CNN vs. Al Jazeera: A Comparative Analysis of Reporting on the Tigray Conflict

Abstract

The two years-long (2020-2022) conflict in Northern Ethiopia provides a compelling case study on how news organisations frame and report complex and contentious issues. This study focuses on the coverage of the Tigray war on CNN and the Al Jazeera English news websites, examining how and to what extent the two international media outlets covered the conflict. A total of 367 news articles were collected and analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. The study found that Al Jazeera English and CNN, have provided distinct and contrasting coverage of the conflict. In terms of the number of articles published throughout the two years, both media show significant differences with Al Jazeera English having many more published news stories than CNN. However, even though Al Jazeera provided more impartial and equitable coverage than CNN, neither of these media outlets provided unbiased and independent news coverage. Both media had a significant portion of stories in favour of TPLF. Al Jazeera was found to publish more neutral news stories than CNN and had more mixed news stories. Both media outlets appeared to rely heavily on conflict and violent framing. Similarly, both media outlets applied attribution of responsibility framing, economic framing, and human interest framing. Al Jazeera English was found to use them more frequently. CNN applied the prognostic framing more frequently than Al Jazeera. Anti-war and advance framing were underrepresented by both media.

Keywords: CNN, Al Jazeera, Tigray war, framing, agenda setting, global media, conflict

Introduction

Between November 2020 and November 2022, the conflict in Ethiopia was marked by clashes between the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Ethiopian government led by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali. The Tigray region and parts of the Amhara and Afar regions suffered from this conflict (Gesesew, et al., 2021; Damtew & Ejigu, 2022; International Crisis Group, 2022). Following that, States, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and the African Union urged the parties to cease hostilities and work towards a political settlement (Dou & Kim, 2022; Akamo & Fisseha, 2023). This mediation culminated in the successful signing of the cessation of hostilities agreement (COHA) between the Ethiopian government and the Tigrayan forces on November 2, 2022, in Pretoria, South Africa. The cessation of hostilities agreement was then complemented by military leaders and the Declaration of the Senior Commanders on the Modalities for the Implementation of the Agreement, signed in Nairobi, Kenya (CDP, 2023; Akamo & Fisseha, 2023). The agreement raised hopes that the protracted struggle that threatened to destabilise Africa's second-most populous nation could finally come to an end.

The conflict stands out as one of the most tragic conflicts of the twenty-first century globally so far. The war in Tigray caused many thousands of deaths, millions of displacements, and starvation due to the full blockade of humanitarian aid (Gebreyesus, et al., 2024). It is indicated by estimates of its death toll ranging from 300,000 to 600,000 civilians and 100,000 to 200,000 fighters (Naranjo, 2023). In addition to the loss of human lives, the Tigray conflict caused the breakdown of health infrastructure in Tigray which resulted in 86% of 853 health service units experiencing structural damage, with 71% of medical equipment partially non-functional (Gesesew, et al., 2021; World Health Organization, 2023). Similarly, in the Amhara region, the projected cost of rebuilding the war-torn areas exceeds a staggering half a trillion birr (Addis Standard, 2023). Diseases associated with war, such as fistula and HIV, have become prevalent as the result of limited maternal care, malnutrition, and sexual violence. Consequently, it is anticipated that Post-conflict trauma will likely persist in the foreseeable future (Gesesew, 2022; Weledegebriel, 2023).

Statement of the problems

Mass media can significantly influence participation and play a big role in conflict management

during conflicts, directly influencing behaviour and indirectly through social interactions (anagizawa-Drott, 2014; Jakobsen, 2000). This is mainly because realities are first defined and mediated by powerful global news outlets before they reach the public (Matsaganis & Payne, 2005; ones, 2006; Snyder & Ballentine, 1996). In fact, "it is difficult to see how work on news coverage of war and conflict can justifiably avoid engaging with wider contextual questions of political power" (Al Nahed & Hammond, 2018, p. 365).

In essence, their function can combine two opposed and incompatible forms. The media can actively play a proactive role or participate in the conflict and be held accountable for escalating aggressiveness. According to Thompson (2007, p. 7) "hate media in Rwanda contributed to the genocide by playing a proactive role, the international media also played a role by, in essence, acquiescing to the killing campaign by downplaying". On the other hand, Media can maintain its independence and approach the conflict as a peacemaker to reduce violence and end the conflict through "building confidence, facilitating negotiation or breaking diplomatic deadlocks [among the parties] for discussion"(Bratic & Schirch, 2007, p. 10). The positive impact of media can be observed when the media report on conflicts favoured the orientation of anti-war issues and reconciliation (Galtung, 2002). Different frames can emphasise different aspects of a story and influence the audience's attitudes and beliefs, so the use of different framing techniques in news reporting can shape how audiences perceive and interpret events. Understanding the nuances of framing techniques in news reporting can help readers develop a more informed perspective on current events and evaluate news sources more critically. The structure of the frame in a news text serves as a reflection of power showing the identities of actors or interests for control over the narrative (Entman 1993, p. 55).

According to Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch (2009, p. 149), "the agenda-setting role of the news media plays an important part in focusing people's attention on the problems that government and public institutions can work to resolve". NGOs and civil society called for intervention in the face of apparent indifference.

Nations and humanitarian organisations were keen to follow international media reports, where CNN and Aljazeera played a big role in the Tigray War by shaping the general public opinions. Especially the US and the UN's actions toward the parties involved in the conflict were followed by what western media such as CNN in particular reported or investigated. For example, the US warned to sanction Ethiopia after CNN revealed that airline ferry weapons were used in the war

in October 2021. On March 4, 2021, the UN rights chief said war crimes may have been committed in Ethiopia after CNN revealed the Tigray massacre. A month after the conflict started, in December 2020, the EU warned to delay budget support to Ethiopia if the situation did not improve (Plaut & Vaughan, 2023).

Consequently, the EU announced it had suspended budgetary aid to Ethiopia worth £88 million until Ethiopia's aid reached the needy in Tigray. In August 2021, France put pressure on Ethiopia by withdrawing its promised $100 million back in 2019 to support the project of the rebirth of the Ethiopian Navy in the Red Sea in Eritrea. On November 2, 2021, the US took a measure against Ethiopia by announcing that the US would remove Ethiopia from the free trade pact known as the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) if Ethiopia had not mended its way by January 1, 2022. In addition, on September 17, 2021, The Department of Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) imposed sanctions on certain persons concerning the Humanitarian and Human Rights Crisis in Ethiopia (US Department of The Treasury, 2021). These measures taken by international organisations and countries were highly manifested by the international media (Plaut & Vaughan, 2023).

Given the crucial role of the media in shaping influence policymakers' attitudes, international organisations, states, and public opinion during wartime (McCombs, 1972; Cook, et al., 1983; Protess, et al., 1987), a thorough content analysis of media content is required. This thesis is one of the first to examine the comparative study of CNN and Al Jazeera news websites' coverage of the Tigray conflict. International media coverage of the Ethiopian Tigray conflict played an important role in informing the global public about the situation and bringing attention to the ongoing crisis. However, the reporting of the Tigray conflict had also been subject to criticism, with many arguing that certain outlets had provided biassed or incomplete coverage. According to Abbink (2021), the global media have been marked by bias, incompleteness, lack of context understanding, credulity, and an anti-federal government attitude. Studies suggest that the lack of coverage of the Tigray conflict by the American media is due to Ethiopia's relative position as an American strategic and economic partner as well as key to counter-terrorism strategies (Caruso & Akamo, 2024, p. 8). Although the Ethiopian government has made several statements on the conflict, international media failed to provide ample context (Solomon & Mezgebu, 2021, p. 5).

The existing study examines the global media coverage and the Tigray conflict is limited and not comprehensive but revealed some findings. Temesgen (2021) found differences in the

coverage of BBC and Reuters on the Tigray conflict, with Reuters emphasising military actions by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and international responses, while BBC's reports were more focused on governmental military strategies and the counteractions of the Tigray Armed Force. Both outlets appeared to exhibit a bias, favouring the TPLF in their reporting. A framing analysis of coverage by the Ethiopian News Agency (ENA) and Reuters found that the two media channels labelled the conflict as law enforcement and as a military offensive campaign against TPLF which tends to civil war. In addition, the two media outlets published stories about making peace by negotiating and supporting government officials to create peace in the region (Betelhem, 2021, p. 55). Additionally, a study of Al Jazeera's framing of the conflict found that the major cause of the Tigray war was represented as political disputes between Ethiopia's federal government and Tigray's regional government. The moral judgement of the war was conveyed by way of a covert 'blame judgement' directed at the leader of the federal government (Yemane, 2022). Although these studies contribute to our understanding, they suffer from a limited sample period, spanning only a few months. Considering the two-year fight, these studies do not address the broader aspects of the Tigray conflict as comprehensively as the present study. In addition, they focused more on comparing local and foreign media coverage. Therefore, the current study seeks to bridge these gaps by providing a more extensive and comprehensive examination of media coverage, encompassing a broader two-year timeframe.

Additionally, Throughout the conflict, the Western media were strongly criticised by the Ethiopian government and its people for their coverage. Demonstrations were arranged by pro-government Ethiopians in different big cities around the world with banners such as " BBC stop fake news " and "CNN stop fake news". Many blamed international media outlets for what Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed called "a sophisticated narrative war waged against the nation" (voanews.com, 2021, December 1; Bloomberg, 2021). The Ethiopian government sent a warning letter to CNN, BBC, Reuters, and AP to revoke the granted licence given by the Ethiopian Media Mass Authority. The letter was issued because the government believed that these media were indulging in manufacturing and disseminating false news and supporting TPLF (Fanabc.com, 2021, November 20; Bloomberg, 2021).

However, as there was no visible criticism from TPLF and its supporters toward these Western media, it may mean that from TPLF supporters' perspective, those media's reporting was addressing the conflict in a good manner. From the Ethiopian diaspora and government,

CNN received more criticism than Aljazeera, which makes it interesting whether the two media channels had a real difference in their coverage of the Tigray conflict. Despite the peace deal to end the conflict, the impact of the conflict is still felt affecting many people. So, it is an important and timely topic to research. Furthermore, as of my knowledge, no comparative study has been conducted specifically focusing on CNN and Aljazeera news websites on the coverage of the Tigray conflict.

Thus, this research focuses to analyse how CNN and Al Jazeera covered the Tigray conflict in the two years (November 4, 2020-November 4, 2022). These news websites were selected because they are among the most popular international news websites and they are well visited worldwide. Their accessible online archive and their usage of the English language are also the reasons. In addition, they are different in terms of proximity to the Tigray conflict, which makes an interesting ground for comparison.

Research questions

RQ1. To what extent did CNN and Al Jazeera cover the conflict?

RQ2. What tones did they use?

RQ3. How did they frame it?

Africa and media

The press portrayal is that "Africa is a 'dark continent' where violent and irrational people live, or that the continent is lost because of its constant struggle with violence, famine, and disease" (Baaz, 2005; Ammina, 2010, p. 209). US media coverage of Africa has reinforced a negative image of the continent as having little understanding of the underlying problem they are covering (Hawk, 1992, cited in Ammina, 2010, p. 212). Similarly, Fair (1992), in her study of coverage about US food aid sent to Africa in the mid-1980s, found that "Africans were represented as dependent and helpless, while the United States was portrayed as the aid giver and the West as compassionate".

According to Awondo et al (2012), the homophobic sentiments made by some African politicians are what give the continent of Africa its bad reputation in the Western media. Similarly, Zhang & Mating-wina (2016) criticised the BBC for maintaining negative preconceptions about Africa. According to Huang & Leung (2005), the Western media has a prejudice against developing nations and frequently presents them as "bad others." In their portrayal of African nations, American and British media frequently emphasise conflict, as noted

by Lee et al (2006). According to Franks (2010), the BBC's portrayal of Africa, which is based on data from aid organisations, has been inaccurate and misleading.

However, in a recent study, international news coverage of Africa has become significantly more positive in tone. There has been a decrease in stories that focus exclusively on humanitarian disasters and an increase in stories about business and sports (Bunce, 2016). Some studies dispute the idea that Western media portray Africa negatively. For instance, Scott (2015) claims that negative portrayal is a myth and does not accurately reflect the state of the world today. According to Nothias (2014), between 2011 and 2013, the portrayal of Africa in British, French, and US American news magazines between 2011 and 2013 news media changed from negative to positive. Bunce, Franks, and Paterson (2016) claim that the media's portrayal of Africa is evolving. Additionally, Scott (2009) asserts that despite what is frequently believed, UK press coverage of Africa is not as marginalised, derogatory, or insignificant as --.

Causes of the Tigray conflict

The Tigray conflict, beginning in 2020, is rooted in political tensions between Tigray's regional forces and the Ethiopian federal government. The election of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed in April 2018 initially brought hope to Ethiopia, as political prisoners were released, media laws reformed and the peace agreement with Eritrea after two decades which led Dr. Abiy to nobel peace prize in 2019. However, dissatisfaction arose, when the TPLF (Tigray People's Liberation Front) viewed the peace treaty with Eritrea sceptically, suspecting a plot to undermine their power (Tesfaye & Gebrehiwot, 2020).

Tensions escalated between the federal government and TPLF following a bomb blast at the mass in Addis ababa Meskel square in June 2018, creating scepticism towards Tigray officials. Abiy called TPLF leaders ``daytime hyenas", arrested some of TPLF officials by federal forces, started investigations into TPLF-affiliated companies, and there were allegations from Abiy's supporters that the TPLF was responsible for the campaign of destabilisation in the country (International Crisis Group, August 14, 2020). These inclinations worsened when Abiy formed the Prosperity Party, excluding the TPLF, and cut federal funding to Tigray. Another tension comes with regional elections held by Tigray regional administration in defiance of the Ethiopian government's directive to postpone all elections due to Covid-19 (John & Gavin, 2021).

Anti-TPLF TV documentaries broadcast nationally by framing TPLF in a pejorative light, exacerbating divides and swaying public opinion against Tigrayans(Abdulkadr & Neszmélyi, 2021) .

The conflict in Tigray cannot solely be attributed to the leadership of Abiy Ahmed; it also encompasses a protracted verbal and territorial dispute with the neighbouring Amhara region. Tensions escalated as both Tigray and Amhara mobilised their forces along the shared border, particularly in the southern stretches near towns like Alamata and Kobo, an area known as Waja, as well as in the western region of Welkait. The Amhara regional administrations saw the disagreement between TPLF and Ethiopian government as an opportunity to regain what they perceive as lost territories in south and west Tigray (Tronvoll, 2022, p. 166). The Ethiopian government stood with Amhara against Tigray, foreshadowing the impending full-scale conflict. The outbreak of war can be attributed to a combination of factors: disputes over Ethiopian state identity, intra-party power struggles, ethnic nationalism, and the contentious Eritrean alignment (Tofa et al., 2021). Both the Ethiopian government and the TPLF accused each other of treachery and initiating the conflict (Sarah Vaughan & Martin Plaut, 2023).

Framing Theory

Chong and Druckman (2007) emphasise the idea that issues can be approached by media from diverse perspectives, each entailing multiple values. They define framing as the cognitive process through which individuals construct a specific conceptualization of an issue or reframe their thoughts about it. This underscores the notion that issues are subject to interpretation, influenced by the framing applied, and can have implications for various values. Entman (1993) offers perhaps the most widely quoted definition of framing:

> To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem, definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described (p.52).

Another prominent scholar in framing theory is Gitlin (1980, p. 6), who states that "frames are principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters". Media can construct a frame by employing techniques such as filtering and shaping texts, or by selectively presenting a particular perspective of an

event, thereby highlighting specific aspects of reality (Gitlin, 1980). Media are useful tools if they make sense of relevant events, suggesting what an issue is, the degree of urgency, the degree of importance, and the extent of official and public involvement (Otchere, 2020, p. 14). In a crisis, media framings tend to determine the reality to the international community, and human rights groups. A certain group's, society's, or individual's thinking and perspective toward an issue are influenced by how the issue is framed in the media (An & Gower, 2009). Iyengar & Simon (1993) found that television news coverage of the conflict in the Persian Gulf significantly affected Americans' political concerns and the criteria with which they evaluated George Bush.The media was criticised for selecting texts in a way that reflects a certain ideology of the state, groups, or individuals. War journalism can be framed, for example as military strategy, as professionalism and technology, as military victories, and as the enemy's losses (Vladisavljević, 2015). Dimitrova & Connolly-Ahern (2007) studied framing analysis of online news sites in coalition countries and the Arab World during the Iraq War. The study's results indicate that Arab online news platforms tend to highlight the military conflict and violence aspects, framing the narrative around war, while Coalition media emphasises the reconstruction of Iraq. Moreover, the research identifies differences in coverage tone and source usage across the four news outlets, reflecting diverse perspectives in their depiction of the war. In the Ethiopia-Tigray conflict, global media coverage had a significant impact on the perceived status quo of the war. How the media were framing the conflict-affected the reactions or approaches of the humanitarian organisations, human rights groups, or nations toward the fighters (Plaut & Vaughan, 2023). Media plays a vital role in shaping the awareness and perspectives of both the general public and decision-makers. Interestingly, there is a dependability of policy makers on media reports to gain a comprehensive understanding of events (Bloch-Elkon 2007;Entman 2000).

The complex phenomenon of framing refers to the media's ability to create an atmosphere and a focal point that shapes our understanding of events. This can be accomplished through the use of various linguistic devices, metaphor, hyperbole, irony, and narrative elements that aid in the framing of a story (Burgers, et al., 2016). In the case of the Tigray conflict, the Tigray media and the Tigray supporters tended to frame the incident in terms of public safety, emphasising the danger posed to the people living in the Tigray region as the government was trying to control Tigray by killing innocent people. Government-affiliated media or government supporters, on the

other hand, framed the armed conflict as a law enforcement success, praising the government's quick capture of the region, and leading to a safer situation for people (Plaut & Vaughan, 2023; Woldearegay, 2022). Global media received criticisms from the Ethiopian government for framing the conflict in an unbalanced way (Abbink, 2021).

The concept of framing theory given by (Entman, 1993; Gitlin, 1980; Goffman, 1974) are particularly fit with this study. In applying framing analysis, this study followed Entman's (1993, p. 52) categories of framing, defining problems, identifying causes, making moral judgments, and suggesting solutions are relevant to identify certain types of frames in the story. Semetko & Valkenburg (2000), Benford & Snow (2000), and Aday & Devitt (2004)'s types of framing were also useful since this study followed predefined frames.

Agenda setting theory

McCombs & Shaw (1972) propose that in agenda setting "readers learn not only about a given issue but also how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position" (p, 1). Similarly, Moy & Rinke (2016) say agenda-setting is the process through which mass media influence public perception of the significance of various issues by giving varying degrees of attention to specific topics. In essence, the media can mould people's views about which issues are more important and relevant by how much coverage they provide to those issues. Cohen (1963) underlines that "the press may not be successful all the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about" (p. 2). Media can affect an individual's daily activities by influencing the audience's minds. They also affect how audiences see the world, and how they decide which issues are less and more important. Lang & Lang (1966), as cited in McCombs & Shaw, (1972) describe the mass media as giving attention to certain issues, building up public images of political figures, and constantly presenting objects suggesting what individuals should think about, know about, and have feelings about. According to the agenda-setting model of media effects, there is a correlation between the amount of media exposure to the issue and the degree of importance the public attaches to the issues. The issues that receive the least media attention are considered by the public as being the least important. Whereas, for the public to perceive the news as important, the media must give the issue significant exposure (McCombs & Shaw, 1976: Rogers, 1994).

Agenda-setting research supports that media affect the policy agenda (through public debate and powerful lobby) and play a key role in shaping the public agenda (issues discussed or prioritised). In terms of conflict, Hawkins (2004) cited in Odine (2013, p. 209) ponders that "agenda-setting will lay the ground for a "chosen" conflict (blinding spot) to be the subject of public debate and scrutiny for about one year, thereby eclipsing all other points of possible interest". Because media, policymakers, and the public can only, consciously, process one or two conflicts at a time.

Issues covered by the media determine what the media consumer believes is important by legitimising certain stories while marginalising or delegitimizing others. McCombs & Shaw (1972) systematically examined and analysed the impact of the media on both the candidates and the electorate of Chapel Hill in the 1968 US Presidential Election. They found a significant connection between the attention given to different campaigns in the media and the perceptions of voters regarding the relevance of various issues and their decision-making. Their findings indicate that the media established themselves as influential agenda-setters by playing a crucial role in shaping public opinion by strategically highlighting certain issues or individuals in their coverage. Hence, the agenda is usually set by media outlets, journalists, or editors as they are the ones who control the content. However, at some stage, the editor's or journalist's decision-making can be influenced by third parties, such as by state leaders' political party campaigns, social media outlets, and public relations efforts (Kiousis et al. 2007 as cited in Guo & Vargo, 2020). In CNN and Al Jazeera's case, the agenda-setting scenario might differ as their geographical location differs. In CNN, the media's agenda can be influenced by a Western tendency toward the situation, while Al Jazeera may be situated within an Arab perspective. A study on framing analysis of Al Jazeera and BBC coverage of the 2011 Libyan uprising and NATO intervention by Nahed (2015) found that the coverage of both these networks was aligned with the national and foreign policy interests of their home countries, making their political contexts the main influence on their news agendas.

3. Methodology

Sample of the study

Data was collected based on the online news websites of two major international news organisations: CNN (https://edition.cnn.com) and Al Jazeera (https://www.Al Jazeera.com). The

data collection comprises 24 months of the armed conflict between the Ethiopian government and TPLF (Tigray People's Liberation Front). The research implemented a quantitative and qualitative content analysis approach. Coverage of CNN and Al Jazeera news websites concerning the Ethiopian-Tigray war (spanning from November 4, 2020 to November 4, 2022) had been taken as a sample. The time span was selected to show the overall nature of the news websites' coverage of the Ethiopian Tigray war. Additionally, it helped to include all the coverage of the war up until both sides signed the peace agreement. Online archives of CNN and Al Jazeera were used to prepare a list of all stories. The words 'Tigray' and 'Ethiopia' were used as search strings.

The unit of analysis was the individual news articles. News is easily the most prominent discursive site in which communication researchers strive to understand what framing is and how framing works (Dangelo & Kuypers, 2010). All articles related to the conflict were analysed regardless of the number of words or paragraphs. First, all stories mentioning the name Tigray or/and Ethiopia were identified. Then, those stories that mainly treat Ethiopian-Tigray conflict-related issues in their headlines were selected and coded. In this study, within 24 months of conflict, 367 news stories were used from both sites together; 268 by Al Jazeera and 99 by CNN. Stories that did not mainly deal with the Ethiopian-Tigray conflict issues as the main topic were excluded.

Framing analysis

The framing analysis approach was a tool in this study. There are two general approaches to framing analysis: inductive and deductive. In the inductive approach, the researcher does not pre-determine certain frames in the study, but instead leaves the study to identify all the possible frames. In the deductive approach, the researcher pre-defines certain frames and analyses the occurrence of the frame in the stories (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). This study used predefined or pre-specify certain frames by the scholars (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; Gronemeyer & Porath 2017; Benford & Snow, 2000; Fahmy, 2010; Lee, et al, 2006).
The key frames used in this study are as follow:

Conflict framing centres around conflicts between two opposing parties, often emphasising the involvement of troops, and military developments. To categorise stories within this type of

frame, certain key elements were considered; whether the story portrays a clear disagreement between parties, whether it references two sides or potentially more than two sides involved in the issue or problem, whether the narrative highlights winners and losers, and whether it includes instances where one party, be it an individual, group, or country, blames or accuses another party. The *violence of war* framing with emphasis on both destruction as well as the human cost raises the question of whether the story highlights the physical destruction caused by the war, including infrastructure damage, casualties, and environmental harm.

To identify *human interest framing*, the researcher used criteria to determine if the stories provided a human example or "human face" on the issue. The researcher also assessed whether the stories employed adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy, caring, sympathy, or compassion. Additionally stories were examined to determine whether they emphasise how individuals and groups are affected by the issue/problem or whether the story delves into the private lives of the actors.

The *responsibility frame* aims to attribute blame and responsibility for an issue. To identify this frame, the researcher examines whether the story suggests that either the government or the TPLF is responsible for the problem, indicates their capacity to mitigate the issue, proposes solutions, assigns responsibility to individuals or groups in society, or underscores the need for urgent action.

Economic framing focuses on the reference to the economic consequences of pursuing or not pursuing a course of action. It emphasises the economic consequences, financial losses or gains, and the degree of expense incurred, both in the present and the future. In addition to the above types of framing, this study also used *prognosis, diagnosis, advanced* and anti-war frames. When the news article stressed potential outcomes or long-term effects of the war, it was identified as a prognostic frame. It was taken as a diagnostic frame (Benford & Snow, 2000) when it focuses on the causes, reasons for the war, or origins of a problem, or answers the question of what is the problem. *Advance framing* focuses on any significant change in the development of the war such as capturing cities or mountains, retaliation, and shifting battle areas.

The *anti-war* frame (anti-war activities) looks at how news reports portray opposition to the war. Anti-war framing had the ability to undermine widely accepted pro-war narratives in the media and to elicit public debate and anti-military conflict activism (Fahmy, 2010).

Tones of the story

Tone is the writer's intention behind the text. The tone of news refers to the affective aspect of media message generation and the depiction of events or issues as either good, neutral, or negative (Newhagen, 1994). In this study, the tone was classified into four. Stories that were in favour of the government, stories that were in favour of TPLF (Tigray People's Liberation Front), stories that were neutral, and mixed.

To study these classified four tones, I adopted the concept of agency, as proposed by Wall (1997; also cited in Fahmy & Al Emad, 2011). The term 'agent' encompassed entities perceived to have taken positive, negative, or neutral actions related to the conflict, involving the Ethiopian government and the Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF). Each news story underwent a meticulous examination, with the headline and the first three paragraphs being scrutinised to identify the key agent. Agents were subsequently categorised into *Positive agent:* Entities contributing positively to the conflict, engaging in actions such as problem alleviation, expressing interest or concern, or striving for resolution. Positive attributes were identified through words like help, relief, negotiations, humanitarian efforts, reconstruction, peace efforts, and cooperation. *Negative agent:* Entities causing negative changes in the conflict, either by creating or worsening situations or problems. Negative attributes were associated with words like destroy, bomb, kill, torture, unwillingness to cooperate, acting irrationally, and resisting positive influence. *Neutral agent:* Entities neither causing negative nor positive changes in the conflict, with news stories not attributing either set of attributes to them. *Mixed agent:* News stories that blame/favour both parties.

Quantitative data were entered into SPSS software and analysed using descriptive statistics, and Google Sheets was also used to make charting, categorising, and coding when necessary.

Intercoder Reliability Test

To ensure reliability, an intercoder reliability test was implemented. 40 stories were coded (20 from each news outlet). The researcher and one coder from outside came to agree on 35 news articles and disagreed on 5 (2 from Al Jazeera and 3 from CNN). Differences in coding were computed using Holsti's (1968) formula: 2(C1.2) divided by C1+C2 Where: C1.2 = number of category assignment agreed on: C1+C2 = total number of category assignments made by both

coders: 2(35)/40+40= 0.87.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. The extent of the coverage

Table 1 presents the overall number of relevant news stories regarding the Tigray conflict between November 4, 2020, and November 4, 2022. Al Jazeera and CNN gave varied attention to the Ethiopia-TPLF conflict from November 2020 to November 2022. Al Jazeera English had 268 online stories, and CNN 99,which is one of the surprising findings of the study. The table included all news stories from both websites.

Year	Month	ALJE's number of news stories	ALJE's average number of words per month	CNN's number of news stories	CNN's average number of words per month
2020	November	40	857	15	770
2020	December	16	815	4	446
2021	January	10	508	0	0
2021	February	11	723	0	0
2021	March	14	663	11	878
2021	April	10	596	5	716
2021	May	20	851	10	923
2021	June	13	736	7	586
2021	July	14	700	4	1095
2021	August	16	509	4	529
2021	September	10	776	4	251

2021	October	14	611	10	807
2021	November	20	821	13	929
2021	December	10	629	4	555
2022	January	7	468	2	1081
2022	February	0	0	1	534
2022	March	4	918	0	0
2022	April	5	508	2	378
2022	May	5	279	0	0
2022	June	1	251	0	0
2022	July	0	0	0	0
2022	August	8	423	0	0
2022	September	8	620	1	280
2022	October	8	492	0	0
2022	November	3	785	2	808
Total		268		99	

Table 1. Frequency of coverage

 with peak coverage in the conflict's initial and one-year mark—attributable to significant events such as the TPLF's march on Addis Ababa. However, the amount of coverage doesn't equate to quality or depth, which must be gauged differently.

Despite a higher article count, Al Jazeera's average word count was 632 compared to CNN's 680, reflecting CNN's slightly deeper reporting. Coverage for both outlets decreased in 2022, with Al Jazeera presenting 52 pieces (19.4% of total) and CNN 8 (8% of total). This decline may stem from audience fatigue, as observed during the Ukraine conflict by Eddy & Fletcher (2022), and competing news focus, particularly CNN's attention towards the U.S. presidential election and the Ukraine war.

CNN's lower article count could also be due to their broader multimedia coverage strategy or reduced accessibility of online articles. Al Jazeera's extensive reporting possibly reflects its geographic proximity to the region and organisational focus on the African continent—factors historically affecting the depth and nature of African conflict reporting by Western media, as noted by Kinner (2005), Dalby (1993) and supported by Okon's (2013) comparative study of CNN and Al Jazeera coverage.

Frames and tones

This research analysed Al Jazeera English and CNN news websites' coverage of the fight between the Ethiopian federal government and TPLF (Nov 4, 2020 to Nov 4, 2022). Stories sometimes fit multiple frames; for example, headline *'How Abiy Ahmed's Ethiopia-first nationalism led to civil war'* from Al Jazeera has a conflict frame as its narrative links Abiy Ahmed's nationalistic leadership to the conflict. However, it also fits into the human interest framing, as it highlights the emotional impact of the conflict and personalities of the news to capture and retain audience interest. Similarly, the CNN headline '*Airstrikes in Ethiopia's Tigray region will continue, PM says'* can be understood and classified under various frames such as prognosis, conflict, and attribution of responsibility as it fulfils different criteria at the same time. Each story, however, was consistently coded under a certain type of tone.

4.2.1. Tones of the story

CNN and Al Jazeera offered distinct and comparable narratives when evaluating how the Ethiopia-TPLF conflict was portrayed in the media. More diverse coverage was provided by Al Jazeera: 31.3% mixed, 14.9% pro-government, 41.4% pro-TPLF, and 12.7% neutral. Even though Al Jazeera supported the TPLF, it made an effort to take a fair stance. However, 64% of CNN's articles had a significant bias in favour of the TPLF, compared to 18% that supported the government. This implies a potential bias, casting doubt on the objectivity of Western media when covering conflicts, and prompting criticism of CNN by the Ethiopian government and public demonstrations (Fanabc.com, 2021, November 20; Bloomberg, 2021; Temesgen, 2021; Abbink, 2021). CNN's blend of neutral (7%) and favourable (9%) tones shows little effort to be balanced.

In the first month of the war, both media outlets published the most coverage, indicating a high level of initial interest that may eventually decline. From the beginning of the conflict, reports had a strong human rights perspective and often painted the government as the aggressor. Examples of such headlines were '*Ethiopia bombs Tigray capital as it rejects mediation calls' (Al Jazeera) and 'Ethiopia's Nobel laureate leader vows military confrontation with restive region'* (CNN), which expressed cruelty for the Ethiopian government.
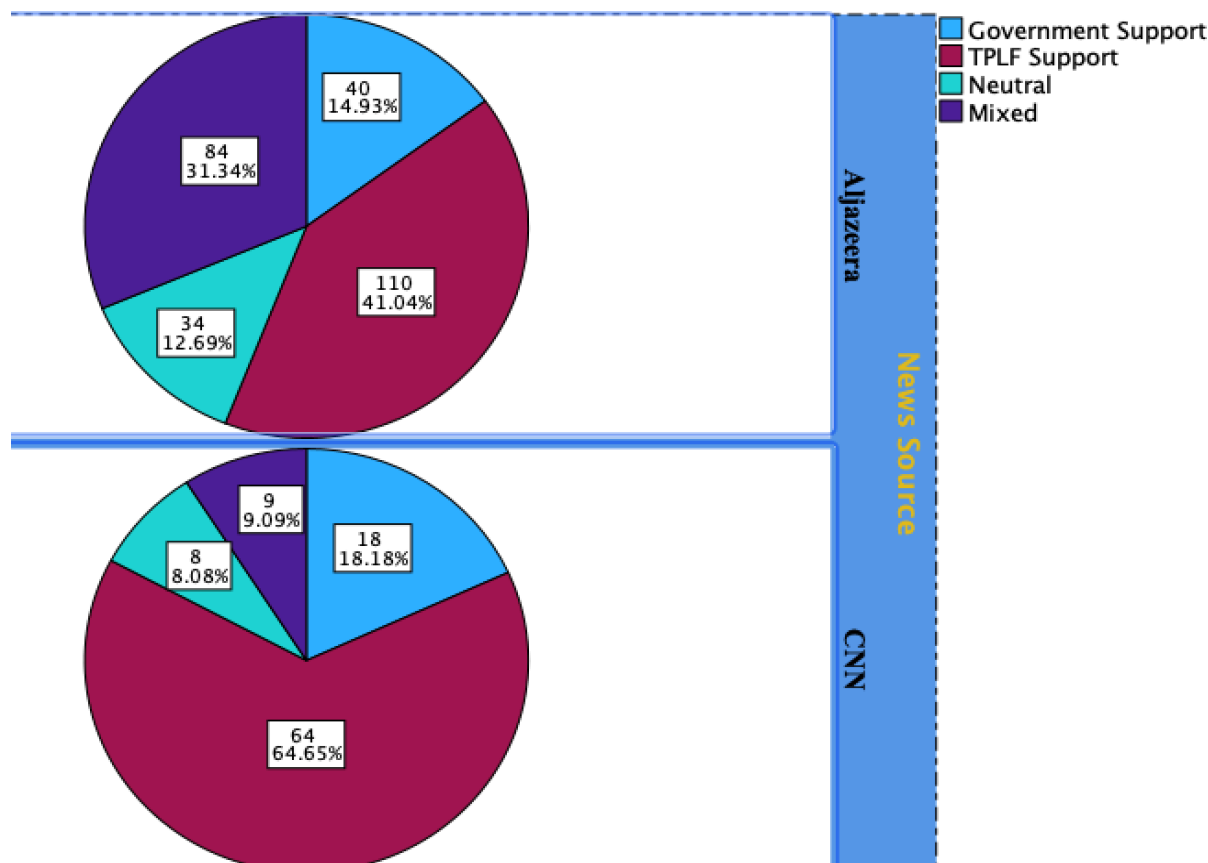
Figure 1. Tones of the stories

Coverage of the tones changed as the war went on in tandem with important incidents like the Mai Kadra massacre and the TPLF's missile strikes, which led both channels to criticise. Al Jazeera headlines like, *'Tigray leader confirms bombing Eritrean capital'* and '*At least 600 civilians were killed in northern Ethiopia massacre, rights commission says.'* Similarly, CNN covered events such as '*Rebels in Tigray reject calls for ceasefire after Ethiopian government forces withdraw from regional capital'.*

Both channels have something in common as most of their news stories were in favour of TPLF. Possible factors may contribute to this phenomenon, such as the Tigray region, which the TPLF represented, was perceived by many in the international community as the victim in the conflict. Consequently, it was not surprising to have a greater number of news articles that supported the victims of the Tigray people. This finding was supported by Abbink (2021) who observes that many leading Western media outlets and news websites focused on the aftermath and the effects of the fighting in the Tigray Region and its population, easily shifting sympathy toward the perceived 'underdog' (TPLF). Both media's news articles had depended on where the actual crimes happened. For example, crimes outside of Tigray brought notoriety for the TPLF, whereas crimes happening inside the Tigray region tended to frame the Ethiopian government negatively.

Story framing

After examining the presence and absence of generic news frames. The data reveals that both news organisations predominantly used conflict framing, human interest framing, attribution of responsibility, and violent framing, with Al Jazeera used in 64%, 58%, 50, 41% and CNN in 47%, 48%,40, 39% of their stories respectively. Both media's focus on conflict framing aligns with previous war framing studies (Dimitrova D, et al. 2005; Schwalbe & Dougherty, 2015; Hailu, 2022). The prominence of conflict framing could be due to the nature of the conflict itself.. The war lasted for a long time and it had a number of battles. The continuous fighting between the two parties prompted conflict-framed news.

Conflict framing emphasises the conflict between individuals, groups, or institutions by evoking a sense of drama and suspense (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p, 95).

An Examples of CNN's conflict news stories:

- *"UN says aid truck hit by debris from Ethiopian drone strike"*
- *"Fresh airstrikes hit capital of Ethiopia's war-torn Tigray region: Air strikes in Ethiopia's Tigray region will continue, PM says"*

. Examples of Al Jazeera's conflict news stories

- *"Tigrayan forces claim to capture new town of Kombolcha"*
- *"Ethiopia's strategic town of Dessie captured by rebel forces"*

Following the conflict framing the second most dominant frame in both media was *violence*

framing. Overall, 53% of the stories contained violent framing inside their story (52% for Al Jazeera and 54% for CNN). Violence framing occurs in news related to bombings, fighting, and killings.
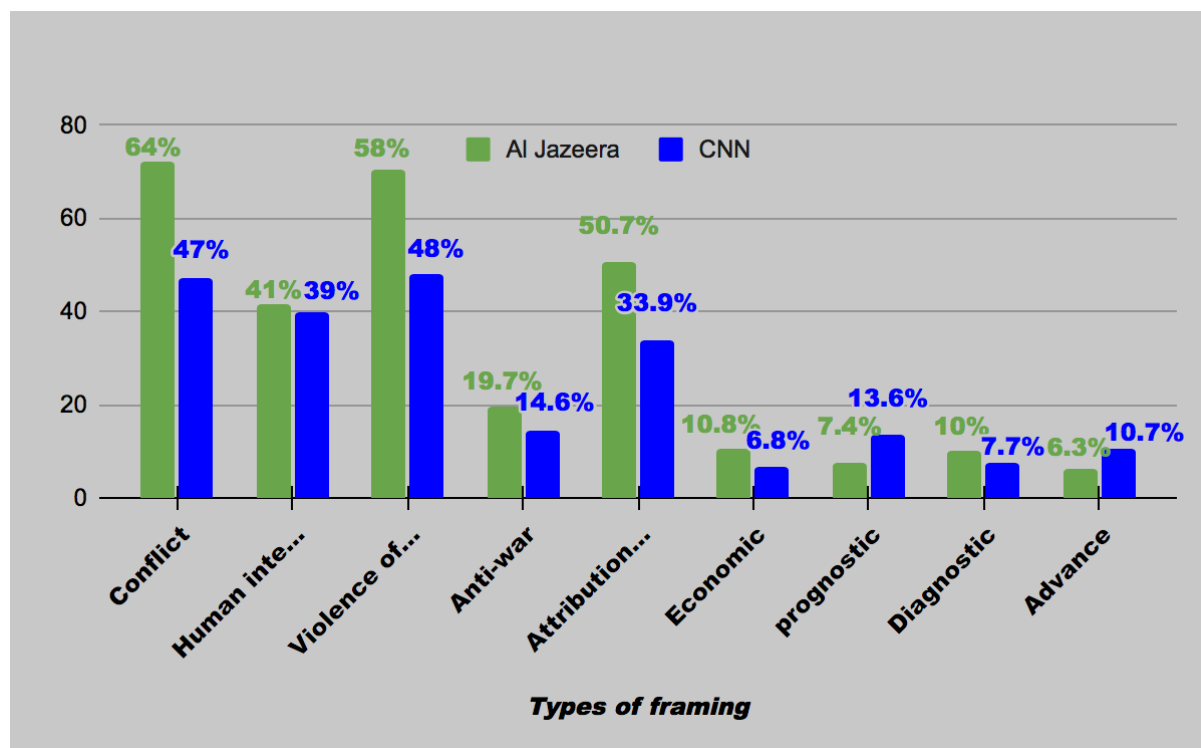

Figure 3. Story of frames

Examples of violence framing:

- *Addis Ababa asks residents to prepare to defend Ethiopian capital(Al Jazeera, Nov 2, 2021)*
- *Two bullets is enough (CNN, April 2, 2021)*

This finding is supported by Hachten (1999), Hess (1996), Riffe et al. (1994) and Rosenblum (1994) who found that western foreign news agencies prioritise reporting on violent events and conflicts over other types of news stories from developing countries. Being a Middle Eastern company, Al Jazeera can be treated the same way based on the findings in this study. The implication is that violence and conflict are perceived as more newsworthy and attention-grabbing than other types of news, which may contribute to the media's disproportionate coverage of violent events. This phenomenon has significant implications for

the public's perceptions of developing countries, as well as their levels of exposure to the diverse range of issues and experiences that exist within these regions.

As figure 1 shows, *human interest framing* is one of the dominant framings. The difference between Al Jazeera and CNN was insignificant. Stories were taken as human interest when they provide a human example or 'human face' on the issue and employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy caring, sympathy, or compassion, or when the story emphasises how individuals and groups are affected by the issue or when the story goes into the private or personal lives of the actors.

Examples of *human interest framing*:

- *'Almost 40% of Tigrayans suffer 'extreme lack of food', WFP warns' (Al Jazeera)*
- *'The Weeknd says he is donating $1 million toward Ethiopian relief efforts' (CNN)*

CNN and Al Jazeera's coverage of the Ethiopian Tigray conflict were framed in such a way that it elicited an emotional response from the public. Both media were able to provide more detailed and emotional accounts of the victims' deaths by focusing on their human stories, inciting public sympathy and outrage. The news outlets also highlighted the victims' personal lives and the impact of their deaths on their families and friends, heightening the emotional impact of the reporting. Incidents were intended to emotionally engage the public and encourage them to take action against any brutality that happened during two years of conflict. This finding aligns with the typology of distant suffering in news, as described by Chouliaraki (2008a), Joye (2009), Zhang & Luther, (2020), and Kyriakidou (2011) typology of a 'hierarchy of distant suffering' in news.

Both CNN and Al Jazeera also frequently used *attribution of responsibility framing*, 33.9% and 50.7% respectively. Based on this, as discussed in the data presentation, Al Jazeera had more news articles that contained attribution of responsibility frames than CNN, which indicates that CNN seemed less interested in making people accountable. This indicates that both media gave considerable room in their news articles toward pointing to a responsible body for damage, human rights abuses, humanitarian crises, economic crises, etc during the two-year conflict.

Examples of *attribution of responsibility framing*:

- *Ethiopian leader says troops who raped civilians in Tigray will be held to account after CNN investigation (CNN)*
- *Disturbing' rape allegations in Ethiopia's Tigray conflict: UN (Al Jazeera)*

Al Jazeera's emphasis on *attribution of responsibility* may reflect their interest in highlighting the impact of the conflict on civilians and holding those responsible accountable.

Economic framing was applied less frequently by both channels, though slightly more often by Al Jazeera at 10.8% compared to 6.8% for CNN. Both channels used this frame to inform readers about the economic consequences of the conflict. They published stories that were related to Ethiopia's relations with international trade organisations. For example,

- *Ethiopia to lose access to lucrative US trade program following CNN investigation (CNN)*
- *How the conflict in Tigray is fraying Ethiopia's finances | Conflict | (Al Jazeera)*

Prognosis and *diagnosis* frames were also used by both news websites. *Prognosis framing* focuses on the stories that tell about what will happen in the future or what has to be done to solve the conflict, it can be a plan of attack and frame-consistent strategies for carrying it out. It refers to remedial strategies, tactics, or solutions to overcome the problem (Messer & Bell, 2010, p. 855). *Diagnostic* frames are used to interpret an event or aspect of life as problematic and in need of transformation as a social movement attempts to change a problematic situation through direct action, which is dependent on identifying the root causes. A diagnostic frame also includes the 'attribution of blame for the problem' (Snow & Corrigall-Brown, 2007, p. 3). The diagnostic and prognostic frame seems to overlap with the responsibility frame of Semetko and Valkenburg (2000). However, every responsibility attribution frame story did not have a diagnostic or prognostic character or vice versa. For example, in this study, there were stories where diagnostic or prognostic frame stories focused on the consequences or root cause of the war that had no intention of blaming or making people/agents accountable. In addition, not all news stories will fit neatly into either the diagnostic or prognostic framing categories, as some stories may be a combination of both or may not fit either category.

CNN used the *prognostic framing* method on its news website more frequently than Al Jazeera, with a usage rate of 13.6% versus 7.4% for Al Jazeera. Al Jazeera used the *diagnostic framing* method on its news website more frequently than CNN, with a usage rate of 10% versus 7.7% for CNN, although neither of the media displayed a significant usage of prognosis or diagnosis framing stories. The finding implies that CNN may prioritise providing insights and analysis on potential outcomes and solutions to the Ethiopian Tigray conflict, whereas Al Jazeera may

prioritise focusing on the root cause of the war. However, overall it can be understood that both news websites were less interested in applying these frames.

Examples of *prognosis news stories:*

- *Air strikes in Ethiopia's Tigray region will continue,(CNN)*
- *How far will Ethiopia's PM go to fight rebels in Tigray? | Conflict | (Al Jazeera),*

Examples of *diagnostic news stories:*

- *How Abiy Ahmed's Ethiopia-first nationalism led to civil war (Al Jazeera)*
- *TPLF spokesman: Ethiopian prime minister has never been interested in peace'(CNN)*

Finally, *anti-war* and *advance framing* were also underrepresented. Advanced framing focuses on significant changes or developments in the war, as well as the war's progress or advancement, and battlefield outcomes, as well as their implications, such as incidents when the fighters capture cities or mountains during the battle. In contrast, anti-war framing examines how news reports portray opposition to the war and has the potential to challenge pro-war narratives in the media and encourage anti-military activism.

Examples of *advance framing:*

- *'Ethiopia says it will seize airports in rebel-held Tigray region' (Al Jazeera)*
- *'Capital of Ethiopia's Tigray region under control of Ethiopian forces, says PM after intense bombardment' (CNN)*

Examples of *anti-war framing:*

- *Ethiopia's government announce ceasefire as Tigrayan troops retake region's capital (CNN)*
- *Ethiopia's Tigray rebels say ready for AU-led peace talks. (Al Jazeera)*

CNN and Al Jazeera used *advance framing* and *anti-war framing* less frequently in their news websites, which could indicate that they put less emphasis on efforts to de-escalate the war. While anti-war framing and advance framing was used less frequently by both CNN and Al Jazeera, it was used more frequently by Al Jazeera with a usage rate of 19.7%(anti-war) and 6.3%(advance) versus 14.6%(anti-war) and 10.7%(advance) for CNN. This suggests that Al Jazeera may prioritise covering anti-war protests and promoting anti-military conflict activism, whereas CNN may prioritise reporting on significant developments in the war. The lower priority given to this framing supports the criticism or accusation of international media, not only for

escalating the conflict but also for not playing a bigger role in de-escalating the conflict.

Conclusion

The study aimed to investigate the amount of coverage devoted to the Tigray conflict by CNN and Al Jazeera, how both news websites framed the conflict, and what was the tone of their coverage. Table 1 summarises the difference between CNN and Aljazeera's amount of coverage. Al Jazeera had more coverage than CNN. This difference coincides with previous studies of Western media coverage of African conflicts stating that they give little coverage while Middle Eastern media provide more coverage due to their geographical proximity to Africa (Dalby, 1993, p. 439; Kinner, 2005).

Al Jazeera and CNN provided distinct and contrasting coverage of the conflict. Neither of the media outlets provided unbiased and independent news coverage, with their news stories favouring the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). This finding was supported by the same findings that international media were in favour of TPLF (Temesgen, 2021; Abbink, 2021). A comparison of the two, however, reveals that Al Jazeera provided more impartial and equitable coverage than CNN. The percentage of Al Jazeera's news stories with a neutral or mixed stance was higher, indicating a balanced and fair approach to news reporting. In comparison with Al Jazeera, CNN's coverage had more percentage supporting the Ethiopian government, even though it was heavily skewed in favour of the TPLF.

Based on a comparison of CNN and Al Jazeera's coverage of the Ethiopia-TPLF conflict, it appears that both media outlets heavily relied on conflict framing, which is not surprising given the conflict's multifaceted and protracted nature. Both outlets frequently used violent framing, reflecting the tendency of Western news organisations to prioritise violent events and conflict. This is in line with Hachten (1999), Hess (1996), Riffe et al. (1994), and Rosenblum (1994) studies which argue that Western foreign news agencies prioritise reporting on conflict and violent framings over other types of news framing from developing countries. Even though this study agrees with these prior findings, unlike the North-south dichotomy, it also leaves Al Jazeera in the same category. While both media outlets prioritise the attribution of responsibility framing, Al Jazeera used it more frequently, indicating a stronger focus on identifying and holding responsible parties accountable for negative outcomes resulting from the conflict. Both media similarly prioritise human interest framing. They publish news articles highlighting the

impact of deaths of families and friends, heightening the emotional impact of the reporting to the typology of a 'hierarchy of distant suffering' in news by Chouliaraki (2008b), Joye (2009) and Kyriakidou (2011).

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