Israel's political discourse justifying its actions towards Palestinians from October 7th, 2023
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Citation

Israel's political discourse justifying its actions towards Palestinians from October 7th, 2023

MA Middle Eastern Studies Thesis

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my parents, Giorgos and Fani, who taught me to act with determination to make my ideas and dreams come true. I would also like to thank my brother Yiannis, who gives me the strength to keep striving for my goals. I cannot forget the support and encouragement of my best friend, Anastasia, who listened to my complaints for hours, days, and weeks, but offered me mental support and helped me pursue what I love.

Of course, my friends Marios, Eirini, Dionysis, and Marina, who believed in me and helped me to continue with this project. I would also like to thank Marianna, who was by my side during this period and asked me questions I didn't want to answer, so that I could become better. I would also like to thank Ms. Marina Eleftheriadou and Mr. Sotiris Roussos, who were the motivation and inspiration for me to start studying the Middle East.

Finally, I cannot leave out expressing my equally heartfelt thanks to Mr. Maurits Berger, who challenged me throughout the semester with the right questions, pushing me to find my voice and teaching me how to become better academically. His guidance in the process of writing my thesis was extremely valuable.

Without all these people by my side, this result would not have been possible; there are no words to express my gratitude. This thesis is dedicated to the Palestinian people, whose struggle inspired me to write these pages and will continue to inspire me for many more.

Abstract

October 7, 2023, marked the beginning of yet another escalation of violence between Israel and Palestine, triggered by Hamas attacks and the Israeli military response. From that day until now, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's public discourse has played a central role in shaping the political narrative and legitimizing state violence against the Palestinians. This paper examines how Netanyahu used rhetoric to construct the idea of the enemy and present the use of military force as a moral imperative. Based on Michel Foucault's theory of discourse and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the study analyzes twelve historically and semantically selected statements made by Netanyahu between 2023 and 2025. The work concludes with an analysis of this rhetoric in other historical cases (the US in the Vietnam War and Russia in Ukraine), to highlight whether the phenomenon of rhetorical legitimization of violence is a unique case or part of a broader state practice.

Introduction

Political discourse is not just discourse; it is also action. It is a tool of power that does not simply describe the world but shapes it. Particularly in times of war and conflict, discourse cannot be kept neutral as it creates narratives, reinforces national identities, and inevitably constructs enemies while legitimizing life and death choices. With the case of the Israeli-Palestinian war being one of the most complex and politically charged conflicts of modern times, the reason to examine its political discourse becomes particularly important. The speech of Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister who has served in this position for more than 16 non-consecutive years, is an important example of the use of speech as a means of power and ideological legitimization of violence. What this thesis seeks to do is to unpack his speeches not as a political position but as an object of research by asking the question: How does Netanyahu use language to justify Israel's political and military actions against the Palestinians, and to what extent is this strategy unique?

At this point, before continuing the analysis of the research, it is important to analyze the historical context of the dispute. The war between Israel and Palestine did not start on 7 October 2023. The starting point for the conflict is the creation and recognition of the State of Israel in 1948, which resulted in the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homes.[1] From that point onwards a vicious circle of various waves of violence followed.[2] First the first Arab-Israeli war and the expulsion and flight of more than 700.000 Palestinians, the so-called Nakba, then the Six Day War of 1967 which resulted in further occupations of Palestinian territory with Israel imposing control over areas of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Golan Heights and Gaza.[3] Gaza has been an "autonomous" region since 2005. In that year, the Israeli government officially withdrew from Gaza, which it had occupied continuously since 1967.[4] However, the term "autonomy" is used here under quotation marks to describe the period from 2005 to 2023, when hostilities between the two sides escalated.[5] In this period, Gaza was not truly autonomous, as it was under the governance of Hamas, but its sovereignty was essentially limited due to Israeli and Egyptian control of its borders and the economic and military restrictions imposed by Israel.[6]

Since the rise of Hamas (2006), both sides have been involved in many armed clashes with

[1] Rashid Khalidi, "The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917–2017." *Metropolitan Books*, January 26, 2021.

[2] Ilan Pappe, "The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine." *Oneworld Publications*, September 1, 2007, 86–126.

[3] IMEU, "Timeline: The Palestinian Nakba (Catastrophe) & Establishment of Israeli Apartheid." May 8, 2013, https://imeu.org/article/the-nakba-65-years-of-dispossession-and-apartheid

[4] Julia Frankel, "A Timeline of the Gaza Strip in Modern History." *Public Broadcasting Service,* February 5, 2025, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/a-timeline-of-the-gaza-strip-in-modern-history

[5] Laura Almagor, Joas Wagemakers, Simeon Paravantes, Fabio Cristiano, and Peter Malcontent, "The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Explained: This Preceded the Gaza War." *Utrecht University*, October 16, 2024, https://www.uu.nl/en/the-israeli-palestinian-conflict-explained-this-preceded-the-gaza-war

[6] Belén Fernández, "Israel's Gaza 'disengagement' That Paved the Way for Conquest." *Al Jazeera*, May 17, 2025, https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2025/5/17/israels-gaza-disengagement-that-paved-the-way-for-conquest

more than 300 casualties on the Israeli side and more than 6.000 on the Palestinian.[7] However, the humanitarian crisis and widespread destruction in Gaza are the result of a variety of factors, including Hamas's governance , repeated missile attacks on Israel, and Israel's restrictive measures on Gaza's economy with a long-standing blockade and its military actions against Hamas.[8] The culmination of all this came with the 7 October 2023 attack on Hamas, with Israel responding a week later with strikes in Gaza and numerous Palestinian casualties to this day.[9] In this context, Benjamin Netanyahu's political discourse has gained particular weight since, as the leader of the state, he has a central role in how these events are perceived internally and internationally. This paper seeks to understand how Benjamin Netanyahu, through his speech, presents his version of reality. This historical context is not just a background, but is an active component of the rhetorical strategy that Netanyahu consistently adopts and uses.

Although this paper touches on very important political issues, the approach taken will be as academic and distanced from the author's personal position as possible, as the purpose of this paper is to find the mechanisms by which language constitutes reality and power. At a time when the public discourse on the Middle East is full of information, academic research must adopt a methodological stance that focuses on the interpretation of facts and not simply on their denunciation. The academic and social significance of this work is twofold. First, there is a much literature on political discourse in Israel, but little analysis has been conducted on how this discourse can compare a regime of normalized violence through its repetitive emotional and historical language. In doing so, the study of the speeches of Netanyahu fills a gap in current research. Secondly, the issue is quite relevant given the ongoing violence that generates this discourse at the time of writing. The main hypothesis that will be explored in this paper is whether the discourse of Netanyahu serves as a mechanism to legitimize violence. This seems to be the case: through repeated patterns of linguistic references, the construction of dichotomies, and the invocation of the collective threat, he attempts to normalize the statist response to Hamas as a moral obligation. With this in mind, this thesis will also examine other key elements of Netanyahu's discourse, such as the strategy to frame the exercise of violence around defense, the use of historical collective trauma, collective memory. Finally, the question will be addressed to what extent Netanyahu's rhetoric legitimizing state violence can be paralleled with other cases. For this exercise, case studies will be drawn from the United States in the Vietnam War and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

This research thesis will be divided into four chapters. In the first chapter, the relevant literature and the methodology used to do this work will be analyzed. The second chapter examines the rhetorical strategies that Netanyahu used to legitimize the violence of his political decisions - this is the core of the research and this chapter will therefore be lengthier than the other chapters. This chapter is divided into several subsections, each addressing different aspects of Israeli rhetorical practices. The third chapter contains the study that investigates the question whether Netanyahu's rhetoric is a unique case of rhetoric or whether its motives are recurring by doing so an analysis of political rhetoric in two additional

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[7] United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - Occupied Palestinian Territory, "Data on Casualties." Accessed July 12, 2025, https://www.ochaopt.org/data/casualties

[8] Amnesty International, "Israel's Apartheid against Palestinians." February 28, 2022, https://cdn.amnesty.at/media/9282/amnesty-report-israel-s-apartheid-against-palestinians_februar-2022.pdf

[9] Aditi Bhandari, Prasanta Kumar Dutta and Jonathan Saul, "What We Know about Israel's Invasion of Gaza so Far." *Reuters*, October 30, 2023, https://www.reuters.com/graphics/ISRAEL-PALESTINIANS/MAPS/movajdladpa/2023-10-30/mapping-israels-ground-invasion-of-gaza/

case studies will be presented: The Russian discourse surrounding the invasion of Ukraine and the discourse of the United States during the Vietnam War. The fourth and final chapter will summarize the findings, thus highlighting the broader conclusions about discourse and possible directions for future research.

1.   Theory and Methodology

1.1 Theory

Discourse analysis is a tool that does not examine exclusively what is said, but attempts to find out why something is said and how.[10] It serves many purposes, such as examining the way in which ideologies are reinforced, or the process by which language can construct social identities and support or challenge power structures. The use of discourse analysis can be applied for many purposes such as in education or psychology but at the same time it can also be applied to political discourses and mass media. In this particular thesis the purpose of discourse analysis is to reveal the way in which language is used to construct social identities such as gender, ethnicity, or even social class. At the same time, it examines how power dynamics and social injustices can be perpetuated through language, which is best achieved by examining the factors involved, more specifically who is speaking, to whom and for what reason, as well as the tactics of influence, exclusion, and persuasion that may be contained in a discourse. Discourse analysis offers the possibility of examining how the mass media cultivate stereotypical images of social groups and how political discourse shapes the image of the "enemy" or the "nation." [11] Discourse is what co-creates reality rather than simply reflecting it; it is a fundamental part of reality and has a direct impact on the way people perceive, feel, think, and behave in the world.[12]

Foucauldian and Critical Discourse Analysis proved to be particularly suitable methodological approaches for analyzing Netanyahu's speeches since they both allow the investigation of how political discourse not only describes reality but also frames and ideologically shapes it. Taking Foucault and Critical Discourse Analysis into account, it is possible to identify in these speeches ideological implications and methods of persuasion with which linguistic communication and discourse maintain and promote socio-political and ethnic divisions, often concealing injustices or using symbolic violence.[13] Both methods explain how the language of political discourse creates ideas such as the "good Israeli citizen" or "dangerous Palestinian," and the way in which this narrative justifies political choices and military actions that are shaped by constantly repeated verbal motifs.

Michel Foucault provides a theory how discourse creates and develops identities, knowledge, and power dynamics in specific historical contexts.[14] According to Foucault, discourse does not just describe reality as mentioned above, but rather creates, designs, and shapes it as it pleases. In The Archaeology of Knowledge, he argues that discourse

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[10] Brian Paltridge, "*Discourse Analysis: An Introduction*." Blomsbury Academic, London, 2012, 215-220.

[11] Barbara Johnstone, "*Discourse Analysis*." Blackwell Publishers, 2002, 45-49.

[12] James Williams, "Poststructuralism, History, Genealogy: Michel Foucault's The Archaeology of Knowledge - Understanding Poststructuralism." Cambridge Core, Acumen Publishing, 2005, https://doi.org/10.1017/UPO9781844653683.005

[13] Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, "Methods of Critical Discourse Studies, 3rd Edition." *SAGE Publications Ltd*, January 2015, 121-125, https://www.researchgate.net/Methods_of_Critical_Discourse

[14] James Lindsay, "Foucauldian." *New Discourses*, April 26, 2021, https://newdiscourses.com/tftw-foucauldian/

"rules in" certain ways of talking about the world while excluding others, determining what counts as knowledge and who is the one with the authority to speak.[15] The most fundamental characteristic of discourse, he argues, is its relation to the truth, and human civilization is obliged to produce truth, just as it produces goods.

In The Will to Knowledge, he writes: "Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth — that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true."[16] Truth, in the way that he sees it, is not universal or objective but produced and sustained by power. The discourse of science, medicine, and the criminal justice system are some of the discourses that are considered socially "true" and, by extension, not easily disputable, while others are marginalized using the idea of the "truth regime." According to Foucault, the truth of discourse does not often depend on its maximum agreement with reality, but on the authority and power it exercises over people.[17] Every system of truth production is an authoritarian mechanism. Every era has its own "truth regime," its own cognitive codes, which constitute historical diversity.[18] A concept he elaborates in both The Will to Knowledge and his earlier writings on knowledge and discourse is that there is no "truth," but rather many "truth regimes" and a constant will that tends toward it (volonté de vérité), without ever achieving its absolute conquest.[19] The way this relates to the study is as Foucault explains the construction of "regimes of truth", so leaders such as Netanyahu rely on this to legitimize state violence and present their actions as morally justified. In this way, they set the limits of what can be said and who can speak, as Foucault explains, thus making their discourse a tool of governance and creating an identity through language itself.[20]

At the same time, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a method that investigates how language helps to maintain and challenge the power dynamics, ideologies, and social injustices it creates.[21] Critical discourse analysis can't be considered neutral but is politically and socially oriented, as its theoretical basis comes from Marxism, sociological constructivism, and theories of ideology.[22] Its primary goal is to bring to the surface "hidden" forms of domination that exist in language. Looking at linguistic communication from a social, historical, and political perspective, it examines the linguistic tools used (such as syntactic analysis, lexical choices, and naming conventions). In its attempt to show that language shapes social consciousness and maintains or undermines hegemony, CDA is applied to texts of a political or journalistic nature, educational material, and institutional practices.[23] The reason why Critical Discourse Analysis was chosen as an approach is because it provides the tools and explains in the best possible way how

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[15] Michel Foucault, "The Archaeology of Knowledge." Translated by A.M. Sheridan Smith, Tavistock Publications, 1972, 54-56, https://monoskop.org/Foucault_Michel_Archaeology_of_Knowledge.pdf

[16] Michel Foucault, "The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction." Translated by Robert Hurley, Pantheon Books, 1978, 131-133, https://monoskop.org/Foucault_Michel_The_History_of_Sexuality

[17] Ibid.

[18] Michel Foucault, "Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977." ed. Colin Gordon, Trans. By Colin Gordon et al., Pantheon Books, 1980, 109–133, https://monoskop.org/Foucault_Michel_Power_Knowledge

[19] Michel Foucault, "The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction.", op.cit.

[20] Julianne Cheek, "Foucauldian Discourse Analysis." The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods, 2008, https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412963909.n180

[21] Simon Statham, "Critical Discourse Analysis: A Practical Introduction to Power in Language." Routledge & CRC Press. Routledge, March 30, 2021, 142-153 https://www.routledge.com/Critical-Discourse-Analysis-A-Practical-Introduction-to-Power-in-Language/Statham/p/book/9780367133702

[22] Johannes Beetz, Benno Herzog, and Jens Maesse, "Introduction Special Issue Marx & Discourse." Critical Discourse Studies, 2018, 321–24, https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2018.1456944

[23] Simon Statham, op.cit.

language is used to create, legitimize, and reproduce conditions of power. Given that this paper examines the way in which political leaders, and more specifically Netanyahu, and by extension the Americans during the Vietnam War and Putin in Russia, use language to justify violence and control public opinion, CDA allows for an in-depth analysis of how legitimacy, threat, fear, and moral superiority are used and manipulated as concepts through language. Since the analysis is based on what is said and to whom, CDA adds that it is the way in which something is said that turns it into a collective narrative.

While Foucault's theory of discourse and Critical Discourse Analysis serve as the central theoretical lenses of this thesis, the analysis also incorporates other theories so as to explain the various observations made about the speeches. Among those, some are the classical rhetorical appeals of ethos, pathos, and logos, the strategic use of fear as a tool of legitimization, but also collective memory and group identity. All these couldn't be analyzed separately in this section, but combined, they offer a more nuanced understanding of how political discourse has the power to influence belief, behavior, and perceptions of legitimacy.

1.2 Methodology

This paper aims to answer the research question by focusing on the political discourse of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, with an emphasis on his public speeches. Therefore, it will focus on the time frame between October 7, 2023, and May 7, 2025. October 7 is the starting point of the research as this is when the Hamas attack which was followed by the war in Gaza, took place, and the end date is set as May 7, 2025, when Netanyahu in a speech to the Security Cabinet, approved the plan to extend the attack on Gaza on May 5, 2025. This period was chosen not only because of its political significance, but also because it reflects a moment when rhetorical strategies were crucial for legitimizing state violence and shaping public opinion in Israel. Netanyahu's speeches are a particularly interesting case study as he is Israel's longest-serving Prime Minister and head of government. His role over the years has made him a central figure in the construction of Israel's official narrative. The reason why Netanyahu's public speeches or statements were chosen rather than his personal Twitter page or those of other Israeli political figures is that official speeches carry particular institutional weight as they express the positions of the state, justify its decisions, and address both domestic and international audiences. Unlike social media posts, which are often short, reactive, and shaped by the limitations of the platform, public speeches allow for the development of arguments, the formation of a narrative framework, and the use of rhetorical strategies, thus providing a better picture and a wider range of information for analysis. The focus on Netanyahu's speeches, as a long-standing and central figure in Israeli politics, allows for a more in-depth analysis of Israeli political rhetoric. By examining this specific type of rhetoric, the methods and techniques used to justify Israel's actions towards the Palestinians over the last two years will become clearer.

The number of publications and official announcements was extensive, making the selection of specific data necessary. During this period, Netanyahu made more than 200 statements, which, although helpful to the research, cannot be adequately presented in the context of a master's thesis. For this reason, the survey was limited to 70 statements, a number that allows for a sufficiently representative and manageable analysis within the limits of a thesis. The choice of this number of statements was made in an attempt to strike a balance between

qualitative depth and quantitative sufficiency in order to form a complete sample. The statements selected were based on their thematic coherence, content, and importance of the timeframe within the period 2023-2025. It is also important to note that no digital language analysis application or tool was used in this thesis and that the analysis was carried out through the author's personal reading of all texts, with handwritten notes and comparisons in order to identify common patterns and basic rhetorical strategies. Although 70 statements were initially selected, which were considered most important based on their subject matter and temporal significance, the attempt to analyze them within the limits of a master's thesis was difficult, with the result that this number was limited to 12. Nevertheless, during the research process, the strong repetitiveness in Netanyahu's rhetoric was noted, both in the words and phrases and in the narrative structures he used. As a result, the presentation of all 70 statements was not necessary, as many of them reproduced the same narrative and conceptual content. In this paper, therefore, 12 of these statements are presented, which are illustrative of the rhetorical patterns identified during the period under study. Focusing on these extracts allows for the in-depth analysis needed to create a coherent picture of the Israeli Prime Minister's speech strategies.

In contrast to the first section of the thesis, which focuses exclusively on Benjamin Netanyahu's own statements and the primary sources available to us, the second section of the thesis is based exclusively on secondary sources to examine the cases of Russia and the War with Ukraine and the United States in the Vietnam War. The cases are not examined with the aim of equating their historical and geopolitical contexts, but with the aim of highlighting common patterns in the way power constructs enemies, reinforces collective identity, and legitimizes the use of state violence through discourse. The choice of specific historical examples was not made at random. These are cases where state rhetoric has played a key role in covering up or justifying acts of violence, as well as in shaping a framework of national cohesion around a "just cause." Finally, as in the first part, the analysis will be carried out within the same theoretical framework, namely Michel Foucault's theory and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The use of the same theoretical approach will ensure the consistency of the analysis and will help in the analysis of linguistic elements on a case-by-case basis. Despite the differences in sources, which are primary for Netanyahu and secondary for the historical cases of Russia and the US, the common theoretical basis allows for a unified examination of the role of discourse as a means of exercising power and legitimizing political narratives.

1.3 Literature Review

The political rhetoric of a politician exists even before that person comes to power and is gradually built up, changed, transformed, reversed, altered or embellished over the years they remain in power. However, in times of conflict, political rhetoric takes on a different dynamic, as it ceases to be a tool for communication between the leader and the people and becomes a means of constructing identities, enemies, and mechanisms for legitimizing power. In the case analyzed in this paper, the political discourse of Israel, and more specifically that of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, emerges as a characteristic example of linguistic practice that constructs regimes of truth as defined by Foucault.

Trying to look back historically at the perception of the Middle East, at the "otherness" of the Arab world, one ends up with Edward Said and Orientalism. Said analyzed how the West

constructed the East as "Other" through stereotypical and hierarchical representations. The Palestinian people and, by extension, their cultural identity fit into Said's analysis of "the Other" as he described it.[24] Among other things, based on this, Netanyahu attributes to the Palestinians the characteristics of threat, barbarism, and inherent violence, thus creating an internal and external "other" that needs to be neutralized. As Maurits Berger points out in his book A Brief History of Islam in Europe, the process of "Othering" is not simply a cultural or ideological representation of the "Other", but functions as a mechanism of self-definition for Europe itself, in the case of the Israeli state, reinforcing a sense of superiority, cultural cohesion, and moral legitimacy. For Berger, the "Other" is everything we are not and, by extension, everything we despise, reject or would never want to be. Through this process, the "Other", who in this case is the Palestinian, is presented as "uncivilized," "terrorist," or "barbaric," and violence against him is a necessary and justified act.[25]

The construction of this "Other" is also linked to the mechanisms of power described by Foucault in his works Discipline and Punish and The Archaeology of Knowledge, where he explains that truth does not exist as an objective fact, but as a product of discourse and power, and that discourse is what creates reality.[26] This makes the political discourse of Netanyahu and other leaders with power, and the organization of information, a tool for shaping the truth about who the enemy is and who has the right to defend themselves and rule. Furthermore, in his work Society Must Be Defended, Foucault analyzes how the state itself constructs its internal enemies through biopolitics and the discourse of "security," helping us to better understand how Netanyahu explains Israel's actions in Gaza as an existential threat.[27]

Apart from these studies, this particular work refers to concepts such as legitimacy, the normalization of violence, mortality, and the value of life. If we took each concept and looked for previous research, this chapter could be a separate study in itself. It is important to understand that through these works, Palestinian identity is defined by the characteristics of threat and violence. Judith Butler, in her book Precarious Life, states that Western societies create hierarchies of mortality and suffering, and as a result in this case the death of Palestinians is considered less mournful than that of Israelis.[28] The value of life in this particular work will also be a subject of analysis, not only of life in general but of specific lives. Although the period being studied is unique, the rhetorical strategy used is not. In the third chapter of the paper, through other cases (the US in the Vietnam War and Russia in Ukraine), an attempt will be made to prove exactly that. This literature review, therefore, does not aim simply to present older theories, but aims to create a conceptual frame that will prove that speech is an act of power.

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[24] Edward W. Said, "*Orientalism*." Penguin Books, 2003, 206-220, https://monoskop.org/Said_Edward_Orientalism_1979.pdf

[25] Maurits Berger, "A Brief History of Islam in Europe: Thirteen Centuries of Creed, Conflict and Coexistence." Amsterdam University Press, 2014, 29-31, https://doi-org.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/10.1017/978940060150

[26] Michel Foucault, "Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison." Translated by Alan Sheridan, Vintage Books, 1995, 27–28, 194–228, https://monoskop.org/Foucault_Michel_Discipline_and_Punish , see also; Michel Foucault, "The Archaeology of Knowledge." Translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith, Routledge, 2002, 54–55, 131–138, https://monoskop.org/Foucault_Michel_Archaeology_of_Knowledge.pdf

[27] Michel Foucault, "Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976." Edited by Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, translated by David Macey, Picador, 2003, 30–40, https://cpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com/sites.psu.edu/Foucault-Society-must-be-defended.pdf

[28] Judith Butler, "Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence", Verso, 2004, 20–23, 39-41, https://www.wkv-stuttgart.de/uploads/media/butler-judith-precarious-life.pdf

# 2.	Discourse in Israel
2.1 "Us vs/or Them" Narrative

From the public political statements by Prime Minister Netanyahu over the past two years, a variety of justifications emerge that he uses to defend Israel's actions. These are based on security issues, international law, moral superiority, and Jewish history. The most common narrative concerns military operations as defensive responses to threats and terrorist attacks, with the Israeli government and army presenting their military actions as a reaction to Hamas' attacks on Israeli territory, which they consider a necessary move to defend their citizens. The rhetoric employed by Netanyahu is that any other nation would act in the same manner to address similar threats, if not more harshly.

> *"Thousands of Iranian-backed Hamas terrorists from Gaza burst into Israel in pickup trucks and on motorcycles, and they committed unimaginable atrocities. They savagely murdered 1,200 people. They raped and mutilated women. They beheaded men. They burned babies alive. They burned entire families alive — babies, children, parents, grandparents. It seems reminiscent of the Nazi Holocaust."[29]*

> *"In this battle between good and evil, there must be no equivocation. When you stand with Israel, you stand for your own values and your own interests. Yes, we're defending ourselves, but we're also defending you against a common enemy that, through violence and terror, seeks to destroy our way of life."[30]*

> *"We see this moral confusion when Israel is falsely accused of deliberately targeting civilians. We don't want to see a single innocent person die. That's always a tragedy. And that's why we do so much to minimize civilian casualties, even as our enemies use civilians as human shields."[31]*

The above three excerpts from Benjamin Netanyahu's speech at the UN on September 27, 2024, are the most characteristic examples of his rhetoric. In five lines, he uses phrases such as "good and evil," "terrorists," and "our enemies use civilians as human shields," creating a specific narrative around the image of Hamas and its supporters. Hamas is blamed for everything that happens and is accused of the deaths of Israeli civilians. This portrayal of Hamas as an evil that spreads terror now defines it as an inhuman threat that cannot be discussed or negotiated, let alone exist as a political opponent with goals or a social base. Based on this rhetoric, Hamas and, by extension, those who support it are violent, radical, and dangerous, while Israel is the defensive, "rational," and "civilized" side. The distinction between "us" and "them" creates a moral and emotional divide, with the result that any act of self-defense by Israel is considered justified by society as necessary and essential, while any reaction by the Palestinians, even if not military, is labeled and stigmatized as collaboration with terrorism. Indirectly, however, this does not remain limited to the individuals who make up Hamas, but affects the entire Palestinian population, perpetuating the perception that

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[29] Benjamin Netanyahu, "PM Netanyahu's speech at UNGA in New York." *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, *Gov.il,* September 27, 2024, https://www.gov.il/en/pages/event-un280924

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

Hamas "hides among civilians" or "uses children as human shields." Hamas and as a result Palestinians are classified as "others" among the threatening and dangerous, and by using the term "terrorist," military violence as a response is legitimized, and the conflict is simplified without any political responsibility or self-criticism.

To understand these processes, the concept of "Othering" is useful: it is a term for the division between "us" and "them" in the social sciences. The "Other" is not just a group of people who are different; rather, it is a process by which we identify how we differ from the Other.[32] The Other represents everything we hate, reject, or would rather not be because it embodies everything we are not. Man versus woman, white versus black, sane versus insane, civilized versus barbarian, Western versus Eastern, are some of the levels at which the process of othering is examined in the social sciences. By contrasting the "West" with "the rest of the world," the European image that was constructed on the basis of diversity resulted in a process of "alienation" that primarily turned outward, toward the non-European Other.[33] Compared to the "civilized" world of Europe, the Other was barbaric or primitive. Europe saw itself as logical, well-organized, and civilized—qualities that had brought it to a position of wealth and influence. In addition to supporting this notion, the idea of the uncivilized Other assisted Europe in identifying and portraying itself as the highest point in human history. [34]

Religion added another layer in the Othering division. Since the early Middle Ages, religion has been an important factor in the period, in addition to the "alienation" of European nation-states and cultures. Because of religion, the world seemed to be split into three groups for Europeans: non-believers (non-Christians), heretics (Christians who had to rejoin the official Church), and Christians (believers).[35] Through this categorization, one can understand how Europeans, despite their various differences, conflicts, and hostilities, were united by their common Christian heritage.[36] In this way, religious Othering accompanied cultural othering, creating a moral map in which Europe was at the top and non-Christians were excluded from the circle of civilization and it is important to note that these categories do not describe differences but justify exclusion, domination, and violence. This entire analysis may seem unrelated to the Israeli-Palestinian context, but this logic of exclusion prevails in the rhetoric used by Netanyahu. Specifically, references to the Jewish religion and biblical texts reproduce this dynamic. In this context, Palestinians are not only the political Other, but also the religious Other.

In the case of Israel, these historical patterns of "othering" are not simply reproduced, but adapted to fit a narrative of survival. What distinguishes much of Benjamin Netanyahu's rhetoric is the emphasis on an absolute and irreversible threat. Hamas and its supporters are not simply different or uncivilized, but are presented as people who want to wipe Israel off

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[32] Salma Ahmed Abdul Magied, "Othering, Identity, and Recognition: The Social Exclusion of the Constructed 'Other'." *Future Journal of Social Science*: Vol. 1: Iss. 1, Article 5, 2022.

[33] Clint Curle, "US vs. Them: The Process of Othering." *CMHR*, January 24, 2020, https://humanrights.ca/story/us-vs-them-process-othering

[34] Yancy, George, Nasser Ishtayeh, George Yancy, Judith Butler, Nicholas Powers, Sharon Zhang, Tareq S. Hajjaj, "The Violent 'Othering' of Palestinians Has Political Roots." *Truthout*, September 1, 2024, https://truthout.org/articles/the-violent-othering-of-palestinians-has-political-roots/

[35] James Muldoon, "Popes, Lawyers, and Infidels: The Church and the Non-Christian World, 1250-1550." *University of Pennsylvania Press*, 1979, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt18crxt5

[36] James L. Fredericks, "Faith among Faiths: Christian Theology and Non-Christian Religions." Paulist Press, January 1, 1999, https://archive.org/details/faithamongfaiths0000fred

the map. It is no longer a question of cultural or religious superiority, but of physical existence. It is a logic that shifts from "us against them" to "us or them," bringing to the fore the question of survival or extinction. In this context, the Palestinian Other is not only demonized but also dehumanized and expelled from the realm of legitimate life. The division between "us" and "them" is therefore a political and symbolic process of identity formation and is not simply a description of difference. What is not like you is different, and this identity creates a coherent and morally superior image of the self that automatically demonizes the "other." The Palestinian other, as described by Israel, is not simply portrayed as different but as something threatening, something wrong, thus rejecting Palestinian culture and placing it in a position of enmity. This repeated rhetoric from Netanyahu has systematic alienation tactics that are quite similar to those described in European colonial thinking.

The Israeli narrative, for Hamas and its supporters, over the last two years has revolved around the idea of the uncivilized "other" who poses a threat to the Western ethnic group, class, logic, and organized society. The image of the Palestinian has been constructed in such a way as to justify his marginalization, surveillance, and even extermination on the altar of Israel's salvation. This method of Othering, which has its roots in human history and colonial tradition, appears to be reproduced in contemporary Israeli state ideology. This alienation is not simply a theory in this particular case; it is not merely referred to as an idea, but is used as a weapon of national narrative and as a weapon of power.[37] Netanyahu uses the narrative of division "us or them," meaning Israel, and "them," meaning Hamas and its allies, in almost all of his speeches. Netanyahu's repeated rhetoric constructs the Palestinians as an existential enemy, which not only justifies violence but also helps to create a national identity through a contradictory logic of survival. This is confirmed by Netanyahu's statement below, in which he says that if Israel does not act, it will be destroyed; if Hamas is not eliminated, all Israelis—and by extension all Jews—are in mortal danger. This statement does not simply provoke fear; it creates a framework in which the Other must be eliminated in order for the Self to live, and this is the deeper logic of "us or them."

> *"The state of the Jews arose from the ashes of the Holocaust in order to promise a defensive shield for the Jewish people. Israel, like every sovereign country, has the basic right to defend itself. We are fighting a war, the justice of which is unparalleled, with an army, the morality of which is unparalleled. This war was forced on us by an abhorrent enemy, that openly declares its intention to murder all the Jews. On October 7, they murdered, beheaded, raped, and burned infants. If they could have, they would have massacred all of us. If we do not eliminate the Hamas terrorists, these 'new Nazis', the next massacre is only a matter of time."* [38]

2.1.1 Biopolitical Rhetoric

> *"This morning, on Shabbat and a holiday, Hamas invaded Israeli territory and murdered innocent citizens including children and the elderly. Hamas has started a brutal and evil war.*
> *We will be victorious in this war despite an unbearable price. This is a very difficult*

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[37] George Yancy, "The Violent 'Othering' of Palestinians Has Political Roots." Truthout, September 1, 2024, https://truthout.org/articles/the-violent-othering-of-palestinians-has-political-roots/

[38] Benjamin Netanyahu, "Statement by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu." *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Gov.il,* January 27, 2024, https://www.gov.il/en/pages/statement-by-pm-netanyahu-27-jan-2024

day for all of us. Hamas wants to murder us all. This is an enemy that murders children and mothers in their homes, in their beds, an enemy that abducts the elderly, children and young women, that slaughters and massacres our citizens, including children, who simply went out to enjoy the holiday." [39]

Above is an excerpt from Netanyahu's first speech to the Israeli people in a public appearance after October 7, 2023. According to Foucault's analysis, given the timing, this speech serves as a tool for creating identity and "truth," triggering a discourse that defines who the "enemy" is and who is the "innocent" from the outset. In this particular excerpt, certain words, such as "barbaric and evil war," "innocent civilians murdered," and "massacres and mass murders", create a moral dichotomy between the two sides. Netanyahu, with the power he wields through his role, is in a position to create subjectivities through his rhetoric, with Hamas being a demonized entity without nuances or a voice, that is, as a subject without any justification for its legitimacy. Additionally, to reinforce his argument, he uses collective identity with phrases such as "we will win" or "a very difficult day for all of us," which serve as a means to unite the people and rally public support. This has the effect of justifying political decisions without any public debate because the narrative of national emergency outweighs everything else.

From the beginning of his speech, the first thing we notice Netanyahu doing is distinguishing between Israeli citizens, Jews, victims, defenders, enemies, and murderers. Israel is built around the rhetoric of innocence, and it presents itself as a subject that is not responsible for what happens to it.[40] But at the same time, it is presented as a morally superior subject with higher moral values, virtuous behavior, and the ability to judge what is right and wrong. Netanyahu uses these narratives to present Israel as a collective victim who is under attack, especially on a holy day (Saturday and holidays). On the other hand, Hamas is described as a group that targets women, children, the elderly, and even people who "just went out to enjoy their vacation" and acts with blind violence and cruelty without any reason, making it not only inhumane but also a group outside the bounds of human morality.

This can also be based on Michel Foucault's biopolitical rhetoric. For Foucault, biopolitics is a way of exercising power that focuses not only on repression or enforcement, but mainly on managing people's lives. It is power over life and not just over law or order; it is power over lives that need protection and over those that are considered "disposable."[41] In this particular case, the inhuman identity is most evident in Hamas and its supporters, where we see collective punishment being justified because, biopolitically, these lives do not have the same "value." For Foucault, Logos (Discourse) is a system of thought, a network of knowledge, rules, and ways of speaking that determines what we can say, how we say it, and what is considered "true" in each era. Logos is power, and not simply power over speech, but speech itself is a vehicle of power, because it determines what is considered knowledge, who has the right to

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[39] Benjamin Netanyahu, "Statement by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu." *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, *Gov.il,* October 7, 2023, https://www.gov.il/en/pages/statement-by-pm-netanyahu-7-oct-2023

[40] William S. Laufer, "The Rhetoric of Innocence." *UW Law Digital Commons*, 1995, https://digitalcommons.law.uw.edu/wlr/vol70/iss2/2/

[41] Rahmatullah, Arlin Adam, and Syamsu A. Kamaruddin, "Power, Knowledge, and Language Hegemony from the Perspective of Michel Foucault." *International Journal of Health, Economics, and Social Sciences (IJHESS),* 2024, https://jurnal.unismuhpalu.ac.id/index.php/IJHESS/article/view/4746

speak, and what is excluded as false or true.[42]

Netanyahu's words in this particular excerpt deprive his opponents of any legitimacy, while attributing absolute value to certain lives (those that were unjustly lost). This dichotomy serves Israel's ideological and political motives, with the result that Israel is placed in a vulnerable position and Hamas is not a political enemy but "an enemy that murders children" and "an enemy that slaughters," which constitutes a collective and state threat and must be eliminated, and consequently any kind of state violence is justified. This interpretation given by the head of state excludes any other interpretation of the war, making national unity essential and inevitable for survival.

2.1.2 Terrorism and Necropolitics Narrative

"Israel is at war. We didn't want this war. It was forced upon us in the most brutal and savage way. But though Israel didn't start this war, Israel will finish it. Once, the Jewish people were stateless. Once, the Jewish people were defenseless. No longer. Hamas will understand that by attacking us, they have made a mistake of historic proportions. We will exact a price that will be remembered by them and Israel's other enemies for decades to come. The savage attacks that Hamas perpetrated against innocent Israelis are mindboggling: Slaughtering families in their homes, massacring hundreds of young people at an outdoor festival, kidnapping scores of women, children and elderly, even Holocaust survivors. Hamas terrorists bound, burned and executed children. They are savages. Hamas is ISIS. And just as the forces of civilization united to defeat ISIS, the forces of civilization must support Israel in defeating Hamas." [43]

Two days later, Netanyahu repeated this narrative, continuing with the division in another speech, which is quoted above. His speech does not describe reality but the reality he has created by creating a subjectivity. With statements such as "We did not want this war," "Israel will end it," and "the Jewish people were stateless... no longer…", the pronoun 'we' has a positive and moral connotation, projecting a heroic and historically justified identity of Israel. "They" are devoid of any political connotation and are presented as the epitome of evil: "savages," "Hamas is ISIS," and "children who were burned and executed." There are no intermediate or alternative narratives in his speech, as this would not serve the "us against them" rhetoric he wants to achieve. In this particular excerpt, two days after October 7, Netanyahu makes the connection between Hamas and ISIS for the first time, a connection that will be repeated many times over the next two years. He presents the situation as a global moral battle rather than a regional or political one between Israel and the Palestinians, thus making Hamas' enemy not only Israel, but the entire West, as "us" is expanding into a global alliance with the "forces of civilization." By bringing to the forefront terrorist organizations of the past, he transfers the fear from traumatic experiences of the West, such as September 11 or the rise of ISIS, to the present to place Hamas in the position of global enemy, as ISIS was in the past.

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[42] Peter Armstrong, "The Discourse of Michel Foucault: A Sociological Encounter." *Critical Perspectives on Accounting,* March 27, 2015, 29–42, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpa.2013.10.009
[43] Benjamin Netanyahu, "Statement by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu." *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Gov.il,* October 9, 2023,https://www.gov.il/en/pages/statement-by-prime-minister-benjamin-netanyahu-9-oct-2023

"If someone rises up to kill you, kill him first." Yesterday, the State of Israel eliminated the arch-murderer Hassan Nasrallah. We have settled accounts with someone who was responsible for the murders of countless Israelis and many nationals of other countries, including hundreds of Americans and dozens of French. Nasrallah was not just another terrorist; he was the terrorist. He was the axis of the axis, the main engine of Iran's axis of evil. The elimination of Nasrallah is a necessary condition in achieving the objectives we have set: As long as Nasrallah was alive, he would have quickly rebuilt the capabilities we took from Hezbollah. Therefore, I gave the directive – and Nasrallah is no longer with us. His elimination advances the return of our residents to their homes in the north. It also advances the return of our hostages in the south." [44]

Netanyahu's speech is presented above, almost a year later, and after the assassination of Hassan Nasrallah. This speech is an example of how a discourse of power is constructed, presenting state violence as liberating, moral, and based on superstitions. What is important to examine in this excerpt is the outcome and continuation of the biopolitics analyzed earlier. In this excerpt, Netanyahu exercises the power he has through his words in the context of Achille Mbembe's "necropolitics," that is, the control of life and death. [45] In any theological-political discourse, there was, the principle of "if someone rises up to kill you, kill him first"; the right to murder as the foundation of political sovereignty would have been a given in this case. The need to protect the lives of "others" (Nasrallah, Hezbollah, Iran) is diminished as they pose a threat as long as they continue to exist, which means that for reasons of survival they must be eliminated without consequences. This excerpt reiterates even more strongly the dichotomy between "them" (Nasrallah, Iran, and terrorism) and "us" (Israel, the West, and the civilized world). The enemy that currently has a face is absolute and inhuman and has been transnationalized, as it has been personified as the "global evil" that must be eliminated. The reference to Nasrallah as a 'terrorist' and "axis of evil" is a tactic of absolute incrimination, and once again the phrase "axis of evil" revives rhetorical motifs from the post-September 11 discourse, where the "enemy" is not only dangerous but represents a total cultural threat.

As Critical Discourse Analysis shows, by presenting the Other as an inevitable target of violence and completely demonizing the Other, the legitimacy of any political discussion or agreement is undermined. The strategy of biopolitical discourse analyzed above, where the state is presented as the sole guarantor of human life and the enemy as a threat to the continuity of survival, transforms rhetoric from a moral and political antagonism into a conflict with two absolute choices. The choice of survival of one's own or of the opponent, with the enemy being not just the other or the opponent but the threat to one's own existence. Netanyahu's statements such as 'if Israel does not win, they will be next in the chain of barbarism', 'it is humanity's war against barbarism', 'if we don't stop them, they will come for you' do not simply describe a territorial war but form an existential concern and questioning. With these phrases one achieves the construction of a discourse of fear that mobilizes national unity through the instinct of self-preservation. The use of fear is a legitimating mechanism as it creates a feeling that there is no other way but to confront the enemy to the end, with the extermination of the opponent being not just a strategic move but a biological necessity.

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[44] Benjamin Netanyahu, "Statement by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu." *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Gov.il,* September 29, 2024, https://www.gov.il/en/pages/spoke-statement280924
[45] Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics.", Duke University Press, October 2019, https://www.dukeupress.edu/necropolitics

The killing in the excerpt is presented as a necessary and non-aggressive act to protect civilians and restore balance, and Netanyahu claims that he personally gave the order and that the killing resulted in the release of the hostages and the return of the fighters to their homes. This creates a narrative where violence is presented as redemptive and state violence is glorified and objectified as a morally acceptable guarantee of security and order for Israel. By equating state execution with a 'necessary condition for the return of civilians and hostages,' the structure of the discourse employs a strategy of moral reversal, from the 'right to die' to the 'duty to protect life.' Netanyahu victimizes Israel and considers violence as self-defense, justice and resistance to evil. Nasrallah's death is characterized as a security measure and not as a state assassination, as he has removed himself from the political and legal arena and has placed himself in a situation of absolute threat. Thus, like Netanyahu's previous references to ISIS or the 'culture of barbarism,' the "us" or "them" strategy in this excerpt assumes the characteristics of a cultural and geopolitical conflict.

> *"One year ago, Yahya Sinwar, the terrorist chief of Hamas, launched the October 7th massacre against Israel.It was the bloodiest attack on the Jewish people since the Holocaust. It was the worst attack on the Jewish state since the founding of Israel. Sinwar's terrorists murdered in cold blood 1,200 people. That's elderly people, Holocaust survivors, children. They brutally raped women. They beheaded men. They burned babies alive. And they took 251 women, men and children hostage to the dungeons of Gaza. Today, the mastermind of this day of sheer evil is no more. Yahya Sinwar is dead."* [46]

Almost a month later, Netanyahu announces the death of Yahya Sinwar in his subsequent speech. Netanyahu accuses the Hamas leader of the massacre of 7 October and presents him as a 'terrorist leader of Hamas.'. This speech is important to examine as it contains a piece of history and refers to the attack as the bloodiest attack against Jews since the Holocaust. This comparison is not accidental, as it seeks to turn any political dispute into a struggle for survival, while presenting Hamas as the direct successor to those who once endangered the existence of the Jewish people. His speech focuses on the acts of violence that have taken place over the last two years: '1,200 people murdered in cold blood', 'raped women', 'beheaded men' and 'burned babies', using harsh and emotionally charged language, thus provoking moral outrage through his dramatized descriptions. At the same time, the reference to the Holocaust at the moment of the death of the Hamas leader has a multi-layered meaning, as it aims for an emotional, historical, moral and strategic impact, as it brings back to mind the collective and historical trauma of the Jewish people, which is one of the deepest and most fundamental elements of the Israeli identity in the modern world.[47] However, the connection between the Hamas attack and the Holocaust directly links Hamas itself to the Nazis, making it a vehicle of hatred and threat, as through Hamas the present is turned into a repeating history in which the Jewish people are a victim to be exterminated.

For Netanyahu, Sinwar is the main culprit, the mastermind and creator of the threat, and as the creator of the threat, he is also the target of the collective anger that the Jewish people

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[46] Benjamin Netanyahu, "Statement by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu." *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Gov.il,* October 18, 2024, https://www.gov.il/en/pages/event-statment181024

[47] Li, Mengyao, Bernhard Leidner, Gilad Hirschberger, and Jiyoung Park, "From Threat to Challenge: Understanding the Impact of Historical Collective Trauma on Contemporary Intergroup Conflict." *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 18 (1): 190–209, 2022, https://doi.org/10.1177/17456916221094540

must feel and which morally justifies his elimination. From Netanyahu's final statement, 'Yahya Sinwar is dead,' it seems that the rhetoric he is trying to create has reached its peak as a kind of ritual to lead people back to a sense of security. The way this part of the excerpt is presented, i.e. with short sentences with a subject and object, shows that this is a clear statement of facts presented as fair, without any additional context or analysis, as an absolute and certain truth that cannot be questioned. The structure of the speech as a narrative justification, with a clear dramatic development from the memory of terror to the description of the enemy and, finally, to catharsis, emphasizes Israel not only as a suffering nation, but also as a morally superior force that imposes punishment and restores order. This is a discourse of political power and moral superiority, not merely a description aimed at internal unity, leadership determination, and sending a message to the international community that Israel will never adopt a passive stance. In this sense, the death of Sinwar is an act of moral retribution and not an act of war. it is an act that is justified and legitimized by Netanyahu's words, and what makes this excerpt important is that it accurately reflects Netanyahu's rhetoric in shaping the truth about what war is, what terrorism is, and who has the right to punish.

In addition to presenting facts, the prime minister creates knowledge, defines the limits of what is morally acceptable and unacceptable, and provides the framework for specific actions (for example, the assassination of Sinwar is not presented as a political execution, but as a restoration of order). In addition to reproducing the state's power as moral and sovereign, he uses his words to define who the "legitimate" agents of violence are. This excerpt reinforces the construction of the 'Other' as a threat, legitimizes the politics of violence and promotes a national narrative. Terms such as 'murdered in cold blood,' 'burned babies,' and 'raped women' are emotionally charged and used to dehumanize Hamas and, more specifically, Sinwar. This tactic of emotional persuasion aims to limit or even eliminate any other thought or disagreement with the official position of the state. For Israel, there is no other image of the Palestinians than that of the enemy, and in this distorted perception of reality, it has carved out a linear history of good and evil.

2.2 Barbarism Narrative

Continuing the narrative of "us vs them" and "us or them" is the idea of Othering as a praxis that creates an absolute dichotomy between the civilized self and the barbaric Other. In the case of Othering the enemy is dangerous, inherently inhuman, irrational and morally inferior. In his words, Netanyahu refers to Hamas and its supporters as barbarians, a word that does not simply describe facts or persons but constructs a moral hierarchy in which Israel embodies order, civilization and justice, while Hamas represents absolute evil and chaos. In this way the "other" is demonized and the constant use of this dichotomy consolidates the division as a constant unchangeable with this idea of the "Other" excluding empathy and reducing political dialogue.

This construction of the idea of the 'Other' as reproduced by contemporary political discourse is not new but has its roots in ancient history. The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle argued that humans are distinguished from animals because they possess reason, the ability to distinguish right from wrong, and speech. To be civilized—that is, a true human being—meant realizing one's rational potential. To achieve this ideal, Aristotle believed that civilized people

had a natural predisposition for life in the polis, the urban political community in which citizens are free.[48] He argued that civilized societies possessed a specific set of cultural goods: first, urban infrastructure, political organization, and laws; and second, the arts, crafts, and education. The opposite of the civilized, rational human being was the barbarian, who lived outside the political community or whose social organization was lawless. Due to their inability to control their passions, barbarians were coarse, brutal, and almost indistinguishable from animals. Indeed, Aristotle argued that some barbarians were slaves by nature, destined to serve because they lacked the true reason required to govern themselves.[49] Like many classical writers, Aristotle argued that human diversity depended on environmental differences. According to this idea, the Greeks lived in an intermediate zone between the cold North and the hot Asia and therefore enjoyed the best conditions for prospering as a free people. [50]

On the contrary, "the natives of Asia are clever and inventive, but they lack spirit and are therefore always in a state of subjugation and slavery." with this assertion, Aristotle supports a series of long-standing stereotypes about the 'Eastern' population that surround them to this day, namely that they are servile, cowardly, and effeminate as a result of the social and geographical environment in which they live.[51] Early modern ethnography adopted images of servile Asians and barbarians and, by combining these two images, reached interpretations based on climatic theories concerning their mode of political governance.[52] More specific, civilized people lived permanently in houses in cities, cultivated the land, practiced crafts, had a monetary economy, and had created well-organized social institutions such as a legal system, government, religion, educational institutions, and a disciplined army. Comparing a way of life to that of wild beasts was tantamount to condemning it in the harshest terms as uncivilized and devoid of reason.[53] The analogy was widely used in early modern geographical literature, enjoying a long tradition and pan-European resonance.

The narrative of Israel regarding the Palestinians has many similarities with the distinction between 'civilized' and 'barbarians,' which was based on Aristotelian models and adopted by European ethnography later in the Middle Ages and early modern times.[54] In the same way that European chroniclers and travelers of the past described foreign peoples as 'irrational,' 'lawless' and 'violent,' so now we see the same rhetorical dehumanization with Palestinian communities being portrayed by Israel as "terrorists" or 'barbarians.' The term 'barbarian,' which Netanyahu uses frequently in his speeches, has heavy historical and ideological connotations that go beyond simple political rhetoric. As a term, it reinforces dehumanization

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[48] David J. Depew, "Humans and Other Political Animals in Aristotle's 'History of Animals.'" *Brill, Phronesis*, 1995, 156–81, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4182496

[49] Richard Kraut, "Aristotle's Ethics." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Stanford University, July 2, 2022, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-ethics/

[50] Guido van Meersbergen, "Ethnography and Encounter." *Brill*, October 21, 2021, 46-49, https://brill.com/display/title/60955?srsltid=AfmBOorr4N1Jm0yTLB9HDrxZEz1xVp_m1p3xXGiN0KUXAUUvZraDdSO_&contents=editorial-content

[51] Mary Nyquist, "Arbitrary Rule: Slavery, Tyranny, and the Power of Life and Death." Dokumen.Pub., The University of Chicago Press, 2013, https://dokumen.pub/arbitrary-rule-slavery-tyranny-and-the-power-of-life-and-death-9780226015675.html

[52] Guido van Meersbergen, op.cit.

[53] Kurt A. Raaflaub, and Richard J.A. Talbert, "Geography and Ethnography: Perceptions of the World in Pre-Modern Societies." *Wiley-Blackwell,* December 2012, https://www.wiley.com/en-us/Geography+and+Ethnography%3A+Perceptions+of+the+World+in+Pre-Modern+Societies-p-9781118589847

[54] John G. A. Pocock, "Barbarism and Religion: Barbarians, Savages and Empires." *Cambridge University Press*, March 2008, http://ndl.ethernet.edu.et/bitstream/123456789/56269/1/pdf23.pdf

by presenting the opponent as uncivilized, irrational, and dangerous, without moral principles or political legitimacy. In this way, the conflict between them takes on political dimensions because it is defined by terms such as 'savages' and 'terrorists.' With this rhetoric, Israel reinforces the moral superiority of its side and even legitimizes the extreme measures of military or political repression it employs.

> *"To our Christian friends around the world, Merry Christmas. Christmas is supposed to be a time of good will to all men and peace on Earth. Well, we don't have peace on Earth, not in our part anyway, and we certainly don't see good will to all men.*
> *We're facing monsters, monsters who murdered children in front of their parents and parents in front of their children, who raped and beheaded women, who burned babies alive, who took babies hostages. This is a battle, not only of Israel against these barbarians, it's a battle of civilization against barbarism. And I know in this that we have your support.*
> *I want to thank you for your support. I want to thank you for your prayers. And I want to assure you, that as we stand together, we will also prevail. We shall win this war and secure our common values and our common future. Thank you."* [55]

Netanyahu's statement above is a typical example of what was mentioned above. It is presented as a seemingly simple political statement, but in reality it activates what Foucault calls 'regimes of truth' – that is, words that do not describe reality, but construct it. The statement 'we have no peace on Earth...' is not merely a statement of fact, but an act that establishes a permanent state of threat. Through this discourse, the necessity of violence and military response is constructed, presented not as options but as imposed conditions. The use of terms such as 'monsters' and 'barbarism' does not merely describe the actions of the opponent, but categorizes the subjects and creates politically useful identities. 'Barbarism' is used here to embody the ultimate threat, the complete collapse of any cultural or moral code. The conflict is not described as military or geopolitical, but as a battle of one civilization against barbarism. The discourse thus takes on a redemptive character, transcending the local and national level and becoming a global moral appeal.

The role Netanyahu takes on in this particular excerpt is not simply that of a representative of a state at war, but that of a leader of a civilized world addressing his Christian friends on an international level. His speech places Israel in a morally superior position alongside the rest of the world that defends order, security and universal values in opposition to the barbarism of the enemy. In this way, he places himself and his state in the Western and Christian world, which operates according to values that the world of barbaric enemies cannot recognize. Furthermore, the timing of the statement (one day before Christmas) and its simultaneous association with Christians reinforces the idea of unity between Israel and the West, Jews and Christians/believers. The reference to Christmas ('Merry Christmas') reinforces the idea that this 'culture' is Western and Christian and, by extension, civilized and not barbaric, effectively excluding those who do not fit into this value system and, indirectly, makes the enemy not only politically dangerous but also culturally alien, and therefore not belonging to the community of 'normal' people.[56]

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[55] Benjamin Netanyahu, "Statement by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu." *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Gov.il,* December 24, 2023, https://www.gov.il/en/pages/christmas-message-from-pm-netanyahu-24-dec-2023

[56] Asef Bayat, "Life as Politics. How Ordinary People Change the Middle East." *Amsterdam University Press*, 2010, https://scholarlypublications.universiteitleiden.nl/handle/1887/15229

"In contrast, the cynicism of the enemy knows no bounds. He carries out war crimes by using civilians as human shields, by using hospitals as terrorist command centers and to supply fuel to its war machine. Many in the world understand very well what we have claimed through the years: Israel is fighting not only its war, but a war for all of humanity – the war of humanity against barbarism. Our allies in the West and our partners in the Arab world, understand today that if Israel does not win, they will be next in line in the axis of evil's campaign of conquest and murder." [57]

In the above excerpt, we see that words such as "barbarism," "war crimes," "axis of evil," and "war for all of humanity" are repeated once again. The repetition of words and phrases, the frequency and position of specific words contribute to reinforcing an interpretative regime. And this is exactly what Netanyahu is trying to achieve with this speech. What he repeats becomes more plausible, more self-evident. Especially when these words are not accompanied by evidence or alternative views, a "regime of truth" is produced—a framework within which certain statements are accepted as "truth," not because they are substantiated, but because they are reproduced by the structures of power. The phrase "if Israel does not win, they will be next in the chain of barbarism" extends the meaning of "barbaric" from a local threat to a global one. In this way, it makes barbarism contagious, diffuse, progressive, and a force that threatens human existence itself. This makes the term not just a label, but a mechanism for global mobilization and fear. Such narratives often create a "state of emergency" that justifies military action, legislative repression, or unquestioning moral complicity. The word "barbarism" and its persistent repetition in Netanyahu's discourse functions as a means of linguistic hegemony: it does not merely describe, but produces political reality; his discourse does not merely reflect the world, but structures it.

In many of the excerpts analyzed so far, and in this one in particular, there is another element that is used together with the rhetoric of the barbaric enemy, the element of fear. The creation of fear is one of the most powerful tools of political rhetoric, especially in times of war or crisis. In this particular excerpt, fear does not arise from any specific reference to fear or documentation, but from the repeated use of emotionally charged words such as "barbarity," "war crimes," and "axis of evil." The use of these words creates fear in the listener and reinforces the sense of existential threat not only to Israel but to "humanity as a whole." Fear here functions as a mechanism for activating social mobilization, silencing critical thinking, and, obviously, as a mechanism for strengthening state power. As Michel Foucault has analyzed, fear is not merely a psychological reaction, but a tool of biopolitical control aimed at disciplining subjects, in this case the Israeli population but also the international community more generally, and creating obedient societies.[58] Through this strategy, Netanyahu does not describe an already existing danger, but constructs it through his rhetoric. The danger may be there, but its intensity is heightened and increased by the way he uses his rhetoric. His goal is to make fear part of the collective consciousness so that he can bring it to the surface whenever he wants to justify an action. Nevertheless, fear is an emotion that needs to be analyzed on its own because it has to do with the psychology of the masses. It could be analyzed further, but within the scope of this paper, it could not be given more space, yet at

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[57] Benjamin Netanyahu, "Statement by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu." *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Gov.il,* October 28, 2023, https://www.gov.il/en/pages/statement-by-pm-netanyahu-28-oct-2023

[58] Michel Foucault, "Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*"* trans. Alan Sheridan, Pantheon Books, 1977, 201–223, https://monoskop.org/Foucault_Michel_Discipline_and_Punish

the same time, it could not be omitted.

2.3 Legitimation and Knowledge Status

In this chapter we will analyze the legitimation and the knowledge status which are central concepts of Critical Discourse Analysis. These concepts help to understand the way in which discourse is used and constructs ideological narratives while simultaneously legitimizing actions. Legitimation refers to the strategies used to present conflated actions as right and morally correct and fair. More specifically, how exactly language creates the need for justification of an action even in the case of war and violence. The knowledge status refers to the way in which the person who possesses and shares knowledge is presented and at the same time to the use of vocabulary that shows certainty and absoluteness, thus reinforcing the authority of the speaker and marginalizing any different narrative. Through the analysis of Benjamin Netanyahu's statements, it will become visible that these two concepts work in parallel and sometimes in parallel to form a narrative of legitimacy of Israel's military action.

2.3.1 Legitimation

According to Critical Discourse Analysis, the concept of "legitimation" refers to the ways in which discourse attempts to legitimize actions, ideas, policies, or conflicts. Discourse is used to reproduce power and is often used to present one side as "right" or "morally justified." Legitimation occurs through four elements. First, through the invocation of authority, for example by referring to authorities, institutions, leaders, sacred texts, or "experts." In the case examined in this paper, Netanyahu initially places himself in the position of authority, as the person who will provide the answer and the solution, thus legitimizing and justifying every decision he makes. Furthermore, in the last excerpt quoted below, he states: "Our allies in the West and in the Arab world understand that if Israel does not win, they will be next..." [59]

> *"In contrast, the cynicism of the enemy knows no bounds. He carries out war crimes by using civilians as human shields, by using hospitals as terrorist command centers and to supply fuel to its war machine. Many in the world understand very well what we have claimed through the years: Israel is fighting not only its war, but a war for all of humanity – the war of humanity against barbarism. Our allies in the West and our partners in the Arab world, understand today that if Israel does not win, they will be next in line in the axis of evil's campaign of conquest and murder."*

Using the same excerpt from before we can analyze it here under a different scope. Except the words "barbarism", "war crimes", "axis of evil" etc., we see an argument that gains legitimacy through international allies. With the support of external actors – "allies in the West" and "partners in the Arab world" Netanyahu gives authorization to his own claims and political methods. More specifically, he makes it clear that it is not only Israel that believes what it says, but others as well, and this makes its words internationally legitimate, with global force. Since so many countries and actors agree with him, it follows that Israel's actions are right, necessary, and justified. What international power and its legitimization do is remove responsibility from Israel itself, as it is not only its own affair but also that of other factors, it

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[59] Benjamin Netanyahu, "Statement by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu." *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Gov.il,* October 28, 2023, https://www.gov.il/en/pages/statement-by-pm-netanyahu-28-oct-2023

presents Israel as the leader in a broader war of good against evil and, at the same time, helps to present military action as a mandate, not just a choice. The authorization in Netanyahu's speech serves to make Israel's actions natural, legitimate, and necessary. Invoking external authority reinforces the persuasiveness of the speech, aims to build consensus, and at the same time silences alternative narratives.

Another way of justifying actions is the rational justification, meaning that by presenting the action as logically necessary and inevitable, one not only justifies the action but at the same time justifies it as absolutely necessary. The narratives 'If Israel does not win, they will be next in the chain of the conquest campaign.' 'It is a war for all of humanity – the war of humanity against barbarism.' they also project a pragmatism that is only mythological for the time being, and the fact that this mythological structure is often repeated in the words of Netanyahu shows that he is trying to build a reality with symbolic meaning, moral legitimacy and emotional charge. A reality in which there will be a battle of immense proportions with the Israeli people mythologized as the hero of this history, who will defend universal values and the moral order, as they say they have been doing for years. In this way, the violence perpetrated by Israel is an honorable act of resistance and even self-sacrifice for humanity, not an act of aggression. Through the narrative, Israel's heroism is legitimized and no political or legal argumentation is needed to do so, as it is achieved through its socially charged discourse, by creating a sense of fear and heroism and collective identification in the struggle. Netanyahu's use of legitimation is not simply a rhetorical strategy but a political practice as through his words, he builds a legitimacy regime that at the same time justifies the war, establishes the international alliance and national identity around a moral struggle.

Furthermore, regarding the legitimization of Benjamin Netanyahu in his speech on May 5, 2024, which appears below, he refers to Hamas by drawing a parallel with the Holocaust, something he constantly emphasizes. In this excerpt, and in the way he expresses it, "*the Nazis acted in order to completely destroy the Jewish people. The Hamas murderers are instructed to do the exact same thing,*" he makes Hamas appear to be as barbaric as the Nazis. In this way, he succeeds in presenting a comparison between the two events, fully legitimizing every Israeli action as an act of defense against the Jews' arch enemy.

> *"Because eighty years after the Holocaust, after the unspeakable genocide of six million Jews, a third of our people, the forces of evil rose up against us once again, driven by pure evil. They slaughtered, abused, raped, kidnapped.*
> *I say this clearly: the horrific terrorist attack of October 7th was not a Holocaust. Not because they lacked the intent of genocide, but because they lack the ability to carry it out. The intention is the same; the Nazis acted in order to completely destroy the Jewish people. The Hamas murderers are instructed to do the exact same thing. They murder babies, children, women, men, the young and the elderly. They do so without batting an eye."* [60]

Evil, violence, and extremism are associated with Hamas, while the identity given to Israel is based on the idea of legitimacy, peace, and defense. This construct functions as a social

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[60] Benjamin Netanyahu, "Statement by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu." *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Gov.il,* May 5, 2024, https://www.gov.il/en/pages/pm-netanyahu-addresses-the-opening-ceremony-for-holocaust-martyrs-and-heroes-remembrance-day-5-may-2024

mechanism for manipulating the masses, providing a rationale for the need to maintain national unity and support government actions, especially military ones, in addition to being a tool of political rhetoric. The community is divided into allies and enemies, and in this way, violence is presented as a supreme necessity, as something indispensable and morally acceptable for the defense of "us." As a result, this narrative serves as a justification for Israel's behavior and actions, which in other contexts could be considered controversial or even illegal. To create a rhetorical shock, moral outrage, and consensus for political and military measures, Netanyahu uses emotionally charged language ("murdering children and mothers in their beds," "kidnapping elderly people, children and young women"), removing the causes, the historical background and political claims, and defining Hamas exclusively through these violent acts. This presentation serves his ideological purpose, which is to create distance and demonize the supposed enemy, while justifying Israel's use of violence to suppress dissent or other viable options.

> *"They call Israel a colonialist state. Don't they know that the Land of Israel is where Abraham, Isaac and Jacob prayed, where Isaiah and Jeremiah preached and where David and Solomon ruled? For nearly four thousand years, the land of Israel has been the homeland of the Jewish people. It's always been our home; it will always be our home."* [61]

Furthermore, in the above excerpt from his speech in July 2024 to the US Congress, Netanyahu referred to the homeland of the Jewish people, Israel, making a clear connection between the historical and religious heritage of the Jewish people and the land of Israel and the political legitimization of the presence and actions of the State of Israel today. In this way, the Israeli people are presented as the only historical rightful owners of the area, while the Palestinians are presented as part of a broader Arab entity. The Israeli side thus has complete exclusivity over the rights to this territory, and Palestinian identity is delegitimized as superfluous or unnecessary. This framework makes the Israeli side institutionally legitimate with every right to defend its territory and carry out its military actions because it is its historical and legitimate homeland. The Jewish state is the historical rightful owner and, together with its institutional and international recognition by other states, acquires additional legitimacy in the region. On the other hand, the Palestinians are not recognized as an autonomous, unique national entity, but are more broadly regarded as part of the Arab people, who are rhetorically presented as a population entity that already has "sufficient territory" and therefore does not lack sovereignty or national identity. This construction of discourse not only serves strategic or military purposes, but also reinforces the internal coherence of Israeli discourse, providing a coherent moral and ideological basis for the acceptance or tolerance of the conflict by the domestic and international population.

2.3.2 Knowledge Status

Knowledge status refers to the knowledge that the two parties to a communicative act are considered to have, more specifically who knows what, who seems to know, who has the right to know and how all this affects the discourse, the speaker-listener relationship and power

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[61] Benjamin Netanyahu, "Statement by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu." *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Gov.il,* July 24, 2024, https://www.gov.il/en/pages/event-congress240724

within the conversation or text.[62] Nevertheless, knowledge status is not only about who is speaking and what position they occupy in the structure of knowledge, but how they use language to construct in the mind of the listener a sense of certainty or authority through speech. In his discourses Netanyahu uses knowledge status as an additional tool for political and moral legitimacy. He builds his position as the sole holder of authentic knowledge regarding Hamas and through his words it appears that for the State of Israel he maintains the truth of the facts. This hierarchy of knowledge, in which he is at the top and the "other" (the enemy or the critic) at the bottom, reproduces power through knowledge, which Foucault describes as the knowledge/power concept that organizes and regulates discourse and in this way excludes alternative interpretations of the war, such as for example the historical analysis of the Palestinian question or the experiences of the Palestinians themselves.[63] These have the effect of creating a monophonic discourse where the side with the knowledge status defines what is true, what is justified, and what form of violence is legitimate, and in this way the discourse disciplines public opinion and defines its reality.[64]

More specifically, as you will see the passage below, Netanyahu uses language in a specific way to show his authority. In Discourse Analysis, the use of phrases like 'we know', 'it is clear', 'they did this', instead of more cautious formulations like 'we believe', 'we suspect', 'it appears', are a strategic choice. The first form of statement indicates absolute certainty and mastery of knowledge, automatically making the listener and the recipient of this knowledge believe what is heard. The public, by constantly hearing from a state leader that 'we know' (and not 'we suspect'), is led to accept the narrative as fact and not as interpretation as is exactly the case with Israel. When Netanyahu in the role of a political leader says 'we know they burned babies', this is not a mere description - it is an act of authority that creates a shared world where we do not have to (nor are we allowed to) ask how we know or what the evidence is because he is the authority of knowledge.

> *"Earlier this week, in the previous phase, we made it very clear that we would not tolerate any violation of the agreement. We insisted on this and we brought forward by a week the release of three of our hostages. Also, after the scenes that we all saw the day before yesterday, we demanded a safe exit for our hostages in the coming releases.*
> *Citizens of Israel, in the last two weeks, we have succeeded in releasing 13 of our hostages, and five Thai nationals who were also held by Hamas.*
> *At this time our thoughts are all with Shiri, Ariel and Kfir Bibas, and all of our hostages, the living and the deceased, who have yet to return home.*
> *We will continue to take determined action to bring them back home, and achieve all of our objectives for the war.*
> *With G-d's help, we will do it and we will succeed."* [65]

The excerpt from Benjamin Netanyahu's speech on 1 February 2025 is a typical example of knowledge status rhetoric that reinforces the authority of the discourse with him using

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[62] Barbara Johnstone, "*Discourse Analysis*." Blackwell Publishers, 2002
[63] Michel Foucault, "Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977." November 12, 1980, https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/literature-and-writing/powerknowledge-michel-foucault
[64] Ibid.
[65] Benjamin Netanyahu, "Statement by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu." *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Gov.il,* February 1, 2025, https://www.gov.il/en/pages/statement-by-pm-netanyahu-2-feb-2025

phrases such as 'we made it very clear', 'we insisted', 'the message was delivered, received and carried out' and 'we have succeeded'. While the use of words such as "we saw" instead of "we believe" or "we think" presents knowledge as a collective empirical truth that is not open to question and leaves no room for the recipient to doubt what he hears, since, as the speaker says, we all "know" or "saw". It is also important to stress that in all of these words Netanyahu uses collective pronouns such as 'we', 'our hostages', 'we demanded', 'we brought forward' constructing and reinforcing the collective identity based not only on common experience but on common knowledge that should be shared by all. In this way he makes his community complicit in what he says, complicit both in knowledge and in the state's stance.

Too many of Netanyahu's speeches could have been used for this work, but the research itself showed the repetitiveness of what is stated. The analysis of his speeches through the tools of Critical Foucauldian Speech Analysis reveals how the production of speech under specific frameworks legitimizes violence and constructs the enemy. Logos can create a new reality and impose it, either through the dichotomy of 'us' and 'them', or through innocence and barbarism, moral superiority and absolute evil. The systematic use of words such as "terrorist", "barbarian" can produce stereotypes and establish an absolute rhetoric. When the speaker and head of state becomes the bearer of authority, he imposes his own version of pragmatism as the only valid one. Thus the speech becomes a tool and a subordinate of the discipline of public opinion, excluding any different political approach. The power of language when used by politicians is very important and deserves further analysis, as it is not just a rhetorical device but a structural tool for the exercise of power. By analyzing Netanyahu's speeches, it is clear that the problem is not only what is said but who says it, from what position of power, and what words he uses while speaking. By analyzing these aspects, we can interpret public discourse as a political practice with ideological consequences.

What follows in the next chapter is a presentation of cases of the same phenomenon. It will consider whether the USA did the same in the Vietnam War, whether Russia has been doing the same thing in the war with Ukraine. This comparison is not aimed at equating their historical and geopolitical contexts as they are completely different cases, but at highlighting similarities in the way political power uses language and speech to create a new truth and impose certain narratives. What this thesis wants to show is that Israel's example of legalizing violence is not a regional or unique example but a phenomenon repeated over time and across time by those who hold the power.

3. Discourse in Russia and the USA

Having presented the basic strategies of legitimation and control of knowledge in Benjamin Netanyahu's political discourse, this chapter attempts an analysis with other historical cases where political power used language as means of shaping reality and as a tool to justify violence. The cases chosen, Russian discourse in the war with Ukraine and US discourse during the Vietnam War, are not examined with the aim of equating their historical and geopolitical contexts, but rather to highlight common patterns in the way power constructs enemies, reinforces collective identity, and legitimizes the use of state violence through discourse.

This analysis of the two cases aims to examine whether the phenomenon of linguistic legitimization of violence, as observed in the case of Israel, is not a unique or isolated case,

but whether it can be identified as a recurring pattern of political rhetoric that appears in different situations, time periods, and states. In all the cases examined, the linguistic framework through which reality is described contributes to the construction of the collective identity of the "we" and the complete delegitimization of the "other", making any alternative voice unacceptable or even dangerous. This analysis, like the Israeli one, is based on the theoretical and methodological starting point of Critical Discourse Analysis, as well as on the Foucauldian concept of power as a diffuse and structural force. This analysis does not seek to equate these conflicts per se, but rather to identify common logics and rhetorical structures that remain stable despite changing historical and geographical conditions.

To be more specific on the context of the analysis; in the case of Russia, Vladimir Putin's political discourse will be examined. How exactly he constructed and continues to build a narrative of national self-defense, historical restoration, and ideological resistance against the Western world and Ukraine itself. Putin's discourse will be analyzed to test if it aims to present the Russian intervention as necessary and just, to revise the boundaries of national sovereignty, and if it aims to construct the Ukrainian "other" as a threat, not only to Russia itself, but also to culture and global stability. In the Vietnam War, the analysis focuses on the discourse of the United States and, in particular, on how the American state presented its military intervention as a necessary step to defend freedom, democracy, and global security against the communist threat of the time. The combination of all these factors contributed to the development of the perception that discourse is used as a tool of repression to create enemies, shape collective identity, and legitimize state violence, as is the case with Israel.

The following analysis will begin with the case of Russia and continue with the political discourse of the United States during the Vietnam War. This sequence is not intended to suggest a hierarchy in terms of the chronological or moral level of the events; they were selected based on the author's research interests and how each of these three political discourses played a role as a mechanism for legitimizing violence and constructing reality. The analysis of each case is based on secondary sources, as a primary analysis of political discourse through authentic texts, speeches, or interviews would require a much larger research project, which is beyond the scope of this paper. However, the use of documented sources allows for a comparative approach to each case, providing an insight into the common mechanisms through which political discourse is shaped and state violence is legitimized.

3.1   Russian Discourse in the War with Ukraine
3.1.1   Historical and political context

The relationship between Ukraine and Russia is a historically tense and conflict-prone coexistence, the beginning of which is marked by the collapse of the Soviet Union, when Ukraine became an independent state and Russia officially recognized Kiev's political autonomy. Over the following decade, Moscow's efforts to prevent Kiev from moving closer to Western institutions escalated from massive influence campaigns to a hybrid war with the annexation of Crimea in 2014.[66] Since February 2022, the strategic landscape has changed, as

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[66] Jonathan Masters, "Ukraine: Conflict at the Crossroads of Europe and Russia." *Council on Foreign Relations*, February 14, 2023, https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/ukraine-conflict-crossroads-europe-and-russia

the Kremlin launched a full-scale expansionist military campaign, presented as a special military operation, as part of preventive measures to prevent Kiev from becoming a Western outpost near Russia's borders.[67]

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 cannot be analyzed without considering the historical and political context that has shaped Russian society over the years. Russia carries the image of the successor to the Soviet Union, with the weight of its historical greatness but also of victimization and encirclement by the West.[68] The way in which it forms alliances and shapes its strategy stems from this perception. The dissolution of the USSR placed Russia in a position of humiliation, and economic collapse, the loss of strategic control over Soviet territories and the expansion of NATO reinforced this feeling.[69] Russia perceived the expansion of NATO and the EU as a threat rather than a natural course of action by independent states seeking protection, and Ukraine reinforced this view.[70]

A problematic aspect of this thinking is the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, who has remained in power for the last 25 years.[71] The problem lies in the fact that the main axis of his political ideology is the revival and restoration of the lost Russian empire. The restoration of military power and spiritual identity have been the cornerstones of his domestic and foreign policy.[72] While he himself has stated that he does not consider Ukraine to be an autonomous nation state with its own historical path, but rather a mistake of history and a technical mechanism guided by the West to uproot the people from their roots.[73] The country restricts political freedoms within its borders and has imposed strict control over the flow of information through state media, criminalizing dissent from any state rhetoric deemed critical and motivated by foreign centers of influence. [74] The case of the 2022 invasion of Ukraine is no exception. The phrase Vladimir Putin chose to use in his televised speech after the invasion was: 'I have made the decision to launch a special military operation.'[75] To justify the military operation, as he called it, he presented the need to protect the Russian-speaking populations of eastern Ukraine and to abolish the tyranny of the Ukrainian regime. In this way, he managed to present the invasion of Ukraine not as an aggressive act, but as a defensive reaction to an environment of international 'siege' and as an act of 'liberation.' In his statement, he used words such as 'de-Nazification' and 'de-militarization' of Ukraine, implying that its government was a military dictatorship with neo-Nazi roots. The use of force was presented as cathartic,

[67] Ibid.

[68] Maria Domańska, "The Myth of the Great Patriotic War as a Tool of the Kremlin's Great Power Policy." *OSW Centre for Eastern Studies*, January 22, 2020, https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2019-12-31/myth-great-patriotic-war-a-tool-kremlins-great-power-policy

[69] Rodric Braithwaite, "Exiting the Cold War, Entering a New World: The Soviet Collapse and the Charm of Hindsight." *Transatlantic Leadership Network*, December 31, 2019, 23-25, https://transatlanticrelations.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/4-Braithwaite.pdf

[70] Ibid.

[71] Christina Pazzanese, "Analysts Discuss the 20-Year Rule of Vladimir Putin." *Harvard Gazette*, November 9, 2023, https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2019/12/analysts-discuss-the-20-year-rule-of-vladimir-putin/

[72] Fredrik Westerlund, "The Role of the Military in Putin's Foreign Policy." *Swedish Defence Research Agency*, February 2021, 33-35 https://www.foi.se/rest-api/report/FOI-R--5070--SE

[73] Michael Schwirtz, Maria Varenikova and Rick Gladstone, "Putin Calls Ukrainian Statehood a Fiction. History Suggests Otherwise." *The New York Times Company*, February 21, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/21/world/europe/putin-ukraine.html

[74] Mariya Riekkinen, "Freedom of Expression and the Law in Russia." November, 2024 https://doi.org/10.4324/9781032613383

[75] Vladimir Putin, "Address by the President of the Russian Federation." Presidential Executive Office, February 24, 2022, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843

necessary, and morally imperative.

3.1.2 Vladimir Putin's rhetoric strategies

Since this paper is not based on a primary analysis of Vladimir Putin's own words, the approach relies on secondary sources which have extensively interpreted and analyzed the speech strategies of the Russian political leadership during the period of the invasion of Ukraine. As academic analyses show, Vladimir Putin's political discourse during the Russian invasion of Ukraine is characterized by a consistent and strategically structured narrative that aims to create an image with historical legitimacy, moral superiority, and national necessity. A key strategy he follows is historical revisionism and the reconstruction of truth. Through official speeches such as that of 21 February 2022, an attempt is made to delegitimize Ukraine as an independent state and portray it as a creation of the Bolsheviks. In Putin's narrative, the West is not a geopolitical rival. As he himself says, the West is an entity that is not based on the values and traditions of the Russian people, and what it seeks to achieve is to deconstruct and weaken Russian identity.[76] Western liberalism, individualism, and secularism are fundamentally incompatible with Russian values, which are rooted in tradition, collectivism, and Orthodox Christianity.[77] Under this pretext, it characterizes Russia's actions in Ukraine as necessary to protect Russian-speaking populations and counter NATO expansion.[78]

Finally, academic analyses suggest that Putin is creating a moral dilemma through his rhetoric, shifting responsibility from Russia, which is the aggressor, to a morally indifferent observer if it does not attack. By presenting the invasion as a chance for peace, he contrasts it with the treaty of non-aggression. If there had been no invasion, there would have been betrayal. The explanation behind this comes from the narrative of the Russian collective consciousness, where even the Russian-speaking populations of Ukraine are considered part of the Russian identity. That is why the Russians are put into a position to see themselves as saviors who, if they do not fight for them, will betray them.[79] Russia's historical significance lies in the fact that the Soviet Union fought against Nazism in World War II, and that today's Russia has a moral obligation to continue acting so. For Russia, military action is therefore not only a permissible act but a necessary and historical obligation that comes with the memory, honor, and legacy of the ancestors that bind a state together. If someone is a defender of peace, according to this logic, then they will support this military intervention, but if they are against it, then they are labeled a "Nazi." [80] All these lead to the exclusion of different views and establish a rhetoric of a war that is justified.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Justyna Doroszczyk, "Moscow – Third Rome as Source of Anti-Western Russian Geopolitics." *Historia i Polityka*, June, 2018, 47, https://doi.org/10.12775/hip.2018.010

[78] Cody Schuette, "Russian Disinformation on NATO Expansion and the War in Ukraine." *Journal of Strategic Security* 16, 2023, 35–50, https://www.jstor.org/stable/48751614

[79] Riccardo Nicolosi, "Putin's War Rhetoric: Spurious Justifications for Invasion." *Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München*, April 29, 2025, https://www.lmu.de/en/newsroom/news-overview/news/putins-war-rhetoric-spurious-justifications-for-invasion.html

[80] Renad Abbadi, Lana Kreishan, Emad M Al-Saidat, "Discourse and Language of War: A Comparison of the Linguistic and Rhetorical Strategies Employed in Russian, United States, and Ukrainian Presidential Speeches*." International Journal of English Language and Literature Studies,* January 4, 2024, https://doi.org/10.55493/5019.v13i1.4957

3.1.3 Discourse analysis

According to the available literature, one of the main pillars of Putin's rhetorical framework is the demonization of the enemy, in this case Ukraine and Western hegemony. As evidenced by the texts of Adrian Ionuț Bogdan, Innocent Chiluwa, and Jurate Ruzaite, Putin's speech on February 20, 2022, characterizes the invasion as a necessary response to what he calls the existential threat posed by NATO and the neo-Nazi regime in Ukraine. What seems to be happening is that he is trying to portray the West as a hypocritical and hostile regime, citing examples from the past involving the US in Libya and Iraq. The reason for this is that in this way he shifts the responsibility from himself to the West and the actions that led him to this invasion. The West, then, is the one hiding behind Ukraine and controlling it, a single enemy completely opposed to Russian values. This homogenization of the West allows Putin to simplify the complex web of international relations into a binary struggle between Russia and an aggressive, morally corrupt adversary, thereby strengthening the legitimacy of Russia's military actions and at the same time reinforcing the us vs them dichotomy, but from the opposite side, as we have seen until now in the case of Israel, with the West as the enemy.[81]

All this while Putin self-victimizes and simultaneously emphasizes Russia's moral superiority, presenting it as the last bastion of traditional values resisting degenerationism perpetrated by the Western world. Furthermore, the same scholars observe that Vladimir Putin's rhetoric reflects a deep-seated sense of disgrace towards Ukraine, which may never disappear until Ukraine is partially or fully reintegrated into Russia, which Russia considers its "historic homeland". The belief that Ukraine is Russia's historical homeland, as revealed by the analysis of Innocent Chiluwa and Jurate Ruzaite, combined with Putin's speech on February 22, encourages an even more patriotic appeal to the Russian people. It refers to Russian citizens about the superior values of Russian culture for which they must fight against the West, aiming to mobilize society.[82] Finally, it creates the moral dilemma of choosing between action and genocide, and this is even clearer in the study by Kadim and Abbadi et al.[83] If inaction had been chosen, then, according to Putin, the genocide of the Russian-speaking populations in Donbas would be allowed, and therefore the military operation that took place was a moral imperative of the Russian people. By examining this, it becomes evident that his argument contains a carefully constructed narrative with many layers, such as historical analogies with World War II and nationalism, with the aim of mobilizing internal support for his people and delegitimizing Ukrainian sovereignty and the West.[84]

[81] Adrian Ionuț Bogdan, "Putin's Discourse Analysis during the Russian Ukrainian War," in *Conflict Resolution and Crisis Communication: Transforming Conflicts and Building Peace*, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2022, 157–66, https://www.researchgate.net/Conflict_Resolution_and_Crisis_Communication_Transforming_Conflicts_and_Building_Peace , see also; Innocent Chiluwa and Jurate Ruzaite, "Analysing the Language of Political Conflict: A Study of War Rhetoric of Vladimir Putin and Volodymyr Zelensky." *Critical Discourse Studies*, April 8, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2024.2331186
[82] Ibid.
[83] Enas Naji Kadim, "A Critical Discourse Analysis of Vladimir Putin's Speech Announcing 'Special Military Operation' in Ukraine." *International Journal of Humanities and Educational Research*, February 1, 2023, 435–40, https://doi.org/10.47832/2757-5403.18.23 , see also; Renad Abbadi, Lana Kreishan, Emad M Al-Saidat, "Discourse and Language of War: A Comparison of the Linguistic and Rhetorical Strategies Employed in Russian, United States, and Ukrainian Presidential Speeches." *International Journal of English Language and Literature Studies,* January 4, 2024, https://doi.org/10.55493/5019.v13i1.4957
[84] Ivan Nechepurenko, "U.N. Court to Rule on Whether Ukraine Committed Genocide." *The New York Times*, February 2, 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/2024/02/02/world/europe/ukraine-un-court-genocide-russia.html

These texts and in combination with the discourse analysis carried out in the previous chapter with Netanyahu, in order to further understand and examine the arguments at the core of the political leaders' statements, we must apply the same analytical method. The demonization of Ukraine and the West in Vladimir Putin's political discourse is a characteristic example of power discourse, which clearly reflects the relationship between language, power, and social practice, as analyzed in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). In Vladimir Putin's political discourse, the demonization of Ukraine is not rooted in Ukraine's own cultural identity per se, but rather in its alignment with Western values and institutions. Ukraine is framed as a proxy of the West as an extension of NATO and Western liberalism, and thus creating the binary worldview of a sovereign, traditional Russia versus a morally decaying, expansionist West. Within the framework of CDA, Putin uses his position of power to legitimize violence and military action by constructing a moral dilemma and creating an "other" that threatens to degenerate. This discourse is similar to the rhetoric used by Netanyahu in his speeches and the "us or them" dichotomy analyzed in the previous chapter. The construction of the world, therefore, is also evident in this case. The use of a morally heavy term acts as a mechanism of exclusion, which is precisely why it is used. It is very difficult for someone to question terms such as genocide or Nazism in public discourse because there is a possibility of being labeled insensitive or even a traitor, thus limiting or even silencing any dissent.

And in this case, what Foucault calls a regime of truth emerges, where discourses are accepted not because they are true, but because they are produced through mechanisms of power. From Michel Foucault's perspective, Putin, who maintains complete control over the information that is broadcasted, can easily be analyzed as part of a mechanism of power-knowledge. Putin's discourse does not only constitute what is said publicly, but also by whom, when, how, and under what circumstances. The construction of truth, therefore, from Putin's point of view, is very easy to fabricate, and by using the concepts of "genocide of Russian speakers" and "de-Nazification" as dominant ideas, he constructs his own objective truth. Foucault believed that power is not only repressive but also productive, i.e., it constructs institutions, identity, and defines its subjects. Through the framing of Ukrainians as "neo-Nazis" and Russia as a moral liberator, Putin's discourse does not merely describe the world—it shapes it and, at the same time, through controlled state media, normalizes it by characterizing alternative narratives as "treasonous" or "Western-led." The demonization of the enemy—the other—is not simply a strategy of persuasion but a method of power to shape a collective consciousness that will link the societal cohesion, prevent any resistance, and allow the use of violence as necessary, natural, and justified.

The phrase "Russia's future lies in the hands of its people," mentioned by Putin in his speech on February 22, as analyzed by Adrian Ionuț Bogdan, is part of a populist patriotic strategy that shifts responsibility for the success of the operation to the collective body of society. He does not simply call on the people for support, nor does he inform them. This phrase has a different dynamic and aims to construct national unity as the moral duty of every citizen, where support for the war is equated with love for the homeland. According to Foucault, this strategy is explained by the production of subjects in discourse. In this case, the citizen is called upon to recognize himself not simply as a passive acceptor of the situation but as the bearer of a historical mission with the title of "patriot." Now the citizen/patriot cannot be politically neutral, nor can he raise objections, because he would be morally suspect. War thus becomes a national affair with a different weight, and silence or abstention from it is considered a breach of patriotic morality and tradition.

Through the analysis of Russian President Vladimir Putin's speech, the role of ideology formation, the legitimization of state violence, and the cultivation of national cohesion are emphasized. The us or/vs them dichotomy that structures discourse and antagonizes the "other," whether it be the West or Ukraine, reinforces the sense of collective identity. Vladimir Putin, with his ability to control the media, has constructed and presented another reality in which he stands on the side of "us." in the bipolar world, identifying Russia as morally and historically true, while "them" are the threat that disrupts global stability. In this way, he silences criticism and presents violence as a patriotic and moral duty. This leads to the conclusion that political discourse, and in Putin's case, isn't just communication but a form of power that can impose "truths" and shape people who accept violence as normal. Through Critical Discourse Analysis and Foucauldian concepts of power and knowledge, it becomes apparent that the rhetoric used by the Russian political leader does not simply explain the world—it defines it.

3.2   USA Discourse in the Vietnam War
3.2.1 Historical and political context

In the same way that the Russian case was analyzed, we'll continue with the Vietnam War and how the US approached it. The Vietnam War is one of the most well-known cases of military intervention, and it is important to examine the discourse that surrounds it.[85] The Vietnam War emerged as an aftermath of a combination of colonialism and ideology. More specifically, what this means is that after World War II, France's colonial rule in Vietnam was questioned by the Viet Minh movement, led by Ho Chi Minh.[86] What Ho Chi Minh's movement wanted was independence and the unification of the country under a communist government. France withdrew from the region in 1954, and as a result of the Geneva Conference held that same year, Vietnam was temporarily divided into two states, communist North Vietnam and South Vietnam.[87] North Vietnam, under communist influence, became the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, with Ho Chi Minh as president and the declared goal of liberating the entire country, and South Vietnam, to which the French granted autonomy while maintaining a symbolic presence, which was transferred to the Americans in the early 1960s. North Vietnam, with the help of the USSR, China, and other communist countries, adopted an ambitious program of reconstruction and industrialization of the country, making significant progress between 1955 and 1965.[88]

South Vietnam came under US protection and received economic and military aid. Emperor Bao Dai appointed Ngô Đình Diệm as prime minister. In 1956, he assumed absolute power and, with US assistance, consolidated his anti-communist, authoritarian, and family-run regime.[89] Diem then refused to hold elections to unify the country, arguing that conditions for free expression of the people did not exist throughout the country.[90] North Vietnam and the

[85] John Prados, "Vietnam: The History of an Unwinnable War, 1945-1975." *University Press of Kansas*, 2009, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1h64p60
[86] Fredrik Logevall, "Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam" *Random House*, 2012.
[87] Sergio Miller, "No Wider War: A History of the Vietnam War Volume 2: 1965–75." *Uitgever Osprey Publishing*, June 2022.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Mark Atwood Lawrence, "Vietnam War: A Concise International History." *OUP US*, August 2010.
[90] Ibid.

communists in the South, who believed they would win the elections, exploited the discontent of the South Vietnamese people due to the economic situation, the authoritarianism and corruption of the regime, and began to organize to overthrow the regime.[91] In 1960, when a guerrilla war broke out in the southern part of the country, supporters of communism who sought to liberate that part led the northern part to create the Liberation Army of South Vietnam.[92]

Two years later, in 1962, US President John F. Kennedy decided to send the first soldiers to Saigon to help the country, fearing the spread of communism (based on the domino theory). and thus took on the role of guarantor of freedom and democracy in the region.[93] As a result, the southern part was placed under the protection of the United States and received significant economic and military aid. However, this move provoked the involvement of China and the Soviet Union in the war, who had Cuba, North Korea, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and many others on their side.[94] This led to the organization of communist forces, which also included allies in the region. While the US initially played a neutral role, its eventual full military involvement led to an escalation of the war in the region.

The narrative followed by the US was one that presented the war as a struggle for freedom and global stability, essentially a defensive war against the spread of Soviet influence in Vietnam.[95] However, the US involvement was not purely defensive, as its long-term intervention resulted in enormous human losses and consequences for the civilian population of the region. With varying degrees of involvement, the US had five different presidents who managed this crisis from the early 1950s until its withdrawal in 1973.[96] Initial support gradually turned into a social and political crisis that required intervention and was supported by the narrative that had been given to this war over the years.[97] More specifically, during the Kennedy and Johnson presidencies, this narrative remained consistent, and the war was a "duty," a "responsibility," and a "necessary evil" for the defense of the free world.[98] The US discourse on Vietnam over the years did not change significantly but was instead built on the original narrative. Although presidents changed and each handled the crisis in his own way, the narrative of the war remained stable.[99] Their rhetoric was not only aimed at informing the

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[91] John Prados, op.cit.

[92] Fredrik Logevall, op.cit.

[93] Fredrik Logevall, op.cit.

[94] The Cuban Center for Strategic Studies, "Fidel Castro's Crimes against American Pilots (POW's) in Vietnam." February 9, 2022, https://cubastrategicstudies.com/fidel-castros-crimes-against-american-pilots-pows-in-vietnam/ , see also; Benjamin R. Young, "The Origins of North Korea-Vietnam Solidarity The Vietnam War and the DPRK." *Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars*, February 2019, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/benjamin_young_north_korea_vietnam_war_february_2019.pdf , see also; Ladislav Kudrna, "Czechoslovakia and the Vietnam War." *Cairn.Info*, February 8, 2021, https://shs.cairn.info/journal-guerres-mondiales-et-conflits-contemporains-2021-3-page-95?lang=en , see also; Konstantin Karagyozov,"Bulgaria, Vietnam Mark 75 Years of Diplomatic Relations at Legation Level." *Bulgarian News Agency*, February 8, 2025, https://www.bta.bg/en/news/829865-bulgaria-vietnam-mark-75-years-of-diplomatic-relations-at-legation-level

[95] BBC News, "Reasons for US Involvement in Vietnam - the Vietnam War - National 5 History Revision." January 27, 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zv7bkqt/revision/2

[96] Minh, Khánh, "Unveiling the Complex Tapestry: A Historical Analysis of the Vietnam War and Its Impact on America." *Influence: International Journal of Science Review* 5, 35–40, https://doi.org/10.54783/influencejournal.v5i3.180

[97] The Vassar Institute for the Liberal Arts, "The Wars for Vietnam." April 2025, https://www.vassar.edu/the-wars-for-vietnam/vietnam-war-overview

[98] Ken Davenport, "Was the Vietnam War Inevitable?" *Medium*, October 29, 2017, https://medium.com/@kgdavenport/was-the-vietnam-war-inevitable-7dc78e064b2

[99] Ibid.

people, but also at shaping a specific moral and political reality, in which American action acquired meaning and purpose, thus creating the existential dilemma that if we do not fight there now, we will fight here later.[100]

3.2.2 USA's rhetoric strategies

The rhetoric of the United States during the Vietnam War was organized around a moral duty, cultural superiority, and geopolitical necessity. Americans see themselves as a nation of reluctant warriors, a peaceful people who abhor violence but must fight from time to time in the national interest. For this reason, they create a scapegoat, a barbaric enemy, to absolve the US, a peaceful nation, of the guilt of having to take up arms. The presidential narrative of the US is therefore made up of elements such as power versus freedom, irrationality versus reason, and aggression versus defense. From the very beginning of the conflict, US presidents, starting with Kennedy and ending with Nixon, tried to frame the war as a struggle for freedom against an "invisible and global enemy", communism.[101]

A key part of American political rhetoric was the exploitation of fear through the "domino theory," which was articulated in 1954 by then-President Dwight D. Eisenhower.[102] With this theory, Eisenhower believed that if one country fell under communist rule, its neighboring countries would likely follow in succession, much like dominoes, with one country triggering the collapse of the next.[103] This resulted in the loss of Vietnam being presented as a threat to global security and US interests rather than a local or regional issue. This narrative was not based solely on geopolitical discussions but it was used to reinforce the idea that every victory of communism was equivalent to a defeat of freedom, thus creating a moral polarization. Any neutral stance was presented as a stance of appeasement, and militant action was now called sacrifice for the world order. In this way, the domino theory was not simply a theory used to manage a foreign policy doctrine, but a communication tool to present US military involvement as preventive, necessary, and morally beyond criticism.[104]

This theory functioned as a rhetorical framework for mobilization because when you create the idea of a threat, you also create an emotional response, fear. The power of fear is to paralyze society or mobilize it, and when the threat is related to the world order, it creates an environment of permanent existential threat. In this context, the public rhetoric used by the US sought to impose the feeling that their absence from the crisis would be disastrous, and thus fear became a building block of political persuasion and ideological discipline.[105] Even when there was a period of internal dissent and public opinion in the US began to turn against

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[100] Christian F. Ostermann and Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, "Western Europe and the Vietnam War." Chapter. In *The Cambridge History of the Vietnam War*, *Cambridge University Press*, 2024.

[101] David Sutton, "The Rhetoric of the Vietnam War: An Annotated Bibliography." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly,* Vol. 24, no. 3/4, September 1994, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3885948

[102] Katie Smith, "How Important Was the So Called 'Domino Theory' in Forming US Policy Towards Indochina During the Cold War? Were Other Factors More Important?" *EInternational Relations*, December 22, 2007, https://www.e-ir.info/pdf/180

[103] History.com, "President Eisenhower Presents Cold War 'Domino Theory.'" November 13, 2009, https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/april-7/eisenhower-gives-famous-domino-theory-speech

[104] Cornelius F. Jr. Murphy, "The War in Vietnam: A Discussion. The Vietnam War a Moral Evaluation." *Natural Law Forum*, January 1, 1967, http://scholarship.law.nd.edu/nd_naturallaw_forum/130

[105] Robert J. McMahon, "Rationalizing Defeat: The Vietnam War in American Presidential Discourse, 1975–1995." *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 2, 1999, https://www.jstor.org/stable/41939543

the war, the US leadership used this theory to justify that the war was a fateful mission and a guarantee of international stability.[106]

One of the most characteristic motifs of American discourse during the Vietnam War is the construction of the enemy as "barbaric" because they are "an irrational and illegitimate adversary opposed to a rational and law-abiding protagonist."[107] The North Vietnamese were seen as driven by a desire for power, while the United States and its ally, South Vietnam, were seen as guardians of order, law, and reason. In this way, the forces of North Vietnam were presented as irrational forces of violence and terror, acting outside any moral, political, or cultural framework. Whenever the enemy, as in the case of Israel, is perceived as more than a threat to security, it is also a threat to the very culture and the "superior" Western moral order. And as in the case of Israel, this rhetoric is embedded in a broader narrative, where the barbarity of the "other" is used to legitimize the intervention of the "civilized" and to transform war into a moral mission, with barbarity serving as a mirror of the moral superiority of the West: the more inhuman the enemy is portrayed, the more necessary intervention appears to be. By extension, the violence perpetrated by the US ceases to be reprehensible and becomes a morally necessary act of salvation.[108]

All these characteristics of US rhetoric were framed by the creation of an identity, a morally superior identity in which the US is the defender and guarantor of freedom and democracy.[109] As we will see in the analysis below, the interventions in Vietnam were framed in terms of "duty," "responsibility," and "sacrifice." And this sacrifice was not only for the interests and security of the US, but also for the liberation of the Vietnamese people from the "communist yoke." With this identity, the US had a duty to fight for the "civilians in danger" and reinforced this idea with terms such as "freedom," "civilization," "defense of liberty," and "just cause." As many American soldiers who were sent to Vietnam and managed to return home have reported, this reality was not actually true. Throughout the war, the above rhetoric prevailed in the American media, and there were constant references to "operational successes," "heroism," and "popular acceptance" of the US by the Vietnamese people.[110] As is obvious, the US narrative was not merely intended to justify the political leadership but also served as a mechanism of ideological construction, creating the image of a necessary and morally "pure" conflict, even when the brutality of the war delegitimized it in practice.

3.2.3 Discourse analysis

Based on secondary sources, this analysis highlights key rhetorical strategies and the ideological construction of US foreign policy during the Vietnam War. The example of American politics is a case of political discourse that attempts to legitimize military intervention through moral, ideological, and emotional tools. Central to US discourse is the dichotomy between freedom and communism, which constructs a division between the

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[106] University of Michigan, "National Teach-In on Vietnam, Resistance and Revolution: The Anti-Vietnam War Movement at the University of Michigan, 1965–1972", accessed July 20, 2025, https://michiganintheworld/antivietnamwar

[107] John Prados, op.cit.

[108] Cornelius F. Jr. Murphy, op.cit.

[109] Paul T. McCartney, "How Foreign Policy Shapes American National Identity." *Political Science Quarterly*, vol.134, Winter 2019, http://www.jstor.org/stable/45284694

[110] Christian Appy, "The Real Tragedy of the Vietnam War," *CherriesWriter*, July 28, 2015, https://cherrieswriter.com/2015/07/28/the-real-tragedy-of-the-vietnam-war/

American self and the enemy.

As David Sutton notes in President Johnson's speeches, the conflict in Vietnam is presented not as a local political or military issue, but as the front line of a global war of values. [111] The enemy appears to be barbaric and responsible for the destruction and suffering caused by the conflict. When describing the actions of the North Vietnamese, Johnson used vivid and graphic language to emphasize their violence. He described them as acting beyond all reason, as forces of chaos that rejected political correctness and negotiation. On the other hand, the actions of the Americans were described in neutral, bureaucratic language that concealed their aggressiveness.[112] On this basis, logic and legitimacy are internalized exclusively in Western discourse, while any other perspective is presented as inherently threatening. In this way, the North Vietnamese and, by extension, communism are perceived as a "dark force" seeking oppression and the expansion of violence, while the US is presented as the bearer of progress, democracy, and human dignity.

At the same time, John F. Kennedy's political discourse on the United States' involvement in Vietnam is an example of the creation of a different reality. As Bostdorff and Goldzwig, as well as Hart's analysis, point out, Kennedy invoked the concept of a moral conflict between freedom and communism as the central axis of his discourse.[113] The Vietnam case is not presented as a simple regional crisis, but as the focal point of a global moral test. As is evident in Kennedy's analyses, through phrases such as "We must bear the burden... of helping freedom defend itself," he transformed violence into a moral duty, an act of salvation, and the only way to achieve freedom. He thus continued and reinforced the belief that the US was the bearer of principles and not merely of interests, shifting the responsibility for the conflict. Through Critical Discourse Analysis, Kennedy's speech constructs identities and roles with the enemy being irrational, dangerous, and faceless, and the US as the moral protector. The result, as in the case of Israel, is that any intervention is naturalized and dissent is excluded, turning distancing into possible complicity. According to Michel Foucault's approach, this discourse operates within a regime of truth, in which only certain narratives are allowed to circulate and be recognized as correct. In Kennedy's case, we see exactly this function. His discourse creates a moral norm where the US intervention in Vietnam becomes not only necessary but also morally inevitable. War is not simply a strategic power game, but a "truth" that the US must defend, and it is this "truth regime" that ultimately disciplines society.

Finally, from the beginning of his presidency, Nixon sought to link his personal greatness to the national supremacy of the United States and aimed to transform what was, at that time, failed involvement in Vietnam into a morally and historically glorious mission to defend the greater good. As Luke Burton's analysis of Nixon's first presidential speech during his inaugural term shows, Nixon claimed that through his role as "peacemaker," he would strive not only to bring peace, but also to earn the recognition of history by adopting the rhetoric of "peace with honor."[114] In his speech on "Vietnamization," he used patriotic rhetoric to delegitimize

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[111] David Sutton, op.cit.

[112] Ibid.

[113] Denise M. Bostdorff and Steven R. Goldzwig, "Idealism and Pragmatism in American Foreign Policy Rhetoric: The Case of John F. Kennedy and Vietnam," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, vol.24, Summer 1994, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/27551281.pdf

[114] Luke Burton, "Executive Exploitation, Richard Nixon, Administrative Policy, and the Vietnam War," *Virginia Tech Undergraduate Historical Review*, May 1, 2013, https://doi.org/10.21061/vtuhr.v2i0.14

demands for the immediate withdrawal of American troops and presented his strategy as the "right path," opposing the "easy way out" demanded by the opposition. Through a critical analysis of his speech, it appears that Nixon is investing in the creation of a national identity as a staunch supporter of freedom, closing the field for open public dialogue or political dissent. Following Foucault's approach, Nixon's discourse, like that of other presidents such as Netanyahu, functions as a mechanism for producing a "regime of truth." It is not merely concerned with persuading, but with shaping the horizon within which truth can be understood. The concept of "peace with honor" thus becomes a discursive regime that allows only certain representations of war (e.g., as a noble endeavor, not as imperialist intervention). Furthermore, discourse disciplines subjects: citizens who question the morality of war are presented as a threat, while the "silent majority" is presented as morally correct and law-abiding. Power here is expressed not only through state mechanisms, but through the construction of identities, meanings, and moral imperatives. Nixon does not simply seek consensus; he produces it by normalizing war as an inevitable moral imperative.

The political discourse of the United States in the Vietnam War was built on the concepts of duty, moral superiority, and fear of communism, and while each president handled the conflict in his own way, they all told the same story. John F. Kennedy approached the engagement as a moral duty, Lyndon Johnson as a global battle of values, while Richard Nixon adopted a discourse of national pride and "peace with honor," which, through his rhetoric, gave the war the character of a historic mission. Common to all three was a Foucauldian idea: the construction of a "truth" that made military action not only logical but also morally inevitable. The example of Vietnam, therefore, is further proof that political discourse does not merely reflect events but constructs them, shaping perceptions, identities, and moral duties.

4. Conclusion

An analysis of Benjamin Netanyahu's political discourse from October 7, 2023, to May 2025 reveals a recurring rhetoric aimed at shaping a political and moral reality. Through techniques such as constructing an "us vs/or them" dichotomy, the use of emotionally charged words, and references to history and religion, the Israeli Prime Minister's discourse functions as a tool for legitimizing state violence against the Palestinian people. With the help of Critical Discourse Analysis and Michel Foucault's theory of the "regime of truth," this paper highlights the influence of political discourse on the exercise of power. Netanyahu's discourse transforms political decisions into morally justified actions, attributing to the "enemy" the characteristics of absolute evil, barbarism, and terrorism, thus denying any right to self-defense.

The analysis of other cases (Russia in the war with Ukraine and the US in the Vietnam War) answered the second part of the research question. It highlighted similarities in the way different regimes used discourse to construct the enemy, strengthen national cohesion, and legitimize violence as a means of survival or restoration of order. Therefore, the use of political discourse to legitimize violence is not a unique phenomenon but a practice of power used in conflictual regimes as a recurring pattern to control reality and construct threats. The

historical repetitiveness of this practice shows that the use of speech to construct threats and manipulate society is not merely circumstantial but is part of the exercise of power. Through these two cases, it is clear that the political subject, regardless of ideological orientation or geopolitical position, resorts to the linguistic construction of the "other" as an enemy in order to maintain its hegemony and social cohesion. This thesis, therefore, contributes to the emergence of discourse as a means of political action and not as a mere tool of communication. A critical reading of the discourses of power is necessary for a deeper understanding of how language can shape perceptions of violence and life.

This thesis, therefore, contributes to the emergence of discourse as a means of political action and not as a mere tool of communication. A critical reading of the discourses of power is necessary for a deeper understanding of how language can shape perceptions of violence and life.

During the present research, a key challenge was managing the volume of primary material, as Netanyahu made many public statements and speeches between 2023 and 2025. This required strict selection criteria and limiting the material to representative excerpts, with the fear of omitting something important for the research. The analysis was carried out without the use of language processing software, which made the process more demanding but allowed for a more meaningful understanding of the content of the speeches. Finally, the most demanding part for the author was maintaining academic distance from the subject of the research, as the emotional and political charge was quite intense, given that the war was ongoing during the research.

Future research could also delve deeper into the study of rhetoric in social media, which allows for more direct, less "filtered" versions of political discourse. Finally, a truly interesting addition would be a quantitative analysis of political speeches using tools for analyzing words, emotional tones, and recurring themes. Such research would greatly enhance the documentation of rhetorical patterns in political discourse. It could also provide tools for decoding similar phenomena in similar situations in the future. The goal, then, is not simply to describe and analyze speech, but to understand how it shapes reality and how it can be challenged.

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