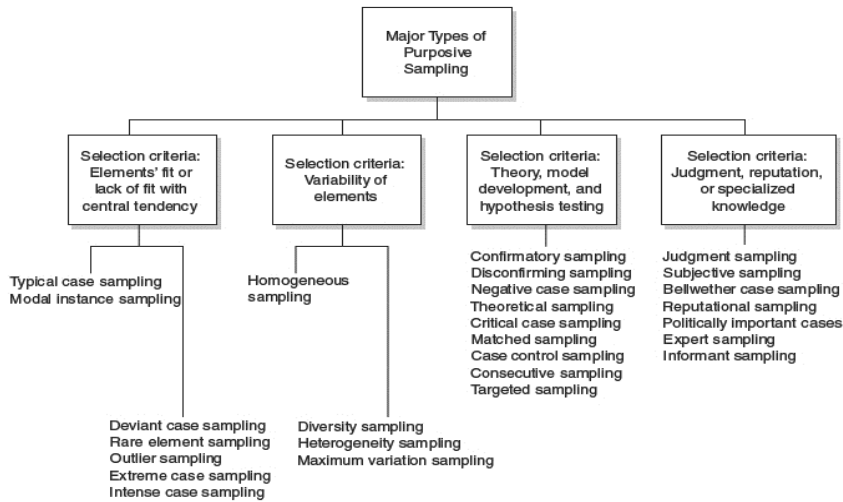
photo illustrations, and other graphic devices. The model includes denotative, stylistic, connotative and ideological levels for visual framing analysis.

In order to answer the study's research question, Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) model was used deductively to focus on the ways in which the war on Gaza was framed in political cartoons in online global media. Data collection was performed first through Google search to have random access to websites containing a considerable number of political cartoons. The search results encompassed online newspapers such as *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post*, news agencies, independent cartoonists' websites like Patrick Chappatte¹ and Ted Roll², sociopolitical analytics websites, etc. In the following step, among all results, purposive sampling, as a non-probability sampling technique, was used to select websites from which cartoons were downloaded. Among the four types of purposive sampling, 'variability of elements' was used as the selection criteria to select websites. Figure 1 illustrates the four types of purposive sampling and their selection criteria. 'Variability of elements' type of sampling was selected for its potential to let the researcher consider maximum elements in the sampling process, that is to take into consideration a variety of factors that help have the proper sampling.

1. A Lebanese-Swiss cartoonist known for his work for *Le Temps*, *NZZ am Sonntag*, the German news magazine *Der Spiegel*, *The New York Times* International Edition and the French satirical newspaper *Le Canard enchaîné*.

2. American columnist

Figure 1. Four Types of Purposive Sampling



Source: Daniel, 2012

Based on the research objective, the considered factors are as follows:

- a) having published a noticeable number of cartoons on the issue of Palestine
- b) easy access to the website content worldwide
- c) inclusion of artists' works of various nationalities
- d) inclusion of various perspectives and viewpoints about the issue of Palestine
- e) having published cartoons on the subject in a wide time span
- f) inclusion of works of both skilful/ well known and young/ amateur cartoonists

Therefore, websites of individual artists, newspapers with specific political orientations, news agencies with any specific national origins, governmental media web pages and websites with very few cartoons published occasionally were excluded from the sample. Two major websites with a great number of political cartoons were finally selected, namely: cartoonstock.com and cartoonmovement.com. Both website contained thousands of political cartoons on various issues by cartoonists with different nationalities. The reasons for which they were selected were as follows:

1. The number of cartoons published in these websites was not few, so they gave the author sufficient access to content so that data saturation is achieved and enough themes and items are inferred to have a conclusion.
2. Both websites were globally accessed and reachable.
3. Both websites published cartoons from a variety of cartoonists and from various countries, among which were both skillful figures and unknown young cartoonists. This let the author make sure the sample was reflective of graphic journalists' ideas worldwide and not a limited number from a few nations.
4. The published cartoons in these websites had a variety of subjects, suitable to detect the frames introduced by the theory.
5. Both websites inserted dates of publication of cartoons and all had published cartoons on the Gaza war from its early days of outbreak.

An explanation is given below about each website as an introduction to its mandate:

a) cartoonstock.com

Cartoon Stock is a library of cartoons. It provides a platform for cartoon art, which provides a mechanism for artists worldwide to license their images. The website accepts cartoons by cartoonists. It also collects and offers works from publications such as *The New Yorker*, *Esquire*, *Counterpoint*, *Creators*, *Cagle Cartoons*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Air Mail*, *Barron's*, *Webcomics*, *Toon Stack*, *Weekly Humorist*, *The American Bystander*, *Narrative*, *The Nib*, *The Rejection Collection*, and *MAD* (Publications, n.d.).

b) cartoonmovement.com

Run by Dutch award-winning editorial cartoonist Tjeerd Royaards, Cartoon Movement is an online platform bringing together professional editorial cartoonists from all over the world. Its mission is to promote professional editorial cartoon and defend freedom of speech. It has published cartoons from a network of more than 600 cartoonists (About us, n.d.). The website works with international media, as well as universities, museums, NGOs and international organizations such as the United Nations to produce cartoons on a range of issues, from climate change to human rights (An overview of our projects, n.d.)

Finally, 700 cartoons were collected searching in these websites with the following keywords: Gaza, Palestine, Israel-Palestine conflict. Among the collected cartoons, 120 were selected randomly regardless of their origin to conduct the research. Table 2 shows the number of cartoons collected from each website before the final random selection.

Table 2. Research Sampling Results (Websites and Number of Cartoons Taken from Each Website before final selection)

No.	Websites	Number of cartoons collected
1	cartoonstock.com	490
2	Cartoonmovement.com	210

Source: author

Open coding was done to categorize thematic features of the cartoons. First the ideas behind the selected cartoons were labeled based on the concepts perceived from the images (In vivo codes). Then cartoons were categorized into groups under common concepts narrowing down the thematic properties in the first stage. Finally, the ultimate codes were inferred and checked to be line with Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) model frames.

2. Findings

The data analysis based on the five frames of theory demonstrates the following results. Table 3 summarizes the distribution of the cartoons' content in each frame based on their frequency, expressed in percentages.

Table 3. cartoons frames and their frequency percentage based on Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) model

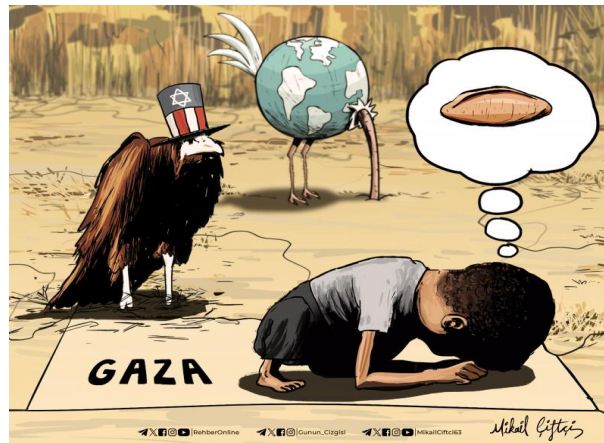
No.	Cartoons frames	frequency percentage
1	Human interests frame	33%
2	Morality frame	24%
3	Responsibility frame	21%
4	Conflict frame	20%
5	Economic consequences frame	2%

Source: Author

2. 1. Human Interests Frame

Humanitarian concerns constitute the content of a significant number of the studies cartoons. The frame appears in different forms and with different messages: 'grief' is a key concept depicted in numerous cartoons in various ways such as children's grief, famine, Palestinian families without food or proper clothing, destroyed or unsafe hospitals for injured women and children as the most vulnerable groups of victims in Gaza. Figure 2 for example, shows a starving Palestinian child, hopeless to receive food. There were also cartoons showing bombs coming down into the empty dishes of Palestinians instead of food or under the name of 'aid'. Other cartoons conveyed the idea that the humanitarian pauses or ceasefires do not work and Gaza residents are suffering from lack of medical and health facilities.

Figure 2. Children and Hunger in Gaza



Source: Çiftçi, 2024

‘Lonely children’ were also the subject of many cartoons, either mourning for the death of their parents, left among the ruins of

buildings, crying, looking for food, horrified or injured in hospitals (figure 3). 'Gaza in human disaster' was visualized by drawings of significant numbers of the dead, ruined hospitals and injured or killed babies. Another theme within this frame was that people in Gaza are 'victims' of war, that civilians are the main people suffering in this war, and that they are being killed innocently. 'Insufficient humanitarian aid' was another human interests frame. The decline in aid compared to previous rounds of Israel attacks on Gaza was also noticed by cartoonists.

Figure 3. Attack on Hospital in Gaza



Source: Lucas, 2023

In general, cartoons with human interests frame tended to evoke feelings of pity, sympathy and caring in the audience. 'The humanitarian face of war' was a central element in all cartoons with this frame. Some cartoons showed United Nations or Red Cross staff being among the killed, meaning that those who came to help were also killed, which sheds light on the severity of the disaster. In a few cartoons, the human interests frame was noticeable, showing Israeli families mourning for their dears killed in October 7 or looking for their freedom.

The cartoons with this frame reflect a human crisis in place and are produced in reaction to a number of facts about Gaza war: first, Israel's denial of food as a weapon against the people of Gaza, as well as its humanitarian consequences. According to the OCHA report on April 25, 2025:

Israel's illegal and immoral shutdown of all supply routes into Gaza is a deliberate campaign to starve civilians, and Islamic Relief staff on the ground say the situation is now the worst we have ever seen there. Many children are going whole days without eating while aid trucks packed with food are cruelly blocked from entering just a few miles away (OCHA, 2025a).

Second, the considerable number of the war casualties has surpassed 50.000 (OCHA, 2025b) creating an irreparable tragedy in the region and exemplifying a genocide. The number of killed is incomparable to that in Sabra and Shatila in the 1982 and 2008-2009 attacks.

2. 2. Morality Frame

Morality is defined as the categorization of intentions, decisions and actions into those that are *proper* or *right*, and those that are *improper*, or *wrong* (Long & Sedley, 1987). It includes codes of conduct derived from a philosophy, religion or culture and is usually taken synonymous as 'rightness'. Whether and how morality is to be considered in war situation is a controversial issue among political philosophers, global ethics experts and international law specialists.

Among the studied political cartoons, a significant number focused on moral issues regarding Israel attacks on Gaza. The

substantial number of killed civilians and political leaders' disregard of the death of civilians, as two instances of immorality, received high attention. Figure 4 depicts an example of such cartoons, showing Biden's visit to Israel, walking with Netanyahu in the middle of lines of the corpses and among the destroyed buildings. The significance of the subject is that it is about how loosely 'moral standards' were regarded in the war, what Moses (2024, p. 211) calls "The absence of a clear, sustained, and powerful invocation of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) in response to Israel's vicious assault on Gaza". Israel's longstanding claims of having "the most moral army in the world" were highly negated in the course of the war (Ya'alon, 2024, in *Times of Israel*, 2024; Levy, 2024) both by the IDF¹'s inhumane actions and words. The use of the term "human animals" by Yoav Gallant² (2023) to refer to Gaza residents is regarded as "a colonial narrative" that "frames Palestinians as immoral barbarians who "deserve to die" (Gordon, 2023).

Figure 4. Biden Visits Israel



Source: Nath, 2023

1 . Israel Defense Forces

2 . Israeli Defense Minister (2022-2024)

Declining 'sensitivity' to the war was also noticed by cartoonists as a moral aspect of the war. Figure 5, for instance, shows an American family ignoring Gaza news when shown on the CNN, because they have become desensitized to the subject, perhaps due to its durability or repeated occurrence in news or their being not impacted by its human consequences. The same desensitized situation was also displayed by another cartoonist depicting media audience indifferent to the war news when watching 2024 Paris Olympic Games on TV.

Figure 5. Desensitized



Source: Royaards, 2023

That theme “civilian Palestinians are the real victims of the war between Hamas and Israel” appeared in numerous cartoons as an immoral phenomenon, something that should not happen. Another item within the moral frame was the depiction of Prophets Moses and Jesus (PBUT) carrying 10 commandments or offended by the war situation.

Another moral aspect of the war was the ‘The Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip’ case brought before the International Court of Justice on December 29, 2023 by South Africa regarding the mass killing conducted by Israel in Gaza. The subject was covered by various cartoons showing Netanyahu in the court.

The morality frame also appeared in cartoons showing the human rights convention in fire or torn up by either sides of the conflict. Journalists’ amazing death toll in the war was also noticed by cartoonists, reflecting statistics released about the number’s surpassing 200 in early 2025 (McCready et al., 2025).

American students’ protests against genocide in Gaza and their critical stances toward their universities financial relations with Israel were also among the morality frame items. In some cartoons of this type, an American student was demanding his/her ‘right’ to protest. In others, their moral stances looked bizarre to their families and parents.

The ‘war is enough’ theme was also observed as a moral demand in certain cartoons. The idea that ‘war does not end war’ or ‘violence brings more violence’ was noticeable both verbally as said by teachers or expressed visually, showing an endless bloody conflict.

2. 3. Responsibility Frame

Taking responsibility frames as those which attribute responsibility for a problem's cause or solution to either the government or to an individual or group (Semetko and Valkenburg (2000, p. 96), one finds several cases of cartoons presenting various parties including

Hamas, Hezbollah, Iran, Israel, Houthis, Israel army, Netanyahu, the US and Europe as responsible or blamed for the war.

In various cartoons, the US was depicted as unable to control Israel and Netanyahu's war cabinet. Figure 6 illustrates Netanyahu's war machine exceeding many stop signs left by the US and ignoring the 'losing support' warning. Interestingly, his greed for war is shown to have received rejection on a bipartisan basis, i.e. both Joe Biden and Donald Trump from Democrat and Republican parties. Among cartoons with blames on Netanyahu were also those about the Israeli society's demand on him to rescue hostages in the hands of Hamas.

Figure 6. USA on Netanyahu



Source: Nath, 2024

Several other cartoons showed the US extensive military, financial and verbal support for Israel as a support for the mass killing of civilians or illicit compromise on genocide. These cartoons were indeed referring to the weapons transfers of the US

to Israel during the Biden administration. According to a report for Brown University's Costs of War Project, the United States spent a record of at least \$17.9 billion on military aid to Israel from October 2023 to October 2024 (Knickmeyer, 2024). The united US-Israeli stance in the war was echoed in Netanyahu's claim in his speech to the US Congress on July 24, 2024, that Israel's war against Hamas is really America's war, as well as a bigger war against Iran, further implying that he was waging it on behalf of the United States (Muasher, 2024). The United States as the key supporter of Israel was also depicted with this frame as weaponizing Israel at the expense of Palestinian lives.

Cartoons with blames on Hamas depicted Palestinian families or children stuck between Israel and Hamas soldiers. There were also cartoons showing Hamas soldiers using Gaza civilians as human shields against Israel's attacks. One cartoon put great assault and blame on Hamas leader, Yahya Sinwar, for the October 7th attacks, showing him killing the peace pigeon, with his name broken into two pieces consisting of sin + war. Another cartoon displayed Netanyahu and Sinwar imprisoned by a judge of the International Criminal Court. Another series of items within the responsibility frame, depicted Iran as 'playing with fire', 'the grassroots of Hamas and Houthis', 'the major target of Israel attacks' and 'an octopus'. Figure 7 is a two-part cartoon in which Netanyahu, sitting on Biden's shoulders, is playing with the beehive named 'Iran'. In the second part the bees are freed and attack them angrily. It is related to the April 13, 2024, when Iran launched more than 300 drones and missiles toward Israel as a reaction to a strike against its consulate in Damascus on April 1st 2024.

Figure 7. Risk of Escalation in the Middle East



Source: Hajjaj, 2024

In general, resistance soldiers, including Hamas, Houthis or Hezbollah were framed with ugly and angry faces and sometimes with terrorist labels at the background. One cartoon showed a paradox in the mind of a Hamas soldier and his words, wondering why there is no peace and repeating 'death to Israel' slogan. This shows the cartoonist's belief that Hamas's ideology is an obstacle to peace in Gaza.

Another responsibility item was seen in cartoons that put blames on Arab countries of the region for their longstanding 'silence' and

‘indifference’ to the genocide in Gaza. These cartoons took the Arab world’s ineffective or hesitant reaction to the massacre in Gaza due to their “social weakness, economic vulnerability and political dependency” (Ataman, 2024).

2. 4. Conflict Frames

As for conflict frame, the clash between Israel and Hamas was the most observed theme in the cartoons. The Israeli and Palestinian sides were identified either by their flags or leaders. In all cartoons with this theme, the two sides were depicted with angry faces with or without weapons. Other sides of the conflict were also shown confronting each other with or without weapons. Figure 8 displays Joe Biden’s inability to stop Hamas – Israel confrontation on the issue of Palestine. The 'conflicting sides' were also depicted 'at war with each other' by showing their soldiers, weapons, and symbols in combat. 'The state of Palestine' was shown in one cartoon kicking harshly on Netanyahu's face in a boxing match.

Figure 8. Biden and Israel and Hamas



Source: Wright, 2024

Another conflict frame theme implied the fragility or impossibility of any ceasefires. The theme was notable since it beared a degree of disappointment about having an end to the conflict. Figure 9 is an instance of cartoons with such an item. ‘Confrontation’ was also represented in the form of showing the United Nations emblem broken into pieces with the phrase ‘divided nations’ at the background, meaning that the world is unable to solve the problem.

Figure 9. Middle East Peace Threatened



Source: Fatunla, 2023

Another item in this category looked mostly like prediction of the future of the conflict. Depicting an ‘unknown’ future with schemes of ‘the approaching of the third World War’, ‘Middle East in fire’, escalating tensions’, ‘chaos’ and ‘unending war’ prevailed in these cartoons, all of which suggest that conflict is ‘severe’. Cartoons of this type were indeed a translation of real world facts about the war. One reason the conflict looked unending was that both sides have ideological reasons to fight; the Palestinian side fights for freedom of its fatherland and the Israeli side regards Hamas as a threat to its security. Moreover several peace talks have proved fruitless so far.

2. 5. Economic Consequences Frame

The economic consequences frame received the least amount of attention from cartoonists. As for this frame, most cartoons took the future of Gaza as their focal point. What was notable as the economic side of the issue, regarded the strip as part of long term plans of other players of the conflict especially the United States. One cartoon for example showed Donald Trump playing golf in Gaza after the war, referring to his proposal on evacuating Gaza from Palestinians and rebuilding the strip. His plan included forced displacement of approximately 2 million Palestinians to neighboring lands. Other items of this frame suggested that the international players of the conflict, especially the US and Europe, are following their own benefits from the war. Figure 10 is an example of this type, showing the European Union, Israel and the US are roasting and eating the map of Gaza as food together, i.e. each pursuing its own interests from the conflict. Portraying the Middle East as a shop for Chinese products, that is being destroyed by bulldozers, constituted the theme of another cartoon. This

perhaps reflects the fact that the war is evoking financial reactions in the region.

Figure 10. Gaza



Source: Artigala, 2023

As argued in section 2, human interests frame had the most number of cartoons with 33% of frequency, ranking at the top of list. After that, 'morality', with 24% of frequency, ranks second, indicating a more focused attention to the 'human and moral' aspects of the war by cartoonists, which seems to signify the war's impact to provoke sympathizing impacts both on the audience and artists. On the other hand, economic consequences frame was the least noticed theme among the selected cartoons, perhaps due to the unknown future of the war or the importance of the dramatic aspect of it for artists. A summary of the five frames and their items observed in the cartoons is provided in table 3.

Table 3. summary of the frames and their example items in the selected cartoons

websites	Items
Human interests frame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grief • Children suffering from war • Widespread hunger • Starvation as a weapon • Civilian lives at risk • Significant number of the killed • No way out of the problem • Human disaster • UN staff killed • UN staff unable to help • Bombs as food for people • Babies being killed
Morality frame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Violence leads to more violence • Ignoring moral aspects of war • Great number of killed civilians • Declining sensitivity to the war • American students' moral concerns • Prophets offended by the war • South Africa case against Israel • Human rights convention in fire • Genocide is taking place
Responsibility frame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Israel military as responsible • Netanyahu as responsible • Iran is behind Hamas & Houthis • Hamas is to be blamed • Sinwar is guilty • The US is backing Netanyahu • The US cannot stop Netanyahu • Criticism of Netanyahu's expansionist ideas • Hezbollah is responsible • Arab countries' indifference
Conflict frames	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The war continues • The war is endless • There is chaos • Several parties are involved • Middle East in fire • 3rd World War is coming • Confrontation is severe
Economic consequences frame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trump is using the situation to have financial gains • Europe and other parties are dividing the cake • Gaza will be poorer • The war is destroying the market for Chinese products in the region

3. Conclusion

This article focused on graphic journalism and the way in which it covered the war on Gaza as a genre of journalism between October 7, 2023 and February 7, 2025. Relying on framing theory and Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) model of news frames, the author tried to investigate how the war has been framed thematically by cartoonists worldwide. Two major websites were selected through purposive sampling, and among a collection of 700 cartoons related to the subject, 120 ones were selected randomly. The cartoons were thoroughly studied to detect the five frames of the model. Throughout the study, thematic items of each frame were inferred to be able to have a comprehensive categorization of themes in each frame. Findings reveal that Human interests, Morality, Responsibility, Conflict and Economic consequences frames constituted the most prominent themes with 33%, 24%, 21%, 20% and 2% of frequency respectively. Results indicate a more focused attention to the 'human and moral' aspects of the war by cartoonists, which seems to signify the war's impact to provoke sympathizing impacts both on the audience and artists. Economic consequences frame, on the other hand, was the least noticed theme among the selected cartoons, perhaps due to the unknown future of the war or the importance of the dramatic aspect of it for artists.

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