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Call them demons without calling them demons: How The New York Times legitimises violence in its coverage of 7 October 2023

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[Mohamad Jamil, Siti Nurnadilla](#)^{a, b}

^a Department of Linguistics and English Language, School of Social Sciences, Lancaster University, United Kingdom

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Abstract

The New York Times's coverage of Gaza has been extensively studied for media bias, yet its role in legitimising mass violence has been relatively unexamined. Addressing this gap, I analyse the newspaper's reporting from 7 October 2023, through 7 April 2024 to conceptualise what I term subtle demonisation. Drawing on Hart's Cognitive Critical Discourse Analysis, I integrate Bakhtin's chronotope with attention distribution to identify four destructive patterns: (1) chronotopic displacement, (2) agentive asymmetry, (3) semantic bundling, and (4) metaphor-driven reclassification that construes Palestinians as existential threats requiring elimination. I find these patterns collectively construct Palestinians as demons without naming them as such, rendering their lives structurally expendable. In doing so, I extend debates on media bias by showing how the language of journalistic objectivity functions as an instrument of epistemic erasure and a mechanism of complicity in atrocity. © The Author(s) 2026. This article is distributed under the

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Author keywords

7 October 2023; attention distribution; chronotope; cognitive critical discourse analysis; demonisation; genocide in Gaza; The New York Times

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Corresponding authors

Corresponding author

S.N. Mohamad Jamil

Affiliation Department of English Language and Literature, AbdulHamid AbuSulayman Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (AHAS KIRKHS),

International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), Gombak, Selangor, 53100,
Malaysia

Email address

nadilla.jamil@lancaster.ac.uk

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