

WAS ISRAELI SECURITY CONSTRUCTED THROUGH GENOCIDE PROPAGANDA FOLLOWING THE OCTOBER 7TH ATTACKS?

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ABSTRACT

The October 7th attacks on Israel represented several challenges for Israeli security. Maintaining order and leadership within the country and mobilizing a response to recover its reputation as 'invincible' military presence are a few of Israel's concerns. Securing gains in its expansionist colonial ambitions and protecting the land already colonized required navigation of indigenous resistance, greater military threats from neighbour states, and fending off global criticism for Israeli apartheid and war crimes. This critical discourse analysis of public communications in the immediate aftermath of the attacks examines how Israel achieved its military goals and led its nation to a brutal war through a series of genocidal speech acts. The analysis found that, besides identifying Jews as a valued object of security 'threatened' by all Palestinians and Arabs, Israeli discourse consistently weaponized islamophobia and the fear of being labelled with antisemitism to gain support for its policies. Further themes include emphasizing Israel's existence as a nation-state, and its claim to moral war practice despite evidence to the contrary. The findings also revealed a dichotomy of contradictory narratives centred on international law and moral rhetoric communicated to the international community contrasted with more overtly genocidal rhetoric directed domestically in Israel.

Keywords: Israel, Palestine, Securitization, Propaganda, Genocide.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Following the shocking events of October 7th, 2023, in Palestine-Israel, an incredibly eventful series of global interactions rapidly swept the world. Unparalleled violence within the first six months following the events left Gaza a dystopian unliveable shell, with near all universities, hospitals, and civilian infrastructure destroyed (United Nations, 2023; Srivastava & Bernard, 2023). This preceded Israeli attacks on Lebanon, Iran, and Syria, followed by symbolic but unprecedented Iranian retaliation. The Yemeni-Houthi blockade of the Red Sea (Clark, 2024), repeated ceasefire negotiations and vetoed votes in the United Nations (UN) (UN News, 2023), South African charges of genocide presented to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) (United Nations, 2024b; United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2024), widespread protests around the world, and the International Criminal Court (ICC) application for warrants to arrest President Netanyahu (International Criminal Court, 2024).

Examining the media presence of stakeholders in the Israel-Palestine violence in the months following October 7th, 2023, through the lens of securitization theory and the Constructivist approach, this research seeks to analyse the key narratives, identities, and messaging strategies salient in global discourse during these events. Employing a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to a variety of public speeches, reports, interviews, imagery and other potential securitizing events, this research

seeks to identify and critically examine how security has been constructed by Israel amidst potential counter-securitization, such as the South African delegation to ICJ. Piecing together events and fast-paced propaganda wars raging across the globe was a mighty task. Conflicting narratives inevitably hinder direct access to “truth”, and so making sense of the public discourse can only be possible through deeper analysis. This research argues that the use of narrative control, propaganda, censorship, and a convergence of messages by western leaders featured prominently in the public defence of Israel, exposing a deep divide between state rhetoric and the views of the western public, particularly among the younger generation. International actors have also seen shifts in position toward Israel, evolving as events unfolded since the start of the violence. Significant to the polarisation is the social media access to context and corroboration during this conflict, and the speed at which contemporaneous non-curated war imagery has been accessible to the wider public. Furthermore, interpretations of historical context in the region are a cause of contention when identifying or prioritizing objects of security, and the identities of threatening parties.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The October 7th, 2023, attack in Israel is relatively new at the time of writing, and so little academic literature exists specifically examining securitization by Israel in the immediate aftermath of the attacks. Some literature exists largely focusing on Israel as a victim of terrorism (Levy, 2024, pp. 25-37), refuting Pro-Palestinian arguments in favour of resistance (Benbaji, 2024, pp. 343-364), and examining the impact of the

attacks on Israeli life (Levi-Belz, Groweissa, Blanka, & Neriach, 2024). However, a small pool of research exists on the long-term securitization efforts by Israel and Zionism in general. Abulof (2014) argued that the case of Israel is rarely examined by securitization scholars. He describes a 'deep securitization' in Israeli society where public discourse persistently frames one ethnic community as being under perpetual existential threat (Abulof, 2014). The conspicuous absence of the case of Israel in securitization literature has been criticized as deliberate, in fear of undermining the theory itself, particularly for early speech-focused iterations of the theory (Lupovici, 2014, pp. 1-9). While securitization theory typically focuses on extraordinary means of addressing perceived threats, Olesker documented domestic securitization in Israel through the use of 'banal securitization' in every-day life, arguing that Israel attempts to securitize the Jewish identity itself through illiberal legislation, (Olesker, 2014; Jamal, 2020). Shapiro and Bird-David suggest these policies instil a routine sensibility to securitization in ways that exclude non-Jews and identify Arabs as a constant 'existential threat' (Shapiro & Bird-David, 2017). Israeli politicians present Israel as a peaceful state defending itself against multiple existential threats, but many historians, postcolonial scholars, and genocide scholars have argued that the origins of the state of Israel represents a long-term objective of establishing and maintaining a Jewish settler colonial state, which necessitated ethnic cleansing of Arabs from the territory (Kaldor, 2012, pp. 33-45, 81-90).

It can be coherently argued that deeply entrenched securitized identities are cynically maintained to further a goal of ethnic cleansing. These aims are progressed through persistent

securitized public discourse, banal domestic securitization, and are compounded by successive strategic policies, laws, and military action such as the building of security walls (Jones, 2009; Folk, 2005), restricting food, water, trade, agriculture, and frequent military violence in the name of security (Jamal, 2020). Jamal (2020) also described the asymmetry of power in discourse between Israeli-led securitization and the consequently limited avenues of ontological counter-securitization by Palestinians (Jamal, 2020). This provides relevant context to any analysis of the public discourse and consequent actions since October 7th, which has also been described as further proof of a wider genocide (Sprusansky, 2024; Albanese, *Anatomy of a Genocide*, 2024).

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Constructivism posits that people are architects of the world and the international arena, based on the identities and ideologies that inform and motivate their actions. This emerged as a challenge to strictly positivist approaches such as realism. Where realists predict that states are primarily motivated by survival through the balance of material power in an endlessly anarchic environment, ideational motivations are sidelined as irrelevant. Constructivists, on the other hand, argue that actors in the international arena actively pursue aims identified by their 'identities,' constructing relations between actors. Challenging one of the foundational assumptions of traditional IR, constructivist Wendt questioned whether the international arena is anarchic by default, or as a result of actor interactions giving rise to a culture of anarchy (Wendt, 1992). Needless to say, 'identities' are central to constructivist theory, Adler (1997)

described how identities are socially constructed by communities, such as the imagined unity or common cause defined by shared ethnicity, language, national borders, heritage, religion, culture or values. Adler proposes that state social identities and interests change over time dependent on the interactions, interdependency of states and the convergence of values between them (Adler, 1997). Identities shape foreign policies according to the role expected of their identities (Holsti, 1970). This can certainly help explain prevailing hostilities and alliances demarcated by shared ideology and religion such as the strong loyalties among Christian Europe, between Shi'ite majority states, and communist states. However, public rhetoric can often be contradicted by actual decisions, such as close cooperation between states that publicly criticize each other for ideological differences. While the value of constructivism in defining the impact of identities on international policy and decision-making has been questioned (Väyrynen, 2000), the approach has greater appeal to the study of security construction (Acharya, *How Ideas Spread*, 2004; Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia*, 2014). In the context of this research, the strong clash of identities and emphasis on preserving identities in Israeli discourse offers valuable insight into motivations of all actors over the course of the conflict. The ensuing global polarization around Israel and the seemingly contradictory approaches toward international law and human rights, can be explained through the lens of identities and social constructivism more coherently than purely materialistic evaluations.

Securitization theory was first pioneered by the Copenhagen school in the formative book, "Security: A New Framework of Analysis," (Buzan, Wæver, & Wilde, 1998). It is a framework seeking to comprehend the process of identifying issues of security and the consequent mobilization of communities to meet that threat (Williams, 2003). Early exploration of the theory focused on 'speech acts' by influential voices such as national leaders, politicians, mass media, and decision makers. These speech acts would seek to invite public acceptance that (a) an identified "threat" exists, (b) that the "referent object" of that threat must be secured (c) by employment of extraordinary means outside of ordinary political processes (Buzan, Wæver, & Wilde, Security: A New Framework for Analysis, 1998; Balzacq, Léonard, & Ruzicka, 2016). Buzan identified a variety of security concerns including state military objectives, both offensive and defensive, political concerns around systems of government, stability of states, and ideologies that legitimize them (Buzan, 1991). Though these were initially state-centric with less regard for citizen-level security concerns, the theory has since expanded from its original narrow focus on state-centric speech acts to include non-state actors and other securitizing media such as video, photography, and physical acts (Heck & Schlag, 2013; Olesker, 2014).

Drawing on both constructivism and post-structuralism (a similar but distinct theory of IR), securitization theory provides a framework explaining how certain threats are accepted, adopted and treated as truth or knowledge through grand narratives and repetition (Huysmans, 1998). Analysing public discourse addressing October 7th through a securitization theory lens pieces together a coherent and revealing

explanation of otherwise confusing, awkward and disjointed series of speech acts. Unlike constructivism, post-structuralism is critical of a positivist approach toward IR, yet securitization theory may still offer a framework that could predict certain common features of securitizing discourse that shapes knowledge production around the Israel-Gaza conflict, such as repetition of grand narratives.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), in the discourse-historical approach, offers a practical research method to examine the construction of security in Israel and Palestine following the Hamas-led attacks on October 7th, 2023. Giving prominence to power relations and ideology in discourse, CDA specifically lends itself well to identifying the identities, ideologies, and grand narratives embedded within securitizing discourse during the conflict. Under the CDA framework, discourse is never benign and is presumed to persistently be “enmeshed in relations of power”. Critical IR depends on the post-structuralist belief that language plays a role in constructing social reality. Other modes of discourse analysis have examined linguistic styles, means, and mechanisms to understand social knowledge production, including the use of similes, euphemisms, and the identification of collective identities. CDA goes further, seeking to empirically investigate causality between discursive practices and events, actions, and social structures (Aydın-Düzgüt, 2014). Through methodical comparisons between competing discursive narratives and implicit ‘truths’, CDA attempts to exceed the limiting post-structuralist remit of understanding of historical structure formation.

The immediate concern with adopting any 'implicit truth', by which to compare other narratives, is the potential for bias, and inserting a researcher's own perspective, consciously or unconsciously, into the analysis. Indeed, any published research has the potential of becoming part of the very social reality construction that is under investigation. Said (1977) demonstrated how 'western orientalism' in academic writing played a major role in western knowledge production about the orient, with scholars very much a part of the story, viewing themselves as part of the western 'us' interacting with an eastern 'them' (Said, 1977). Maintaining integrity in CDA requires the ability to distance any research from the possibility of any personal conflict of interest, whether material, identity-based, or ideological.

A common criticism of post-structuralism is that such interpretation is a free-for-all with no recourse to any objective truth. It is also arguably a philosophically extreme position to claim that there is *no* truth, and that actors are beholden to their own speech shaping reality itself (Reisigl & Wodak, 2000). Without the possibility of 'truth' or even 'truths,' and the ability to seek, test, and make comparisons to it/them, an examination of manipulation and deception in discourse, and its impact may be impossible. Making sense of disputing narratives, each accusing each other of deception also becomes vain. The modern study of antisemitic rhetoric, highly relevant to this research, tends to require acceptance of certain normative 'truths,' including the assumption that racism is wrong and that ridding institutions from it is desirable (Reisigl & Wodak, 2000). While the threat of researcher bias is very real, CDA offers a repeatable analytical methodology to at least offer a nuanced

inter-discursive explanation of the discourse surrounding the Israeli-Palestine conflict since 2023. By comparing narratives to other genres, fields and non-discursive events, analyses can be further supported by a verifiable empirical approach.

In the context of this research, selected public speech events immediately after and in the six months following October 7th, 2023, were analysed in four stages. Outlining prevailing *discourse topics*, then *discursive strategies* or *argumentation strategies* evident in the narrative were investigated to identify: which subjects are named? What characteristics are attributed to them? Which argumentation schemes are employed to naturalize those characteristics? Which characteristics are emphasized, refuted or mitigated? What securitizing goal is intended? How are these narratives repeated and defended? Thirdly, an exploration of identifiable linguistic means or *nomination strategies*, such as creation of 'us and them' narratives, tropes, and stigma words associated with constructed identities (Reisigl & Wodak, 2000; Aydın-Düzgit, 2014) Consistent messaging, patterns, and repetition were also noted as a mechanism or evidence of 'social reality' construction. Finally, attention and emphasis were placed on speech acts relevant to securitization, such as identifying (i) referent objects of security, (ii) threats and (iii) calls to extraordinary action. Each of these included overt, implicit, alleged and conflicting possibilities, which were compared and investigated considering other, more empirical, evidence, to identify a coherent explanation of Israeli security construction.

4. ANALYSIS

4.1 Discourse Topics

The analysed discourse exhibited repeated themes, even where the context appeared irrelevant. Topics of discussion centred around, ' Hamas', with recurring labelling as a 'terrorist organization', being guilty of crimes. "October 7th" was commonly graphically described, particularly mentioning "beheadings" of children, and widespread "rape" (two allegations later revealed to be untrue), targeted killing of 'civilians,' and assertions that Hamas held "genocidal intent" toward Jews. Further oft-repeated themes included that "Israel has a right to exist", "has a right to defend itself", and "is the only democracy in the Middle East." Mention of Israeli "hostages" taken on October 7th and the urgency to release or rescue them and description of Palestinians as 'human shields' exploited by Hamas and mention of "Jews" suffering historic persecution, "antisemitism" and the nazi "holocaust" also featured frequently. Discourse presented by critics of Israel focused more on seeking a "ceasefire", Israel being an "apartheid" regime, allegations of "genocide" or "ethnic cleansing", "civilian deaths", "war crimes", "international law", "illegal settlers", "arms sales" by western nations, "boycotts", "divestment", "free Palestine", and "humanitarian aid". The phrase "From the river to the sea" featured controversially on both sides of the discourse.

4.2 Discursive and Nomination Strategies

Hamas was consistently characterized by Israel as an unlawful terrorist organization - a non-state actor in a territory not recognized as a state. They and their actions were interpreted in the worst possible light, with the notion of having reasonable

intentions treated with absurdity. They were frequently described using exaggerated pejoratives, often compared to Nazis. In Netanyahu's 31 October 2023 speech, *" Hamas launched this war by perpetrating the worst savagery our people have seen since the Holocaust."* (Netanyahu, 2023). In this five-minute address, Hamas was mentioned 15 times, each time immediately followed by extreme pejoratives such as 'evil', 'terror', 'murder', 'war crimes', 'holocaust', 'raped', and 'beheadings.' Comparisons between Israel and Hamas are analogously presented as *"good and evil"* or *"civilization and barbarism"* (Netanyahu, 2023) emphasizing a grand narrative that Israel has no other choice but to fight a 'just war' to eradicate Hamas in self-defence.

These key messages are echoed across multiple speeches, interviews and declarations by Israel and all her allies throughout most of Europe, USA, and Canada, with the same key features. Clearly identifying Hamas as an irrational non-state actor, bent on murdering Jews, that cannot be reasoned with or trusted, the speech asserted that *"While Israel is doing everything to get Palestinians civilians out of harm's way, Hamas is doing everything to keep Palestinian civilians in harm's way,"* including by using them as *"Human shields"*, and allegedly using mosques and hospitals as *'weapon depots'* (Netanyahu, 2023). The speech pre-emptively blames Hamas for any ensuing Palestinian civilian deaths or destruction of mosques and hospitals, which are all ordinarily considered war crimes. Netanyahu also suggested (later ordered) that Palestinian civilians leave the territory allegedly to protect themselves from the coming violence. The securitizing features of this speech are very explicit. The valued referent object of security is identified

as the Jewish people in Israel, and implied to a lesser extent, Palestinian civilians. The single threat to all is the dehumanized terrorist organization, Hamas, and the extraordinary action ordered or invited by Netanyahu includes:

- Mobilization of a military invasion that may include targeting of civilian infrastructure such as mosques and hospitals.
- Backing of this war by all “civilized nations”
- “Palestinian civilians to leave the areas of armed conflict” – which ultimately became the entire Gaza Strip.
- Rejection of ceasefires.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This early speech summarizes oft-repeated themes and narratives echoed for months after October 2023. However, additional differences between domestic Israeli discourse and international dialogue were noted. Internally, politicians and activists were more ambiguous about the identified threat and less concerned about protecting civilians. In fact, rhetoric dehumanizing over 2 million Gazan civilians (half of whom were children) described them as complicit. Justification to exterminate all Gazans were often explicit. Netanyahu cited the biblical “Amalek,” for whom the bible ordered death for all, including women and children (Government of the Republic of South Africa, 2023). A fierce Knesset debate about deaths of Gazan children saw angered lawmaker Meirav Ben-Ari argue that Gazan children “brought this upon themselves” calling

them “children of darkness” (ערוץ כנסת, 2023), Yoav Gallant ordered that “no electricity, no food, no water, no fuel” entering the entire Gaza Strip, arguing they should be treated as “human animals” (Gallant, 2023). Besides the military blockade, subsequent military activity targeted aid convoys while distributing food to civilians in what became known as ‘flour massacres,’ and Israeli civilian protestors voluntarily blocked the paths of aid trucks, preventing entry into Gaza (United Nations Secretary-General, 2024a; UN Human Rights Office, 2024).

President Herzog and Minister Liberman of Israel declared “There are no innocents in the Gaza Strip.” (@AndyMcDeeOne, 2023; Liberman, 2023). Herzog also claimed, “It is an entire nation out there that is responsible,” further blurring the lines between civilians and military targets. Knesset member Ariel Kallner argued that Israel had “one goal: Nakba” citing the Palestine allegation of the 1948 ethnic cleansing or genocide during the birth of Israel (Kallner, 2023). The rhetoric coupled with the subsequent military actions led to accusations of genocide reaching the ICJ, further threatening to derail Israel’s plans (Government of the Republic of South Africa, 2023; Albanese, Anatomy of a Genocide, 2024). This rhetoric is not exclusively a reaction to the October 7th attacks, but continuation of older grand narratives. Lieberman has previously called to “blow Gaza back to the Middle Ages, destroying all the infrastructure including roads and water” in 2012, declaring pity for “not innocent” Gazans as “illogical.” Lieberman’s prophecy perhaps accurately describes the visible state of Gaza since October 7th.

The repeated arguments in favour of permanent removal or voluntary migration of Gazans, coupled with increased illegal settlements in the West Bank, displacing Palestinians outside of conflict zones also suggest that an alternative securitizing aim of the discourse was primarily to force Palestinians out of the territory, while the battle to eradicate Hamas or rescue hostages is secondary or coincidental. Publicly accessible videos and testimonies describing snipers targeting women and children, discoveries of mass graves revealing executed doctors, patients, and children, corroborated by IDF soldiers' own snuff films of degradation, torture, murder and desecration of civilians (Ryan, 2024; Kubovich, 2023), belied the public rhetoric of moral or ethical rules of engagement. Conversely, they supported a theory that securitizing speech acts incited collective punishment on Gazans and genocide. This alternative narrative was presented by critics of Israel, including historians, South African leaders, China, Russia, Irish politicians, Arab leaders, United Nations representatives, and an increasing number of protestors globally, including large numbers of Jewish activists around the world.

5.1 Secondary Securitization: Securing the Narrative

This challenge to Israel's securitizing discourse threatened to undermine the public acceptance necessary to mobilize and maintain its extraordinary military policies. Israeli grand narrative discourse pre-empted such challenges and maintained further securitization rhetoric identifying critics of Israel as an existential threat, often connecting them to Hamas. Israel accused South Africa of being the "legal arm of Hamas" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Israel), 2024) after submissions to

ICJ against Israel. The ICJ were also labelled “antisemitic” (Times of Israel, 2024). Protestors in Ivy League universities in USA were labelled “Antisemitic mobs”, “Hamas”, and compared to Nazis in a public call demanding, “*more has to be done*” to shut down protests (NBC News, 2024; NBC News, 2023). Dan Diker argued in Knesset in May 2024, that the US student protests posed an existential threat to Israel, contending “*We cannot accept statements like 'Israel is an apartheid state' or 'Israel is an occupying state'*” (TheJerusalemCenter, 2024). Such counter-narratives threaten Israel’s imagined identity as presented to the world, (i) firstly as a legitimate nation state with the primary claim to the land, a key contention for displaced Palestinians, (ii) secondly as the only regional ally of the ideological west, and (iii) as bastion of democracy and global ethics in an otherwise ‘backwards’ authoritarian Middle East. To preserve this perception, protestors in Israel and USA faced repression. US Congressman Ogles even proposed a bill to sentence protestors to service in Gaza (Ogles, 2024) at a time where Gazans were being killed at an unprecedented rate (United Nations Secretary-General, 2024a).

In November 2023, a highly publicized leaked recording of Jonathan Greenblatt, identified TikTok as a serious ‘problem’ for the Israeli narrative (Narwani, 2023). Unlike past conflicts, horrific war scenes, and potential war crimes, including confessions of gloating Israeli soldiers, were easily accessible in real time, contradicting the highly curated narrative of ‘just war’ by a ‘moral’ army claimed by Israeli politicians. While any co-ordination with Israel was not public, subsequent US legislation effectively banning TikTok in USA was rushed through within months. Senator Pete Ricketts cited justification for the ban

including that “*Pro-Palestinian hashtags*” were “*generating 50 times as many views*” than pro-Israeli ones (Ricketts, 2024).

Yair Lapid called on the press to give primacy to Israeli narratives, claiming that “*If the international media is objective and shows both sides, it serves Hamas*” (Lapid, 2023). This securitization of the Israeli narrative manifested in journalists and their families in Gaza being targeted for assassination or threatened by being named as Hamas. The UN declared Gaza the most dangerous conflict for journalists. Legislation was also introduced to ban Al Jazeera in Israel (OHCHR, 2024). Across the western world, journalists, scholars, and celebrities reportedly lost their jobs for criticizing or questioning Israeli narratives (CJPME Foundation, 2023), possibly as a form of civilian co-optation of Israel’s narrative. The discursive focus on Hamas as a terrorist organization is repeated, emphasized and enforced persistently in Israeli rhetoric and that of her allies, including by highly draconian, arguably undemocratic, counter-terrorism legislation. In the UK this prohibits even reckless expression of opinions that might inadvertently invite moral support for Hamas (Statute Law Database, 2021). This naturally obstructs any debate around the “terrorism” designation and prevents open critical discussion about the conflict. In the UK, the previously legal activist organization Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HT) was quickly proscribed as a terrorist organization after a spokesperson criticized Israel in a TV interview. The proscription also cites HT allegedly referring to “Hamas as ‘heroes’” (Home Office, 2024). The interviewee also reported that he was suspended from his job as a GP in the National Health Service as a result (Rosenberg, 2024). In contrast, most other countries view Hamas in a different light, United Nations

representative Martin Griffiths invited Israeli outrage after pointing out that Hamas is not considered a terrorist group by the UN (United Nations, 2024).

Israel's claim to statehood is emphasized as being non-controversial, despite its occupation and settlements officially deemed unlawful under international law. The oft-cited 'right of self-defence' refers to Article 51 of the UN Charter relating to recognized Nation States (United Nations, 2016) – further reinforcing Israel's claim to statehood and delegitimizing Palestinian resistance and statehood, recognition of which has repeatedly been blocked by US veto during and prior to this conflict. This reinforcement is ironic as, according to UN Special Rapporteur Albanese, the article does not appear to lawfully apply to an occupying force against non-state actors under occupation (International Court of Justice, 2004; Albanese, Francesca Albanese's Address to the National Press Club of Australia, 2023). United Nations representatives that point these inconsistencies out have regularly been accused of antisemitism in Israeli discourse, consistently conflating criticism of Israel with criticism of all Jews. In each instance, the Israeli propaganda is itself a referent object of security, threatened by any counter narrative or objective criticism, secured by silencing dissent through the methods of overt repression and co-optation.

6. CONCLUSION

Mobilizing a nation and allied countries to contribute to unprecedented violence financially, physically, and politically requires vocal unifying leadership, particularly amidst uncertainty, threats from unsympathetic neighbours, internal

political division, and international interference. The use of speech acts has been central to Israeli securitization in the wake of Oct 7th. This securitization saw two distinct simultaneous propaganda battles. Firstly, to invite continued public acceptance for a violent military assault causing horrific human cost, and secondly to preserve the identity of Israel as a peaceful, rules-based, legitimate democratic state, and the foothold of western strategic influence in a hostile Middle East. Israel sought to achieve this through careful narrative control, emphasizing Israel as a state defending itself, and its opponents as barbaric irrational terrorists. Critics, legitimate or otherwise, of either the Israeli state, its policies, war, or intentions were publicly condemned as Hamas-linked and accused of antisemitism, justifying both overt repression and inviting co-optation through censorship, ostracization and indirect repression by willing state allies, particularly in the west.

These speech acts motivated action among willing parties by negating empathy for all antagonists, discouraging timely investigations, interventions, and dissent, as well as forcibly controlling the version of history that is told or accepted as 'truth'. With every repetition, Israel presented Jewish identity as synonymous with Israel, constructing a sense of inviolability of Israeli security. Simultaneously dehumanizing opponents by constructing an identity synonymous with antisemitism and terrorism for Palestinians and for anyone who might aid or morally support them. These are largely recycled grand narratives in use since the birth of Israel, shared with colonial tropes of oriental savagery that are easily imagined in the west. Contemporaneous imagery from the conflict and the dichotomic rhetoric at home indicates ulterior motives behind

the conflict, and unconvinced critics suggested the primary goal of the Israeli assault is the long-term goal of ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian population through forced migration, aiming to secure a Jewish majority in the state. Increasing rejection of Israeli narratives around the world, and bold legal challenges at the ICJ, suggest that the preservation of a sanitized Israeli identity has failed. However, whether out of fear or indifference, neighbouring Arab states declined to significantly intervene despite potential legal obligations under the 'Responsibility to Protect' doctrine (United Nations, 2005). Civilian infrastructure in Gaza has been devastated and rendered unliveable, with little chance of resettlement even after the inevitable end of violence, and Israeli hegemony in the region appears secure. Presuming genocide was the primary goal, to preserve Jewish supremacy and statehood, the securitization strategy appears successful.

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