CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

The media plays a significant role in shaping global perspectives and narratives surrounding conflicts and political issues. Mass media serves as a means of providing information to people across the globe, catering to the general public's consumption needs. According to Saragih (2020), mass media can be broadly categorized into two forms: printed and electronic. Printed mass media includes newspapers, magazines, books, and tabloids, while electronic media encompasses television, the internet, and radio. The media's dual role in informing the public and shaping perceptions can become problematic when it is influenced by external forces, leading to biased reporting and the manipulation of narratives. This influence is especially pronounced when political interests intersect with media operations, raising concerns about the integrity of the information being presented. Thus, while the media serves as a vital tool for public engagement and global awareness, it can also be susceptible to politicization, where the dissemination of information is skewed by underlying political and economic agendas. This shift from objective reporting to politically influenced content forms the basis for understanding the increasing politicization of media.

The politicization of media refers to the process by which media content and institutions become increasingly aligned with political ideologies, interests, or agendas. This phenomenon has significant implications for public discourse, democratic processes, and the perception of events, particularly in the context of complex international conflicts. Several interrelated factors contribute to media politicization. The ownership and control of media organizations often lie with individuals or entities harboring specific political leanings, which can influence editorial decisions, framing of issues, and the overall narrative presented to the public (Herman & Chomsky, 2002). Additionally, the political economy of media, including financial dependencies on advertising revenue and government subsidies,

can create pressures that shape content in ways that align with particular political or economic interests (McChesney, 2008).

The politicization of media can have profound effects on public understanding of complex issues. In the context of international conflicts like the Israel-Palestine situation, it can lead to selective emphasis on certain aspects of the conflict while downplaying others, framing of events in ways that align with specific political narratives, uneven representation of different perspectives or stakeholders, and simplification of complex historical and geopolitical factors. Rafaeli et al. (2009) highlighted that news media have been evolving by adapting and innovating traditional conventions. This evolution has led to a significant shift in the way information is consumed, with traditional media such as printed newspapers transitioning to online news platforms. Online news has gained immense popularity due to its accessibility and convenience, allowing users to search for news based on specific categories or topics.

As Reuben (2009) points out, mass communications research has repeatedly documented the significant impact that media can have in shaping the public's attitudes about a given issue, such as conflict. The media often determines what the public perceives the issue to be about, its causes and consequences, its importance, and how to think about it. This influence has significant implications for how news media covers domestic and international conflicts. Given the media's capacity to shape public perception and opinion, its role in framing issues such as conflicts becomes highly influential. The way news stories are constructed often dictates how the public understands the causes, consequences, and significance of these events. This is particularly critical when it comes to complex and contentious international conflicts, where the portrayal of one side over the other can significantly affect public sentiment. Therefore, analyzing how media coverage reflects political biases is essential to uncovering the underlying influences that shape public narratives, especially in conflicts as sensitive and polarizing as the Israel-Palestine issue.

In light of these factors, critical analysis of media content is essential for revealing the underlying political biases and agendas that may shape how complex international conflicts are presented. Media, far from being a neutral conveyor of information, often reflects the ideological stance of its creators, consciously or unconsciously framing conflicts in ways that align with certain political or cultural viewpoints. This influence is particularly significant in the coverage of protracted and intricate disputes, such as the Israel-Palestine conflict, where representations in the media can sway public opinion and even shape governmental policies. A critical approach to analyzing media coverage involves moving beyond merely consuming news at face value. News articles, reports, and broadcasts are structured narratives that employ specific linguistic choices, visual imagery, and framing techniques to craft a particular version of reality. As a result, understanding how these narratives are constructed is vital to uncovering the biases embedded within them.

One powerful method for unpacking these layers of meaning is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA is a research approach that scrutinizes how language is used in communication to construct and represent social realities, including those related to conflict. Through the lens of CDA, analysts can explore how word choices, framing, metaphors, and even omissions serve to reinforce or challenge particular ideologies. For example, in the case of the Israel-Palestine conflict, CDA can help identify how each side is portrayed—whether as aggressors, victims, or peace-seekers—and how these depictions align with broader political or cultural narratives. By examining both the explicit content and the implicit messages, CDA provides a deeper understanding of the power dynamics in play within media discourse. It reveals how dominant ideologies are reproduced through media coverage and can help expose the influence of media ownership, political pressures, or cultural biases in shaping the portrayal of conflicts. Ultimately, this kind of critical engagement with media enables a more informed and reflective consumption of news, encouraging readers to question and analyze the forces shaping their perceptions of international events.

The theory of social actor representation, proposed by van Leeuwen (2008), is particularly relevant in this context. It examines how individuals or groups (referred to as social actors) are portrayed or represented in news analysis or media texts. This theory reveals how authors can either marginalize or include social actors within the text, exploring strategies employed to downplay or highlight the presence and significance of specific social actors. Van Leeuwen (2008) outlined two main methods in his theory: exclusion and inclusion. Exclusion is used to marginalize actors in the story, employing strategies such as suppression (completely hiding actors) and backgrounding (selectively ignoring actors or events). The inclusion strategy, conversely, involves highlighting specific actors, agents, or groups for portrayal in media content. These strategies can reveal how agents and events are backgrounded or suppressed in media narratives, providing insight into the underlying ideologies and power structures that shape media discourse.

The longstanding conflict between Israel and Palestine has persisted for decades since the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, witnessing numerous wars, intifadas, and clashes. Tensions have consistently escalated over the years, reaching a recent peak marked by considerable bloodshed. On October 7th, 2023, renewed fighting erupted as Israeli armed forces initiated intense aerial bombardments and artillery shelling on the blockaded Gaza Strip (Adler & Siddiqui, 2024). According to Al Jazeera's report in 2023, this relentless assault resulted in the tragic deaths of over 10,000 Palestinians, including 4,000 children and 2,500 women. The Israel Defense Forces reported on October 13, 2023, that over 1,300 Israeli citizens had lost their lives, with more than 3,200 sustaining injuries. Data from the Palestinian Ministry of Health indicated that 1,799 Palestinian individuals had been killed, and an additional 7,388 had suffered injuries (USA Today, 2023).

Given the significant role of media in shaping public perception of this conflict, it is crucial to examine how various media outlets cover these events. Major media outlets such as Al Jazeera, USA Today, and The Jakarta Post provide different narratives that might be shaped by their background, location, and target

audiences. Previous studies have found varying degrees of bias and neutrality in their coverage, but these findings may have changed over time as media outlets' ideological leanings can be influenced by evolving circumstances.

Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by conducting a descriptive qualitative analysis of exclusion and inclusion strategies used in media texts covering the conflict from October 2023 until May 2024. Examining the linguistic strategies will provide insight into dominant perspectives and reveal whose voices and narratives are included or excluded. Findings will contribute to a broader understanding of how media discourse shapes public opinion surrounding the divisive Israel-Palestine conflict in recent years.

1.2 Research Questions

The research questions for this study can be formulated as follows:

1. What are the exclusion strategies shown in the texts of the articles of the Israel-Palestine Conflict in Al Jazeera, USA Today, and The Jakarta Post?

2. What are the inclusion strategies shown in the texts of the articles of the Israel-Palestine Conflict in Al Jazeera, USA Today, and The Jakarta Post?

3. How does Social Actor Representation differ in Al Jazeera, USA Today, and The Jakarta Post?

1.3 Research Objectives

The research objectives for this study can be formulated as follows:

1. To explore exclusion strategies used by the media in the articles of the Israel-Palestine Conflict in Al Jazeera, USA Today, and The Jakarta Post.

2. To explore inclusion strategies used by the media in the articles of the Israel-Palestine Conflict in Al Jazeera, USA Today, and The Jakarta Post.

3. To compare the Social Actor Representation in Al Jazeera, USA Today, and The Jakarta Post

1.4 Significance of the Study

Theoretically, for linguists, this study further demonstrates the value of the Social Actor Representation (SAR) approach in revealing underlying perspectives and power dynamics within texts. For researchers in media studies and conflict analysis, the findings contribute to understanding how linguistic choices shape narratives and representations in media discourse surrounding the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Practically, for journalists and media professionals, the research can assist in becoming more aware of the implications of linguistic choices when reporting on controversial issues, potentially leading to more balanced and inclusive reporting. For media literacy educators and activists, the findings provide insights into detecting ideological biases encoded through linguistic strategies like exclusion and inclusion, empowering audiences to critically evaluate media narratives. For policymakers and conflict resolution practitioners, understanding how media discourse shapes public opinion can inform better communication strategies promoting greater understanding between conflicting parties.

1.5 Limitation of the Research

There are a few limitations to this study:

1. The study is limited to examining linguistic strategies of exclusion and inclusion in three news portals, including Al Jazeera, USA Today, and The Jakarta Post.

2. The research only focuses on analyzing how social actors are represented in the news articles.

3. This research is limited to discussing the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine from October 2023 until May 2024.

1.6 Definitions of Key Terms

1.6.1 Social Actor Representation (SAR)

Van Leeuwen's theory of social actor representation explores how individuals or groups are portrayed in a given context, often observed in news

analysis (van Leeuwen, 2008). This theory illustrates how authors either marginalise social actors within the text or integrate them into the narrative.

1.6.2 Inclusion

The inclusion strategy within social actor representation involves highlighting a specific actor, agent, or group for portrayal in media content, contrasting with the exclusion strategy (van Leeuwen, 2008). This technique ensures that certain individuals or groups are foregrounded in the narrative, thereby influencing audience perceptions of their significance or role within a given context.

1.6.3 Exclusion

Exclusion, as stated by van Leeuwen (2008), refers to the deliberate omission or absence of certain social actors, perspectives, or information within representations or discourse. This exclusion serves specific interests and purposes, often related to shaping the narrative in a way that aligns with the intentions of the author or the audience they're targeting.

1.6.4 Online News

Online news refers to news content that is disseminated through digital platforms and the internet, allowing users to access information remotely from various devices (Saragih, 2020). A key characteristic of online news is its ability to enable users to search for and consume news based on specific categories or topics that align with their desired information needs