

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

In the world where everything is made possible through virtual connections, the number of news organizations are growing rapidly in line with technological boom. The ability to report news in unimaginable speed with real-time event has made news consumers demand for more news than ever. Thus, prominent world news organizations such as BBC, CNN, Sky News and Aljazeera strive to reshape global media to maintain their reputation as the credible news wire of current affairs channels, (Al-Rawi, 2017). In pursuit of doing so, the media giants moved from television reporting to online news website which later includes the buzz of social media, (Abdulnabi, 2018; Apejaye, 2015). These international news networks have prospered in broadcasting their content across different languages to deliver messages to mass audience in breaking geographical and cultural boundaries, (Al-Rawi, 2017). BBC for instance, is now available in 40 languages with English as the first language (BBC.com, 10th June 2023), followed by CNN and Sky News with their respective versions in other languages (CNN.com, 10th December 2023; Sky News .com, 10th, June 2023). Aljazeera on the other hand, was initially started in Arabic but later expand to English to break the world news monopoly (Aljazeera.com 10th June 2023).

Aljazeera, a prominent news outlet, has established itself as the voice of the Middle East and plays a significant role in the news industry. With a wide network of international bureaus, Aljazeera provides news coverage from around the world (Aljazeera. Come 10th June 2023). It has extensively covered major regional crises such

as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Arab revolutions, civil wars, and the Gulf crises (Matthews & Habsi 2018). Aljazeera Arabic focuses on the Middle East, while Aljazeera English engages in global discussions and addresses crises in non-Arabic speaking countries. Both versions offer distinct perspectives, with AJE emphasizing international reporting and AJA reflecting Middle East regional interests (Al-Zoubi, 2021).

During important events in the Arab world, for instance the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Aljazeera becomes the preferred media for its Arab audience and an eye opener in raising awareness for its Western viewers. According Elmesselmani (2022) though many news sources available, Aljazeera maintains its influence as the most popular news channel with high-rated views among Arab, due to its exclusive reporting on the Palestinian issues. Elmesselmani also adds Aljazeera's support for Palestinian issues has attracted public attention, leading to a deeper understanding of the underlying problems. For instance, the Great March of Return (GMR) protest in Gaza has received widespread international coverage, particularly on Aljazeera networks, highlighting the Palestinians' struggle to assert their rights in Jerusalem (Al-Madi et. al. (2019).

Having said that AJA and AJE stem from the same organization, however, how do these two networks differ? Specifically, how do they differ in reporting GMR? According to Pollock (2011), the AJE site varies significantly from the Arabic version. To explore these disparities, this study employs framing theory and utilizes an enhanced version of Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) framing analysis to compare Aljazeera news websites of both versions regarding the GMR event. Additionally, this study recognizes their similarities and acknowledges the prevailing frames identified through this analysis.

Finally, the launch of Aljazeera English website in 2003 and later the television counterpart in 2006 has created an opportunity to conduct a comparative study on news channels originated from the same owner. Aljazeera, initially in Arabic, expanded to deliver news in both languages to reach diverse audiences. With the researcher's Palestinian background and interest in the Great March of Return in Gaza Strip, the researcher aims to compare the news coverage of AJA and AJE on their respective websites.

1.2 Background of the Study

The idea of this study is built upon researcher's experience as conflicts, disputes and series of wars have been personally revolved in his upbringing. Having to live in such turmoil surrounding, it is observed that the media especially the international one, have been reporting profound events in the Middle East region, especially the long-decade Palestinian-Israeli historical conflict. The conflict is considered as one of the most tragic and controversial events in the world (Ahmed F, et. al., 2018). At its core, it is a conflict between two self-determination movements, which are, the Palestinian people and Jewish Zionist-inspire movement. The year 1948 witnessed the first spark when Israel armed troops established its so-called "Israel state" on the Palestinian lands. Palestinians on the other hand, named this year the Year of Nakba (means catastrophe), which marked a mass eviction of Palestinians that created a refugee crisis aftermath.

In the time of war and conflicts, apart from promoting peace, the media also hold powers as an agent of destruction (Wolfsfeld, 2001). This idea can be clearly seen in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, where media plays a crucial role in this conflict. Mason (2016) indicates that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict stands not only as a military, religious, ethnical, or a territorial conflict, but also it has expanded into a

'media war'. Large amounts of media coverage on this conflict undoubtedly attract criticism from both the pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli sides, where each accuse the other of using biased media (Wang, 2017).

Regarding the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, Aljazeera has been covering the issues for many years. Besides the Palestinian resistance and armed confrontation against Israel in attempts to achieve their goals, Palestinians have also adopted non-violent strategies since early 1930 (Awad, 2016, p. 22). This strategy aims to grab the international attention to Palestinian-Israeli conflict through the exposure of Israeli racist images. Boycotting of Israeli goods also considered as nonviolent; and peaceful demonstrations: aiming to educate, make demands, protest, show solidarity and express opinions. A current example of this peaceful demonstration is the Great March of Return where Gazan peacefully protest in an attempt to return to their original villages to end the continuing siege on Gaza Strip.

1.3 Problem Statement

Media researchers have always paid great attention to media coverage of international news. This is because media organizations in that level have their own way of reporting especially when the public show concern towards world-shared problems such as terrorism or international conflict (Tinnes, 2019). In the field of communication and media studies, the investigation into the divergences or similarities in international media coverage across different audiences has remained a recurring topic of interest (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017). Additionally, Scholars suggest that media coverage is influenced by national contexts and interests, resulting in regional variations in the way news is reported (Abu-Awad, 2015; Al-Shareif, 2016). Therefore the current study is

primary focusing on explore the extent and nature of variations in media coverage cross languages to different audiences, shedding light on the underlying factors influencing these differences.

The study also aim to bridge the existing research gap by analysing the news framing of the Great March of return (GMR) by Al Jazeera Arabic (AJA) and Al Jazeera English (AJE) through a qualitative content analysis guided by framing theory. The specific focus of the analysis is on the framing of nonviolent resistance, which has been a defining characteristic of the GMR. News reports often associate aggression and acts of violence when covering war or conflicts worldwide. Even in cases such as the Arab Spring in Egypt, which began as a nonviolent resistance, the media tends to highlight the later turn to violence (Doufesh & Briel, 2021). Similarly, the struggle of Palestinians for freedom against Israeli occupation is frequently portrayed in the media through themes of death, confrontation, killing, physical torture, and attack. As a result, news framing studies on the Middle East predominantly focus on violence-based narratives (Elmasry, et al., 2013). This study provides a unique opportunity to conduct one of the earliest examinations of news framing specifically on nonviolent resistance in the context of the GMR.

The long-standing Palestinian-Israeli conflict have at times become the breaking news for various international news media. Regardless the type of conflict occurs in the disputed land, the issue of Palestinian and Israeli are covered differently by other global news network, and this includes Aljazeera. In fact, the bilingual media is said to report event differently. As Smith and Johnson (2019) stated, Aljazeera is one organization with two messages. Despite being owned by the same organization, Al Jazeera presents different messages through its Arabic and English versions. While the AJA focuses on Middle East's internal and regional issues, AJE aims to address global topics. Such as,

health, education, welfare, disasters, and human affairs (Ramasubramanian & Miles, 2018). In the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Barnesmoore and El Ghaoui (2013) argued that AJA tends to provide a narrative through a Palestinian lens that is absent in the English service. Hence, although previous studies have highlighted the divergent coverage between Al Jazeera's Arabic and English versions, (Smith & Johnson, 2019; Al-Madi et. al. 2019; Damanhoury & Saleh, 2017; Jungblut & Zakareviciute, 2019). There remains a gap in understanding how the network in both languages, specifically in terms of news framing, covers the same event, such as the GMR. It is crucial to investigate this discrepancy and assess the extent to which Al Jazeera's Arabic and English services differ in their presentation of the same event. By addressing this research gap, the study will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how Al Jazeera delivers news and whether its coverage exhibits bias or distinct perspectives across its different language platforms.

The weekly event known as GMR has consistently garnered media attention since its inception on March 30th, 2018. Despite being a relatively new event within the ongoing conflict, GMR has become the subject of significant coverage across various media outlets. This coverage encompasses news reports, commentaries, and even editorial opinion pieces. Such extensive media attention highlights the necessity for a systematic and academic exploration of GMR. Currently, there is a lack of academic research on this profound event, prompting researchers to undertake a study on GMR. While numerous studies have focused on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, drawing inspiration from various historical events in Palestine, it is crucial to include GMR as one of the events deserving thorough investigation in order to enhance the existing literature on the Palestinian cause.

1.4 Research Questions

The study aims to answer the main four-research question that outlined in order to find out the difference and similarities between AJA and AJE in covering the GMR protests. The questions listed as follow:

1. How do AJA and AJE news-web frame the Great March of Return issue?
2. How do AJA and AJE website depict both conflict sides in their news coverage?
3. What are the raised topics addressed by AJA and AJE in their news coverage?
4. What are the similarities and differences between AJA and AJE websites in covering the Great march of Return?

1.5 Research Objectives

Based from the main research questions, there are also four research objectives outlined for this study as follow:

1. To find out how do AJA and AJE websites frame the Great March of Return issue. (Generic frames and issue-specific frames of GMR).
2. To identify how do AJA and AJE websites depict both conflict sides in their news coverage. (Palestinian protesters and Israeli army)
3. To find out the raised topics addressed by AJA and AJE in their news coverage.
4. To explore the similarities and differences between AJA and AJE websites in covering the Great march of Return.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study holds significant importance as it undertakes a comparative analysis to the news coverages that shape international media narratives and their impact on global

communication. By specifically examining the framing of nonviolent resistance in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the researcher aims to gain a deeper understanding of how Aljazeera, a bilingual news organization, covers similar events in two distinct languages, namely Arabic and English. The inclusion of Aljazeera as a bilingual news organization adds an intriguing facet to the investigation, enabling an exploration of how linguistic choices and framing techniques might influence the portrayal of these events. Through this study, valuable insights can be gained, shedding light on the broader implications of media coverage and its role in shaping perceptions and discourse on a global scale.

Hence, since this study is aimed to find the similarities and differences of AJA and AJE in covering the Great March of Return event as a part of nonviolent resistance in the context of Palestinian-Israeli conflict, it is also conducted to uncover how this event (GMR) is framed by one organization (Aljazeera) in two different languages for two different audience which are the Arabs in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries and other regions such as the non-Arabic speaker from Europe, United States and East Asia. It also aims to find out the themes are used by Aljazeera Arabic and English in covering the event (GMR) in their web sites. Moreover, the study also seeks to find the news images of both conflict sides in the news content. In achieving the abovementioned objectives, the results emerged from this study will be significant in several ways.

First, news frames usually have impact on viewers, which lead to a well-informed society and drive them to respond on the issues presented. Due to language, geographical and audience factors, news organizations employ certain type of frames suitable with the intended audience, which later resulting in the formation of public opinion. However, besides finding the news frames, this study is also comparative in

nature. To be exact, comparing the content from AJA and AJE from similar event. Thus, this study firstly contributes in adding more values to the existing literature in comparative studies especially in media field. On the same note, it is also significant when considering the term peace journalism since it evolves around nonviolent news.

Second, this type of comparative study can be a benchmark for other researchers in pursuing studies alike from other news organizations with more than one language. International media organizations such as BBC, CNN and Russian Today are now multilingual. The findings of this study will shed some lights on how certain aspects of perceived reality are framed across multilingual media organizations. Media organizations greatly differ on selection of an angle of a story and their frames. Therefore, the result alongside with the model developed from this study can be the guideline and framework for future researchers who intend to conduct a comparative media study in general, one organization with two languages in specific.

Third, by the time of this study is conducted, the GMR event, particularly in Gaza, will have already concluded. Throughout the event, both versions of Al Jazeera news websites extensively covered the Palestinian nonviolent resistance associated with GMR. Thus far, stories on GMR are only covered as news, commentaries, opinion writing, debate on television and topics to discuss on other media platforms. This indicates that there are lack academic studies on GMR event, being it is relatively new and current. This study will be significant in handling this event by conducting academic research in order to better understand the phenomena.

1.7 Scope of the Study

This study aims to examine the news content related to non-violent resistance in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on the websites of Al Jazeera Arabic (AJA) and Al

Jazeera English (AJE). AJA is selected for its increasing credibility in the Arab region, covering global issues such as 9/11, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the Arab revolutions. AJE is chosen as a non-western alternative for news representation. Despite both AJA and AJE being part of the same organization with Qatari interests, they demonstrate differences in their news reporting.

The study focuses on analysing the coverage of the Great March of Return (GMR) event, which is a form of Palestinian non-violent resistance occurring every Friday after Friday prayers in the Gaza strip and West Bank. This series of protests commenced on March 30, 2018, to commemorate Palestinian Land Day. AJA and AJE, being affiliated with Qatar, have been providing regular updates and daily coverage of the GMR. Although Al Jazeera is available on television, this study specifically concentrates on the news websites due to their accessibility. The research covers a one-year period, considering the GMR event as a case study.

1.8 Operational Definition

1.8.1 Aljazeera News Network

Al Jazeera, a satellite news channel, was founded in 1996 as the first independent Arabic news channel. It has gained prominence by catering to a large Arab audience and addressing important issues in the Muslim and Arab world. Based in Doha, Qatar, Al Jazeera's coverage reflects the region's rich history, culture, and proud citizens. With over 70 international bureaus, they bring heart-moving stories from both remote towns and bustling cities (Aljazeera. Net). In 2001, Al Jazeera launched their website, aljazeera.net, which became immensely popular, attracting over 45 million unique visitors in 2013 alone. Al Jazeera is considered a valuable resource for Arab audiences as it provides uncensored Arabic news, breaking the dominance of foreign media outlets

like BBC and CNN. In November 2006, Al Jazeera launched an English version with the aim of challenging Western news monopolies. With a presence in over 140 countries, Al Jazeera English (AJE) focuses on covering the often-overlooked developing world. Initially, AJE hired presenters and experts from other major networks. To ensure accessibility, AJE provides online coverage through its award-winning website, aljazeera.com. However, it is worth noting that the Arabic and English news sites of Al Jazeera maintain editorial independence.

1.8.2 Great March of Return (GMR)

The Great March of Return (GMR) is a series of protests organized by Palestinians in Gaza. It started on March 30, 2018, to commemorate Land Day, which marks a tragic event in 1976 when six Palestinian citizens were killed by the Israeli army during a protest against land seizure. The GMR aims to advocate for the right of Palestinian refugees to return and end the Israeli blockade on Gaza, causing immense suffering. In 2018, the UN reported that nearly two-thirds of Gaza's population are refugees, with over 80 percent relying on humanitarian aid. Originally planned for six weeks, the campaign continues to the end of 2020, surpassing its intended duration.

1.8.3 Framing

Framing is a widely used concept in media studies that involves selecting and packaging ongoing issues. It involves highlighting certain aspects while downplaying others, intentionally or unintentionally promoting specific issues. By doing so, the media helps consumers understand events by including and excluding information. This is important because mass audiences often have limited attention and motivation to comprehend complex issues. Journalists play a crucial role in framing news, as they

arrange and communicate information in a way that shapes public opinion and influences people's actions and perceptions, particularly when they heavily rely on media sources. The use of frames, metaphors, examples, and visual images by journalists can significantly influence how individuals feel and respond to an issue.

1.8.4 Media Coverage

Media coverage refers to the way news organizations and other media outlets report and present information on various events, issues, or topics. It encompasses the selection, framing, and presentation of news stories, as well as the analysis and interpretation of those events (Chang, et, al, 2020). In the context of this study, media coverage specifically refers to the manner in which news and information related to the Great March of Return (GMR) protests is presented, disseminated, and reported by Al Jazeera, a prominent news organization with a significant influence in the Arab region. However, there are several key elements are often considered, such as; framing, presentation of news stories, analysis and interpretation of events, selection of news based on relevance, newsworthiness, and audience interest.

Media coverage aims to be objective and accurate, providing a balanced account of events by verifying facts and including multiple viewpoints while avoiding biases. Language and tone are utilized to effectively convey information and engage the audience (Tobias. et, al, 2020). Ethical considerations, such as truthfulness, privacy, and accountability, guide media coverage and ensure its quality and integrity. Media coverage has the power to shape public opinion, influence decision-making, and create social and political impacts by affecting public perception, attitudes, and behaviors (Pfefferbaum, et al., 2022). Therefore, it is important to note that media coverage can

vary across different news organizations, platforms, and countries due to factors such as political, cultural, and commercial influences. Critical analysis and media literacy skills are essential for consumers of news to evaluate and interpret media coverage effectively. Thus, media coverage plays a significant role in society.

1.9 Summary

This chapter deals with a brief introduction of the study. It is presented the introduction and background of the study, discusses the problem statement, presents the research objectives and research questions, and highlight the significance of the study and scope of the study as well. It it end with the conceptual definition which contained explanation of these concepts; Aljazeera news network, Great march of Return and Framing. This chapter.