

## A Holocaust Narrative Analysis in Justifying Israel's Genocide Against Palestine

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**ABSTRACT:** This article discusses why Israel justified their collective fear, which is caused by the Holocaust, as a foundation in the making of their foreign policy, especially towards Palestine. This article uses the combination of political psychology and realism theory in international relations to analyse how the trauma caused by the Holocaust is validated as existential threat. The collective fear would then be a mean of justification for the repressive action which has a big impact on the people of Palestine, such as area restrictions, blockade, all the way to military violence. This article uses descriptive qualitative research method by conducting discourse analysis and library research through academic writing, literatures regarding Israel's foreign policy, as well as news articles regarding Israel's foreign policy. The result of this article shows that even though the fear that is experienced by the people of Israel is caused by a real historical event, using their fear as a mean of justification causes ethical dilemma and challenges towards international law and global justice.

**KEYWORDS:** Holocaust, Israel, collective fear, foreign policy, Palestine, Genocide

### INTRODUCTION

The holocaust is a tragedy that caused a deep trauma within the collective memories of the Jewish people. More than six million Jews were systematically killed by the German Nazis during the World War II period. This tragedy didn't just end the lives of majority of the European Jews, but it also created an existential narration regarding the need for a place of safety and shelter for the Jewish people worldwide. From that background, Israel was established back in 1948 as a national projection whose history has been politically used as a solution against the holocaust trauma. The Holocaust was then used as a symbol of security and as means to preserve their national existence, which then caused the Never Again principal to be used in the Israeli foreign policy (Segev, 1993).

The holocaust trauma wasn't just inherited as a collective memory, but it's also constantly taught in the Israeli education system, military, and diplomacy. Israel's political identity is heavily influenced by their constant fear of the repeat of the holocaust in the form of military attack, international exclusion, or even another mass murder of the Jewish people (Shapira, 2012). This collective fear forms a main mind frame when it comes to facing threats, including from parties like Iran, Hezbollah, and the people of Palestine. From that basis, the Israeli foreign policy is often used as a political strategy and protection for their collective existence which they often thought is being threatened (Lipstadt, 2016).

However, the Israeli foreign policy often triggers aggressive and repressive responds. One good example is the blockade of the Gaza strip that has been happening for more than ten years, which caused one of the worst humanitarian crises that ever happened in that area (Human Rights Watch, 2021). The use of a huge scale of military power against the civilians of Palestine, the limiting of area and humanitarian aid, and illegal settling has triggered international critics (Khalidi, 2020). Organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch had even put together a report that stated that Israel had done an apartheid like action and systematic violence against the people of Palestine, which includes elements that may be categorized as genocidal violence according to the UN Genocide convention in 1945 (Amnesty International, 2022).

In this case, questions of 'To what extent can the narrative of existential fear as a cause of the Holocaust justify Israeli foreign policies that have caused immense suffering to other groups? Can this collective trauma still be justified when the actions taken have crossed moral and international legal boundaries?' arises. These are important questions when such narrations are not only used as a self-defense strategy, but also as a strategy to avoid critics and to justify their systematic violence against the people of Palestine (Butler, 2012).

Based on the background written above, the main question that will be answered in this article is *Why is Israel using the Holocaust Trauma as a basis for their foreign policy which causes them to act repressively towards the people of Palestine?* By using political psychology approach, realism theory in international relations, and discourse analysis against the narration of security and trauma,

## A Holocaust Narrative Analysis in Justifying Israel's Genocide Against Palestine

the goal of this article is to figure out the Israelis' ethical and legal limit in justifying their human rights. This article is not written to deny the truth of what the Jews went through during the World War II Holocaust, but it aims to understand how the holocaust trauma narration is used as a power tool that can potentially go against the principles of human rights and global justice (Alexander, 2004; Walzer, 1977).

Discussions about the role of holocaust in the formation of Israel's foreign policy had become a main focus in many multidisciplinary researches. Tom Segev in his book *The Seventh Million* (1993), wrote that the holocaust isn't just reflected in the personal experiences of the victims, but it is also raised as a national narration in the form of Israel's political identity. Segev (1993) explained that this trauma is applied in Israel's education system, military, and its diplomacy, which then turns it into Israel's ideological foundation for their perception against the outside world, including the people of Palestine. This only strengthens their extreme defensive behavior, which creates a high sensitivity towards threats, even if the threat is non-direct.

On the other hand, Anita Shapira in her book *Israel: A history* (2012), explained that the existential threat post-Holocaust didn't just form Israel's foreign policy and resistance, but it's also a means of justification in its foreign affairs. This narration placed Israel as a victim nation that has a right to protect its people from the possibility of another holocaust against them. In their practice, this narration is often used to justify their pre-emptive military actions and repressive security policy, be it against their neighboring country, like Iran, or against the people of Palestine, which they considered as internal threat. In the field of global diplomacy, this moral position is often used to avoid critics against the human rights violations that they often committed for the sake of national security.

Next, Jeffery C. Alexander (2004), in his theory about cultural trauma, stressed that collective trauma is not a natural response against a tragedy, but is a social and political construction that was formed by certain parties to create a narration collectively. In the case of Israel, political actors and national organizations play a crucial role in forming the meaning behind the Holocaust as an absolute national trauma. Alexander (2004) also stressed that when a trauma is created effectively, it can trigger collective actions, including in terms of public policy and international relations. Thus, the fear that was caused by the Holocaust is not only an emotional expression, but it also became a power tool that influences Israel's foreign policy as a justification for the use of violence,

From the perspective of law and human rights, several reports from international organizations such as Amnesty International (2012) and Human Rights Watch (2021) had questioned the legality and morality of Israel's action against the people of Palestine. These organizations concluded that there are principles in Israel's foreign policy that can be categorized as apartheid and humanitarian violence. Amnesty organization even pressed that the system that's being practiced by Israel in the Palestinian areas is considered a systematic murder with a goal of preserving the power within a racial group above others, which in the structure of international law can be categorized as a late genocide. In this case, the fear narrative that was claimed by Israel can not be used as justification for their collective actions which causes a loss of living rights for the other groups systematically.

By using the literary works mentioned above, the writer can conclude that there are two sides to the main analysis in understanding the relation between the holocaust and Israel's foreign policy: First, an analysis that stresses the importance of understanding the collective trauma as a factor in the formation of identity and defense strategy: and second, a more critical analysis towards the use of collective trauma as a justification tool to give themselves the power to oppress other groups, especially the people of Palestine. This literature review prepares a theoretical base for this article to critically analyze Why the collective fear caused by the Holocaust is being used as a justification tool for Israel's repressive action, and how those ideologies are accepted, questioned, and even challenged in global contemporary discourse.

### PROBLEM FORMULATION AND RESEARCH QUESTION

Collective traumas caused by the holocaust has become an integral part of Israel's national identity and has formed the nation's perspective against external threats. Since its first establishment, Israel uses the holocaust experience as a base of justification for many of their foreign policy and protective security that can also be repressive, especially against the people of Palestine. This established existential fear narration is used to legitimize their military action. Blockade, and restrictions of civil rights, which drew criticism from many groups about how and why Israel Justifies their holocaust driven fear in their foreign policy, and how far that justification can be accounted for ethically and by law, especially when it caused massive loss for the people of Palestine via structural violence. Based on the mentioned background, this research will focus on the following question;

***Why and how does Israel justify their Holocaust driven fear as a basis for foreign policy that results in repressive actions against Palestinians?***

### ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

In order to answer the research question about why and how Israel justifies they Holocaust driven fear as a basis for their foreign policy against the people of Palestine, this article uses multidisciplinary approach that combines political psychology theory, realism theory in international relations, and discourse analysis.

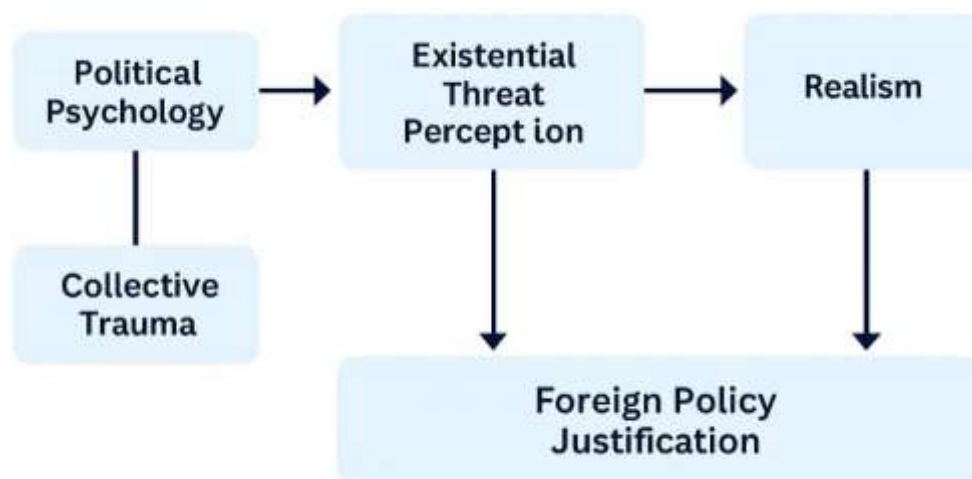
First, **political psychology** is used to explain how collective trauma, like the holocaust, forms the national identity and threat perception of a nation. Jeffrey C. Alexander (2004) inferred that collective trauma is not a direct result of a tragedy, but is a social construction that was formed by political elites and national institutions. In the context of Israel, the holocaust is constructed as a

## A Holocaust Narrative Analysis in Justifying Israel's Genocide Against Palestine

permanent national trauma, which becomes Israel's main reference in viewing external threats and justifying their tough defense policy. Political psychology also helps to understand how collective fear doesn't just appear as an emotional reaction, but also as a political resource and rhetorical strategy to form a sense of legitimacy.

Secondly, the article uses realism theory, especially the concept of security dilemma and existential threat. In the paradigm of realism, a nation is viewed as a rational actor who makes the effort to defend their existence in the anarchic international system. Israel, through the lens of realism, acts according to the high threat calculation against the continuity of the life of the Jews. The holocaust has become a real symbol of the vulnerability of the Jews' existence. Therefore, military actions, such as pre-emptive attacks, blockades, and huge scale operations, is considered as a rational step that is crucial in order to avoid destruction. However, in this context, this article also criticizes the overuse of realism as a justification of violence against other groups that are structurally weak, such as the people of Palestine.

Thirdly, this article uses discourse analysis, especially the Foucaultian approach, to view how the narration of trauma and fear is articulated in a policy, public speech, and concrete national action. Michael Foucault said that power doesn't only operate coercively, but also through the production of knowledge and truth. In this case, the holocaust existential fear narration became a form of "official truth" that is used to frame every threat as justification for their repressive actions. Through discourse analysis, this article will examine how said narration is being repeated, legitimized, and being used to form a domestic and international public perception. By combining those three approaches, the analytical framework allows the writer to not only understand Israel as a country who acts defensively, but also to critic how trauma and fear can be a power tool that legitimizes structural violence. This analysis also uses reflective room against ethical and legal boundaries in using historical analysis as a base for foreign policy justification.



**Image 1. Analytical Model**  
(Reference: Made by the writer, 2025)

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses descriptive-qualitative approach with library study method as the main technic in gathering and analysing the data. The qualitative approach is used because this research focusses on interpretation of meaning, narration, and socio-political construct from a historical trauma, not on quantitative measures (Creswell, 2013). The main aim of this method is to build a deep understanding on how the holocaust driven fear narration is constructed, established, and mobilized in Israel's foreign policy, especially towards the people of Palestine.

The gathering of data is done by doing library research that involves secondary resources such as academic literatures, scientific journal articles, human rights report, official policy documents, and national and international media archives. The main source that's referred to in this article involves literary works by Segev (1993), Alexander (2004), Shapira (2012), and reports from Amnesty International (2022), and Human Rights watch (2021). The search of data also involves Israel's official diplomacy, snippets from their political speech, and foreign and military policy that's been publicly documented.

For the data analysis, this research uses thematic oriented content analysis (Krippendorff, 2018). The aim of this analysis is to identify the repeated narrative pattern involved in the formation of existential fear, threat perception, and legitimation of violent acts through the holocaust discourse. The data are analysed according to three main categories in the analytical framework; (1) Political psychology and collective trauma, (2) Realism logic and the life continuity of a nation, and (3) Narration of power in public discourse.

With these methods the writer hopes that she can give conceptual contributions in building an understanding about how past traumas can shape a person or a group's action today, and how far the moral justification according to history can be accepted in the political ethic and international contemporary law framework.

### DISCUSSION

#### *The Holocaust driven trauma as Israel's political psychological base*

The Holocaust has become a main psychological and identity foundation for the nation of Israel. The collective experience does not only shape an awareness regarding their existential vulnerability, but it also internalized a narration that “the world cannot be handled” and that the Jewish people can only save themselves by using military power and their own sovereignty (Segev, 1993). This trauma can never be fully buried, but will always be relived through education system, national commemoration, and symbols like Yom HaShoah (Holocaust commemoration). In political psychology, this kind of trauma can be categorized as collective trauma that's been established, also known as trauma that is defended to keep living as a political, identity, and moral justification mode (Alexander, 2004).

The fear that comes from the trauma is then interpreted as existential threat to all of Israel. The security situation of the middle east that is full of conflict just strengthens this logic, so that every threat, be from another country like Iran or from another group like Hamas, is positioned in the narration of “the repeat of history”. In many of Israel's diplomatic statements, they keep using the holocaust narration as a warning of the dangers of global indifference, creates some type of moral shield against their military policy critics (Lipstadt, 2016). In this framework, the holocaust driven trauma is not just a collective memory, but also a tool to mobilize political fear and solidarity.

The establishment of this trauma creates a political dynamic that allows Israel to defend their existential narration continuously. When the holocaust is presented as a life memory, it doesn't just strengthen the internal cohesion of the Israeli settlers, but also widens the legitimation too, for their aggressive foreign policy actions. This narration also pushes the formation of a firm boundary between those who are ‘safe’ and those who are ‘potential threats’, strengthening the polarization against the parties constructed as enemy, including the people of Palestine.

#### *Existential Threat Perception and Realist Rationality*

In international relations theory, realism explains about how a nation responds to uncertainty and the anarchy of international system by building strength and widening the defence capacity. Israel is the perfect example for this framework because since its first establishment, this nation has been operating in regional environment that is full of enemies, including threats from neighbouring countries and defence organization from Palestine. The Holocaust driven trauma just strengthens the perception that the threats against Israel are not just military threats, but also existential threats (Shapira, 2012).

This perception is reflected in Israel's foreign policy, which is very militaristic and without compromise. For example, the pre-emptive attack strategy against the nuclear facility in Iraq in 1981 and various military operations in Gaza based on the logic of “if we don't take action now, destruction will come soon” (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007). In the context of the Palestine conflict, this narration of fear is widened to justify the economic blockade against Gaza, West bank settlement policy, and the use of power against civil demonstration. For Israel, these actions are forms of self defence that are legitimate. However, for the international observers, this policy is often unproportional and does not differentiate between armed threat and civil population (Human Rights Watch, 2021). This reality shows how realist logic, which is rooted on the nation's survival instincts, can be used as a means to justify the systematic violence if they are not well handled by the international norms and human rights ethics.

This existential threat narration is also used to strengthen Israel's international legitimation. In various forums, Israel pictures itself as a nation that is surrounded by unwanted powers that wanted to destroy them, and thus, any form of defence mechanism is viewed as valid and reasonable. However, when this narration is defended absolutely, it closes the opportunity for diplomacy, compromise, and peaceful approach, especially in the context of their conflict against Palestine. As a result, the structural violence that they acted on against the civilians of Palestine became a part of their security strategy ghat they think is logical.

#### *The Narration of Holocaust in Producing Power Discourse*

The Foucaultian approach in discourse analysis allows us to see how the Holocaust is used not only as a collective memory, but also as a power mechanism. In the context of Israel, the holocaust driven trauma is repeatedly produced through official narration of the nation to create “a political justification”, that Israel is the permanent victim, and that every threat against it is a form of historical repetition (Butler, 2012). With this narration. A nation forms discursive regime, where their moral position is almost unassailable. This discourse production can be seen in the international medias, foreign policy, and the UN forums, where Israel presses its role as a small nation that is constantly in danger. Critics against Israel's policy are often responded with antisemitism accusation, or are viewed as an effort to weaken Israel's existential legitimation. Amnesty International (2022) noted that the holocaust rhetorics are used to justify Israel's segregate policy against Palestine, including the limiting of mobility, discriminative legal identity system, and unilateral land acquisition.

This discourse also works internally by forming Israeli domestic public opinion that favours more towards repressive policy in the name of security. Therefore, the holocaust tragedy is not just a historical narration, but also a hegemonic tool to silence critics and create a consensus against the use of violence. This discourse production does not only happen in the context of foreign politics, but also in the domestic public discourse and global media. Israel actively forms international opinions through public diplomacy, connecting their threats today with the symbols and language of Holocaust. This crates a shift of focus from the policy that's really

## **A Holocaust Narrative Analysis in Justifying Israel's Genocide Against Palestine**

being acted on against the people of Palestine to the narrative of the preservation of the Jewish nation. In this structure, power works symbolically and ideologically to strengthen status quo and silence critics, be it internally or externally.

### ***Power Imbalance and the Justification of Systemic Violence***

One of the most serious implications from the fear-based justification is the occurrence of structural violence that is difficult to categorize as symmetric conflict. When Israel mobilizes the holocaust driven trauma as a means of justification over the other foreign policies, that action non-directly placed the people of Palestine in a position of collective threat, not as a political entity or human community that has the same rights.

As a result, several actions, which according to the international law is a violation against human rights, such as the destruction of innocent civilians' homes, holding hostages without any legal process, all the way to murdering innocent civilians that they framed as defensive action. Even though according to the international law, violent responds against innocent civilians, even in the context of armed conflict, cannot be justified (Geneva Convention IV, 1949). Reports from Amnesty International (2022) and Human Rights Watch (2021) shows that Israel implemented the apartheid and systematically oppressed the people of Palestine to defend their Jewish ethno-nationalism-based dominion. This power imbalance blurs out the boundaries between defence and oppression. When the fear narration is used to justify structural violation, then we are faced with legitimization risk that in the end is not viewed as a legal or moral issue, but as a valid geopolitical need.

This creates a dangerous dehumanizing condition, where the people of Palestine are no longer needed as legal or moral subject, but as a threat narration. In their practice, policies like limiting movements, land robbery, and neglect towards basic needs of the people of Palestine are done systematically with a security narration as a way to cover a legitimization. In the long term, this condition will create functional apartheid that is perpetuated by historical trauma.

### ***Ethical Dilemma: Between The Right to Survive and The Right to Live***

The main question that comes up from this discussion section is; how far can the narration of fear and trauma be justified as a basis of a political action that causes major loss to other groups? Israel does have the rights to defend its existence as a nation, especially remembering their traumatizing history. However, that right cannot neglect Palestinian people's right for life, dignity, and collective freedom. In political ethics, the legitimate self defence is tied on the principle of proportionality and non-discrimination (Walzer, 1977).

In their practice, there are several of Israel's policy that actually violates those two principles. When the holocaust driven trauma is used as a foundation to justify violence, we are faced with what Judy Butler (2012) called as "instrumentalization of suffering" for political goal. This has not just become a legal issue, but a moral one too. The international world needs to be careful about the narration of 'absolute victim' that Israel used to justify their aggressive action. Trauma cannot be changed into a power licence without boundaries.

Furthermore, this dilemma demands reflection over the role of international community in responding to moral justification that goes over the universal ethics boundaries. When past tragedy is being used as a reason to justify the present-day violence, the global society has a huge responsibility to assert that every trauma, including the trauma of the Palestinians is also valid and worth fighting for. In this case, it is very important to create balance between recognition of history and commitment towards the principles of equal humanity.

## **CONCLUSION AND REFLECTION**

This research shows that the holocaust driven collective trauma is not only a part of Israel's historical memory, but is also constructed as a foundation of their national identity and foreign policy. Through political psychology approach, we can understand that the holocaust narration is produced and defended institutionally as existential trauma that always lives, that shapes the way Israel responds to threats (Alexander, 2004; Bar-Tal, 2011; Segev, 1993). This trauma pushes the nation to build a policy structure that puts a huge stress on security and responds, including in their relations with the people of Palestine.

From the perspective of realism, the logic of life continuity that dominates Israel's foreign policy was built over their mistrust of the international environment and their perception that their existence is constantly under threat (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007; Waltz, 1979; Morgenthau, 1948). This explains why Israel presses prevention strategy, military superiority, and rejection against international institution that they view as biased. However, the justification of this strategy becomes problematic when it's being implemented by the people of Palestine, who structurally is in a weak position and does not have equal power to fight against Israel militarily or diplomatically (Pappé, 2006; Khalidi, 2020).

Discourse analysis strengthens findings that the narration of holocaust is used as a production tool for power. Israel, through education system, media, and international diplomacy, builds a self-image as a permanent victim and uses the trauma to defend themselves from global critics (Butler, 2012; Foucault, 1978; Zertal, 2005). This narration works hegemonically, forming "solitary justification" that every fight against Israel is an extension of antisemitism or existential threats. Amnesty International (2022) and Human Rights Watch (2021) even stated that this justification is being used to support the segregate legal system and policies that shares similarities with the apartheid system against the people of Palestine.



## A Holocaust Narrative Analysis in Justifying Israel's Genocide Against Palestine

Thus, to gain critical understanding and multidisciplinary over relations between history, identity, and power, one needs to read back about the Israel-Palestine conflict fairly and ethically. Israel has the choice to process their trauma into a transformative power for peace, not as a power resource to justify violence. International communities also has to confirm that the humanitarian principle is not only valid for the past victims, but also for the victims of the present-day.

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