Public Executions in Gaza in Arabic Western Media Coverage: A Critical Discourse Analysis Perspective

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Abstract:
This study aims to analyze and describe the process of discourse production regarding the public execution operations carried out by Hamas in Arabic-language Western media, using the three-dimensional framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The research employs a descriptive qualitative approach, applying Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis method. The primary data in this study are taken from Arabic-language Western news media, namely Sky News Arabic, CNN Arabic, and DW Arabic. The secondary data come from books, articles, and official websites relevant to the topic of the research. Data were collected by reading news reports on public executions in these Arabic-language Western media outlets—Sky News Arabic, CNN Arabic, and DW Arabic. The data found were then recorded and analyzed using Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA, which includes the text dimension, the discursive practice dimension, and the socio-cultural practice dimension. Based on the analysis, the researcher found a parallel between the research objectives and the findings. The results reveal the use of semantic instruments in constructing narratives about the executions carried out by Hamas from the perspective of the text dimension. The news media employed instruments such as actor representation and lexical choices through demonization, victimization, and negative representation of other groups.Furthermore, the discourse production was supported by narratives that tended to emphasize an "appeal to authority" regarding the executions carried out by Hamas against militias supported by Israel. The news media also used biased terminology in narrating Hamas's operations, highlighting perspectives that were "anti-Hamas."

***Keywords**: Public Execution, Hamas, Gaza, Critical Discourse Analysis*

A. INTRODUCTION

In this section, After the ceasefire between Hamas and Israel took effect, Hamas shifted its focus to maintaining public security in Gaza. The group deployed its personnel to ensure civilian safety following the genocide. Among the duties of these personnel were to track down, arrest, and punish pro-Israel militias who were active during the genocide in Gaza. Hamas implemented this operation on the grounds that these militias had engaged in deliberate killings, attempted assassinations, the abduction of specific individuals, armed

terrorism, and the extortion of humanitarian aid, actions that heightened public fear and involved the theft of public rights, as well as the use and smuggling of drugs. All of these acts, according to Hamas, were carried out in cooperation with Israel (Aljazeera, 2025).

One of the punitive measures carried out by Hamas was public execution, which was broadcast through Hamas's channel, "Al-Aqsa" (Deutsche Welle, 2025). This public execution operation received various responses from international media and institutions. Negative reactions came from media outlets and organizations that considered the act a violation of human rights and a potential trigger for civil conflict in Gaza. Among these media outlets were Sky News Arabic (2025 ,سكاي نيوز عربية), DW Arabic (Deutsche Welle, 2025), Cnn Arabic (CNN Bil Arabia, 2025), and Times of Israel Arabic (The Times of Israel Arabia, 2025). This situation has created the possibility of public polarization regarding the genocide in Gaza and influenced public perceptions of the resistance organization Hamas.

The media serve as an ideological instrument possessing symbolic power to shape public opinion, thereby playing a crucial role in the process of constructing news narratives, both positive and negative, about the operations carried out by Hamas. This aligns with Prayetno's view that mass media act as agents of social construction, playing an essential role in shaping public perception of major events, particularly within the sphere of global politics (Prayetno, et al., 2023). In the dynamics of political communication, the media do not merely convey information but also reproduce reality that has been interpreted through ideological lenses and specific interests(Nurudin, 2017).

The media have been involved in injecting certain ideologies into the discourse surrounding various humanitarian crises around the world, one example being the romanticization of the American invasion of Iraq (Calabrese, 2005), the production of discourse surrounding military intervention in Afghanistan (Shabir, Ali, & Iqbal, 2011), as well as the demonization of various resistance organizations (An Shori, 2025). This phenomenon represents the power of the media in constructing diverse public perceptions of a given issue.

To uncover the ideological meanings within the discourse production about the public executions carried out by Hamas in news media, the researcher employs a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach. Kurniawati (2014) states that CDA functions as an analytical tool based on a knowledge paradigm derived from the traditions of social theory and critical linguistic analysis (Firmansyah, 2018). According to Fairclough, discourse has three social functions: the identity function, the relational function, and the ideational function (Hamdan, 2019). Fairclough (2010), as cited in (Sasmitha, 2023), explains that Critical Discourse Analysis consists of three dimensions or structures: the text dimension (including speech, writing, visual images, or combinations of these), the discursive practice dimension (which encompasses the production and consumption of texts), and the socio-cultural practice dimension.

This study is interesting to conduct because the topic is a subtopic of the broader theme of the Gaza genocide. Analyzing news texts that are critical of Hamas provides an important perspective on the ongoing dialectic regarding the very essence of Hamas itself. Moreover, the reporting reveals the use of lexical choices and metaphors, as well as the exploitation of specific socio-political positions, in describing the public executions carried out by Hamas.

This study aims to analyze and describe the discourse production concerning the public execution operations carried out by Hamas in Arabic-language Western media, using the three-dimensional framework of Critical Discourse Analysis. First, it involves a textual

analysis of the public execution operations carried out by Hamas as reported in Arabic-language Western media. Second, it examines the discursive practice of these public execution operations in the same media. Third, it explores the socio-cultural practice dimension regarding the public execution operations carried out by Hamas in Arabic-language Western media.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Wardani, Rustono, and Mardikantoro (2023) conducted a study entitled *Analisis Wacana Kritis Model Roger Fowler Dalam Wacana Teks Berita Tentang "Penyerangan Hamas Palestina Terhadap Israel" Dalam Tiga Sumber Berita Online.* The findings of their critical discourse analysis revealed that vocabulary choices and grammatical structures were strategically used to influence readers' perspectives. The study provides deep insights into how different media outlets utilize discourse and grammar to shape readers' perceptions and understanding of the Hamas–Israel conflict. This research underscores the crucial role of language in constructing ideological stances within news reporting.
2. Sherina and Mardiah (2024) examined *Sandera Israel dan Palestina dalam Pemberitaan CNN dari Perspektif Fairclough.* This study aimed to uncover how CNN, as a Western (American) news platform, represents Palestine through its coverage of hostage situations involving both Israeli and Palestinian sides. Through the analysis of cohesion, coherence, grammatical structure, and lexical choice, the study found that CNN tends to take a pro-Israel stance by framing Hamas as the party responsible for violence and threats in the conflict. These findings illustrate CNN's ideological alignment with Western media narratives in representing Middle Eastern conflicts.
3. Shori and Wahid (2024) explored *Respon Israel atas Instabilitas Konstalasi Politik dan Militer Timur Tengah.* The purpose of this study was to identify and describe Israel's strategies to maintain its existence amid neighboring countries hostile to it, using Stephen Walt's *Balance of Threat* theory as a framework. The results indicate that Israel maintains a strong military force to ensure its defense and possesses advanced technological capabilities in both civilian and military sectors. Moreover, the study found that Israel prioritizes balancing rather than bandwagoning when facing threats, reflecting the nation's high confidence in its capabilities and resilience.
4. Purnama (2016) conducted a study titled *The Representation of Hamas and Israel in American and Arabian Mass Media: A Critical Discourse Analysis.* This research focuses on how mass media represent Hamas and Israel through news reporting, particularly CNN representing American media and Al Jazeera representing Arab media. The findings reveal that CNN depicts Hamas negatively and Israel positively, while Al Jazeera presents Hamas positively and Israel negatively. These contrasting representations stem from the impressions built for readers regarding the conflicting parties.

The study concludes that such dichotomies are deliberately constructed by the media to influence readers' attitudes, as audiences are more likely to support the side portrayed in a positive light.

Based on the researcher's search, four previous studies were found to be relevant to the current research. The search was conducted based on focus, object, and theory used in the studies. Among the five previous studies identified, four focused on the Israel-Palestine conflict (Wardani, Rustono, & Mardikantoro, 2023; Sherina & Mardiah, 2024; Shori & Wahid, 2024; Purnama, 2016). In terms of the research object, one study focused on the October 7 attacks, one examined news coverage of prisoners, one analyzed Israel's responses, and one explored media coverage of Hamas and Israel in the United States. Regarding theoretical framework, three studies employed Critical Discourse Analysis, while one used Defensive Realism theory. Among these four studies, none specifically focused on or used news coverage of public executions carried out by Hamas as their research focus or object. Previous studies will be used to determine the relevance and novelty of the research being conducted.

C. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) method. The primary data come from Western Arabic-language news media, namely Sky News Arabic, CNN Arabic, and DW Arabic. The secondary data are sourced from relevant books, articles, and official websites. Data were collected by reading news reports on public executions in these Western Arabic-language media outlets. The collected data were then recorded and analyzed using Fairclough's CDA method, which covers three dimensions: the textual dimension, the discursive practice dimension, and the sociocultural practice dimension.

D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Textual Dimension

In news narratives, media outlets often employ linguistic polarization instruments to dramatize or label the public execution operations carried out by the Hamas resistance. These instruments appear in the form of derogatory terms, official naming, and other representative linguistic markers. This can be observed in the following discussion:

Actor Representation and Words Choices

(Darojat & Widhiatama, 2025) explain that the choice of words reflects the way a person or event is portrayed, which can indicate the presence of bias or a particular perspective in the discourse. This aligns with the view of (Rubing & Sandaran, 2023), who argue that vocabulary is crucial in conveying ideology, as it helps to explain the use of metaphors and the meanings embedded within a text.

Finding 1:

وكأنها رسالة ترهيب أرادت من خلالها الحركة، وفق محللين، أن تعيد فرض هيبتها مع تراجع شعبيتها ولو بالقوة (سكاي نيوز عربية، 2025)

"It is as if this is an intimidation message the movement wants to convey, according to analysts, in order to restore its authority amid declining popularity, even if it means resorting to violence."

In the excerpt above, three lexical choices were found that tend to demonize the Hamas organization, namely ترهيب, هيبة, and تراجع. According to the Al-Ma'aany dictionary, ترهيبis the masdar form of the verb رَهَّبَ, meaning تَخْويفُ orتَفْزيعُ, which translates to "to frighten" or "to panic" (Almaany, n.d.). The word ترهيبshares the same root as الإرهاب, which means "terror." In the excerpt, it is paired with رسالة, which literally means "message." Sky News Arabic, in this context, frames the executions carried out by Hamas as a terror message directed at rival militias.

The word هيبة is the masdar form of هابَ. It means المَخافَةُ and التَّقِيَّة, referring to a fear-inducing aura or something that imposes subjugation (Almaany, n.d.). Sky News uses هيبةto describe authority but omits the more commonly used term سلطة. Additionally, تراجعis the masdar form of the verb تراجع, meaning عودة إلى الوراء orتحوّل, which translates to regression or change (Almaany, n.d.). Sky News further demonizes Hamas by framing the executions as an attempt by Hamas to reassert control amid the 'regressiveness of support' in Gaza. Sky News Arabic avoids using terms like "إعادة الهدوء" ("restoring calm") or "سيطرة الضوء" ("light control"), even though, according to (Yohnan, 2025), the non-Hamas public in Gaza viewed the operations positively. The lexical choices employed by Sky News Arabic can be categorized as lexicalization. (Kadim, 2023) explains that lexicalization is a semantic tool used to depict an individual or group in a positive or negative light.

Finding 2:

بعد الإعلان عن قتل حركة حماس لما لا يقل عن 32 شخصا في قطاع غزة خلال اشتباكات مع مجموعات قالت إنها تشكل تحديا لسلطتها، يظهر التساؤل جليا حول من يتحكم بالمشهد في غزة اليوم ويفرض سطوته (سكاي نيوز عربية، 2025) .

"After the announcement of Hamas's killing of at least 32 people in the Gaza Strip during clashes with groups they considered a challenge to their authority, a clear question arose about who is currently controlling the situation in Gaza and enforcing its power."

In the excerpt above, two ideologically charged lexical choices are identified: قتل and تحديا. The word قتل, which literally means "killing," was chosen by Sky News Arabic instead of using the term إعدام المدني("civilian execution"). While قتلrefers to killing in a general sense and is not a legal term like الإعدام, it carries a negative connotation in public perception. The word تحديا is the masdar form of تَحَدَّى. In the dictionary اللغة العربية المعاصر, it means جابه دون خوفٍ, or "challenging without fear" (Almaany, n.d.). Sky News Arabic frames Hamas's executions as resulting from a rivalry between Hamas and the militias being executed. The outlet avoids using the term التعاون, which would indicate cooperation between the executed prisoners and Israel. The lexical choices employed by Sky News Arabic in this context can also be categorized as lexicalization.

Finding 3:

ولكن في هذه الحالة فحماس تفكر كميليشيا وليس كفصيل فلسطيني، كان يجب تقديم هؤلاء للمحاكمة وليس تنفيذ الإعدام الميداني بحقهم (سكاي نيوز عربية، 2025)

"But in this case, Hamas acted as a militia, not as a Palestinian faction. They should have been tried, not executed in the field."

In the excerpt above, Sky News Arabic uses the word ميليشيا to represent the Hamas organization. The term ميليشيا is the Arabized form of the English word "militia," which itself was adopted from a Roman term. It originally describes a paramilitary group formed by civilians (Calder, 1910). In its modern usage, however, the term has undergone semantic

distortion in social and political contexts, acquiring an additional meaning as a militia formed for radical or hateful purposes (Katz & Bailey, 2000). In this context, labeling Hamas as a militia carries a negative connotation. The narrative constructed by Sky News Arabic can be categorized as Demonization. (Kadim, 2023) explains that Demonization refers to terms used to characterize individuals, organizations, or political entities as inherently 'evil'.

Finding 4:

حيث ظهر مقطع فيديو مروع بشكل خاص يُظهر مجموعة من المقاتلين الملثمين، بعضهم يرتدي عصابات رأس خضراء تحمل شعار "حماس"، وهم يقتلون 8 أشخاص معصوبي الأعين في ساحة بمدينة غزة، بينما كانت حشود غفيرة تشاهدهم، في إشارة محتملة إلى الوحشية التي تستخدمها "حماس" لإعادة تأكيد وجودها كقوة أمنية. (CNN Bil Arabia, 2025)

"A very disturbing video emerged, showing a group of masked fighters, some wearing green headbands inscribed with 'Hamas,' killing eight blindfolded individuals in a field in Gaza City, while a large crowd watched, possibly indicating the cruelty employed by Hamas to reaffirm its presence as a security force."

In the excerpt above, the words مروع, الوحشية, and the phrase لإعادة تأكيد وجودها are used. مروع is the ism maf'ul form of رَوَّعَ, meaning رُعْبٌ ,هَلَعٌ, and ذُعْرٌ, which translate to "frightening," "disturbing," or "alarming" (Almaany, n.d.). The word الوحشية comes from وحش, meaning قاسية جدًّ, or "very cruel." These lexical choices impose the idea or assumption that Hamas is a 'barbaric' group in its actions. The phrase لإعادة تأكيد وجودها, meaning "to reaffirm its existence," reinforces the legitimacy of the previous lexical choices. CNN frames Hamas's executions as 'uncivilized' acts, serving primarily as a framing or dramatization to assert their position in public perception as a security force.

Finding 5:

"الجماعة الإرهابية تحكم بالخوف - تُعدم المدنيين، وتُعذب المعارضين، وتُطلق النار على من يجرؤ على الاحتجاج، ويُقابل الفلسطينيون الساعون للطعام أو الحرية بالرصاص، لا بالشفقة، إنها ليست مقاومة، بل استبداد" (CNN Bil Arabia, 2025)

"Terrorist groups rule through fear, executing civilians, torturing dissenters, shooting anyone who dares to protest, and Palestinians seeking food or freedom are met with bullets instead of mercy. This is not resistance, but tyranny."

In the excerpt above, the words الجماعة الإرهابية, تُعذب, and تُعدم المدنيين are used. The phrase الجماعة الإرهابية literally means "terrorist group." CNN designates Hamas as a terrorist group that exercises control through fear, although this designation is not officially recognized by the UN and is only acknowledged by some Western countries. Experts continue to debate the proper application of the term terrorism, which is difficult to define and distinguish from the concept of resistance (United Nations, 2018). CNN's usage reflects a semantic tool of 'Negative Other-Presentation', closely tied to their ideological stance. (Kadim, 2023) explains that the division between in-groups and out-groups is not merely based on values but is shaped by ideology and the implementation of norms and principles.

The word المعارضين تُعذب is the mudhori' form of عذب, meaning عاقب and نَكَّلَ, or "to punish" and "to torture" (Almaany, n.d.). In the context, it is associated with demonstrators.

The phrase تُعدم المدنيين literally means "executing civilians." The use of these two phrases reflects CNN Arabic's attempt to employ Victimization. CNN Arabic represents those being executed as civilians with no connection to Israel. Through this framing, CNN Arabic constructs a narrative that supports labeling Hamas as a 'terrorist group.' (Kadim, 2023) explains that victimization is a semantic tool used to depict a group as victims of another party, with the opposing party often portrayed using negative terms.

Finding 6:

وأثارت تلك التقارير والفيديوهات القلق بين السكان في قطاع غزة وخارجها بعد يوم واحد فقط من توقيع اتفاق وقف إطلاق النار، الذي تم التوصل إليه بصعوبة بين إسرائيل وحماس، وهي جماعة فلسطينية إسلاموية مسلحة تصنفها ألمانيا والاتحاد الأوروبي والولايات المتحدة ودول أخرى كمنظمة إرهابية(Deutsche Welle, 2025)

"The report and video sparked concern among residents in the Gaza Strip and surrounding areas just one day after the hard-won ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas, a Palestinian armed Islamist group classified by Germany, the European Union, the United States, and other countries as a terrorist organization."

DW Arabic uses the phrase منظمة إرهابية, the same phrase used by CNN Arabic. DW Arabic demonizes Hamas as a terrorist organization based on the designation used by Western authorities. By using this phrase, DW Arabic delegitimizes Hamas's executions, framing the operations as tending toward "terrorism." This usage is also described as positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation (Kadim, 2023).

The findings in the data above align with Darojat & Widhiatama (2025), who state that lexical choices reflect the descriptions used to explain actors and events, thereby revealing potential biases and perspectives within an expression. This is consistent with Rubing & Sandaran (2023), who argue that vocabulary is crucial in conveying ideology, as it clarifies the use of metaphors and meanings within a text. The textual choices and actor representations in these news reports are employed to manufacture consent or propagate the notion that Hamas is not a legitimate or positive actor in the conflict with Israel.

Discursive Practise Dimension

(Handayani, Mailin, Lubis, & Hasibuan, 2018) state that discourse should be understood as both a discursive practice and a text. This study examines three news reports produced by Sky News Arabic, CNN Arabic, and DW Arabic, all of which narrate the executions carried out by Hamas against militias supported by Israel. These reports were motivated by the circulation of a video showing public executions by Hamas members operating under the command named *الرادع*. In narrating Hamas's executions, all three media outlets frame their reporting around both sides of the conflict. However, the conclusions and narrative constructions tend to adopt an 'anti-Hamas' position rather than a neutral stance. Each news outlet demonstrates a tendency to emphasize narratives that cast Hamas's operations in a negative light. Hamas's perspective is frequently qualified with terms such as 'assumption,' 'perspective,' and similar expressions, whereas perspectives from non-Hamas or anti-Hamas institutions are presented without such qualifiers. Overall, the positioning of these reports appears aimed at imposing a negative interpretation of Hamas's operations on the audience.

The discourse production process of the three news outlets is closely linked to the ideologies of Western media. Their reporting is intertwined with the genocidal conflict and the ceasefire between Hamas and Israel. CNN has faced criticism from its own staff, as documented by Al Jazeera, for exhibiting bias in its coverage of Israeli attacks in Gaza. The network was reportedly required to obtain approval or cooperation from Israel before crafting certain narratives (Monjardino, 2025). The narratives employed by Sky News and CNN in Arabic closely resemble those constructed for global consumption in English (Kottasová, Dahman, & Kourdi, 2025; Merwe & Doak, 2025). Furthermore, Assal Rad explains that Western media narratives are carefully curated to align with government policies that support Israel, including those of the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany (Ghani, 2025).

Socio-Cultural Dimension

Van Dijk (2005) states that the choice of words used by speakers is the result of their position, role, purpose, perspective, or opinion arising from the consequences of contextual elements (Kadim, 2023). In narrating the news, Sky New Arabic, CNN Arabic, and DW Arabic often use the social modality of 'appeal to authority' to produce, distract, and shift ideology, guilt, and public attention towards Hamas and its operations.

The executions carried out by Hamas were motivated by widespread aid theft and criminal activities, including murder, kidnapping, and drug trafficking, perpetrated by militias supported by Israel. Initially, Western media discourse largely framed narratives that tended to portray Hamas as responsible for these thefts and other criminal acts occurring in Gaza. However, these claims were subsequently challenged and refuted by numerous international institutions and organizations (Odenheimer, 2025; Landay, 2025).

The three news reports are situated within the context of a public execution carried out by Hamas in Gaza targeting militias allegedly supported by Israel. The video depicts Hamas apprehending and executing several individuals accused of betrayal and collaboration with Israel. In analyzing these reports, it becomes evident that their arguments largely frame the public executions through narratives that rely on an "appeal to authority," drawing credibility from selective sources rather than providing independent verification.

Sky News Arabic

The news report by Sky News Arabic (2025 ,سكاي نيوز عربية), titled *الإعدامات الميدانية.. حماس تفرض سطوتها بسياسة الميليشيا*, examines the public executions carried out by Hamas. According to the report, Hamas executed 32 militias accused of collaborating with Israel during the conflict between the two parties. From an institutional perspective, Sky News argues that these executions were driven by declining public support for Hamas in Gaza. The report suggests that the executions were intended to reinforce the perception that Hamas remained a necessary authority. Furthermore, Sky News Arabic challenges Hamas's claims regarding the alleged collaboration between the executed militias and Israel, framing the narrative in a way that questions the legitimacy of the organization's stated rationale.

CNN Arabic

In the news report by CNN (2025), titled *اشتباكات "عنيفة" بين "حماس" ومنافسيها.. والسلطة الفلسطينية وإسرائيل تدينان "الإعدامات الميدانية"*, the situation depicted in the video of a public execution carried out by Hamas against eight individuals in Gaza is described. CNN characterizes the eight executed individuals as 'rivals' of the Hamas organization. Institutionally, the report contrasts Hamas's perspective, which frames the executions as

punishment for individuals violating the law—such as murder, attacks on security personnel, or collaboration with Israel—with the perspective of the Palestinian Authority, Israel, and Palestinian non-governmental humanitarian institutions, all of which consider Hamas's actions inhumane and unconstitutional. Nevertheless, CNN largely presents Hamas's perspective using negative lexical choices and terms that suggest the organization's actions are largely speculative or assumptive.

DW Arabic

In the news report by Deutsche Welle (2025), titled *حماس تعيد فرض سيطرتها الأمنية في غزة وتنفذ إعدامات ميدانية*, DW narrates the public executions carried out by Hamas against militias in Gaza. Institutionally, DW accuses Hamas of creating a non-conducive situation following the ceasefire agreement between Hamas and Israel. The report emphasizes the narrative that Hamas was granted permission by Trump to act as a 'temporary security authority' in Gaza. DW also highlights Trump's statement that if Hamas did not lay down their weapons, they would be forcibly disarmed.

E. CONCLUSION

Based on the research conducted, the study found a clear parallel between the research objectives and the results obtained. The findings indicate the use of semantic instruments in constructing narratives about the executions carried out by Hamas, particularly from a textual dimension. News media employed instruments such as actor representation and lexical choices through demonization, victimization, and negative portrayal of other groups. Furthermore, discourse production was supported by narratives that tended to emphasize an "appeal to authority" regarding Hamas's executions of militias supported by Israel. The media also used terminology that exhibits bias in narrating Hamas's operations, with a pronounced emphasis on an anti-Hamas perspective.

The researcher hopes that this study can serve as a reference for future research, whether focusing on the Palestine-Israel conflict or employing critical discourse analysis as a theoretical framework for examining literary works. Researchers investigating the same topic are encouraged to explore aspects and statements that were not addressed in this study, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding or by examining discourses not covered here. For those utilizing critical discourse analysis, it is recommended to select objects with the potential to convey discourse effectively, such as novels, short story anthologies, and similar texts, thereby enabling a deeper and more thorough analysis.

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