Redefining the Genocidal Narrative:

A Critical Discourse Analysis of the 2024 ICJ Speeches in the Genocide Case against Israel

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Abstract

This thesis critically examines the language employed in the 2024 International Court of Justice (ICJ) speeches concerning the genocide case against Israel, focusing on how these discourses construct a narrative of genocide within the Israel-Palestine conflict. Through a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of the speeches delivered by the South African legal counsels, the study explores how language is used to humanize Palestinians and portray their victimization. The research is grounded in the definitions of genocide as outlined in the Genocide Convention and operationalizes the concepts of individualization, victimization, and humanization to highlight the distinct language used that conveys the personal and collective suffering of Palestinians. Data for this study were collected from official transcripts and the video recording of the ICJ proceedings. The analysis involved both inductive and deductive coding, facilitated by the #LancsBox software, to uncover themes, linguistic patterns, and discursive strategies. The findings reveal that the South African legal counsels utilized specific nouns, adjectives, and verbs to create an emotional connection with individual Palestinian victims, contrasting sharply with the dehumanizing language used by Israeli officials. This study highlights key themes such as the juxtaposition of humanization versus dehumanization and the portrayal of victimization versus victimizing. The conclusions drawn from this analysis underscore the power of language in shaping legal and political narratives. The strategic linguistic choices made by the South African legal counsels were pivotal in framing Israel's actions as genocidal and in advocating for the rights of the Palestinian people. This thesis contributes to a broader understanding of how legal discourse influences public perception and the role of international legal institutions in conflict resolution, particularly within the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Keywords: Genocide, victimization, humanization, dehumanization, Israel-Palestine conflict

Redefining the Genocidal Narrative: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the 2024 ICJ

Speeches in the Genocide Case against Israel

The Israel-Palestine conflict stands as one of the most enduring and complex geopolitical challenges of our time characterized by deep-seated historical, political, and cultural tensions. Within this contentious arena, the discourses surrounding allegations of genocide against Israel have recently taken center stage in the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Within this multifaceted landscape, the question of genocide allegations against Israel has become a focal point, garnering international attention and legal scrutiny.

The Israel-Palestine conflict traces its roots to the mid-20th century, with competing national aspirations and territorial claims. The displacement of Palestinian Arabs and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 laid the foundation for a protracted struggle marked by a history of territorial disputes, identity conflicts, and conflicting historical narratives. Scholars have extensively examined the historical complexities and power dynamics shaping this conflict, providing valuable insights into its enduring nature.

This research adopts Critical Discourse Analysis to analyze the ICJ speeches presented during the Genocide Case against Israel in January 2024. Through an exploration of language and discourse in these speeches, this study aims to uncover how political actors strategically employ different linguistic tools to shape the perception of Israel's culpability for alleged acts of genocide.

An integral part of any critical analysis requires delving into the broader context of the Israel-Palestine conflict and recognizing the intricate interplay of historical narratives, power dynamics, and international legal frameworks. By analyzing the speeches delivered at the ICJ, the research aims to redefine the understanding of genocide in the context of the Israel-Palestine

conflict. This research is guided by the premise that the discourse surrounding the Genocide Case against Israel plays an important role in shaping international perceptions and responses to the Israel-Palestine conflict.

To address this challenge, the proposed research will address the following research question:

How do the discourses used in the ICJ speeches construct a narrative of genocide in the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict?

This will be further examined through two sub-questions:

1. How does the language used in the speeches contribute to the humanization of Palestinians?

2. How does the language used in the speeches portray the victimization of Palestinians?

Literature Review

The exploration of political discourse through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has provided profound insights into how language is employed to convey ideology, exert power, and shape social realities. This literature review examines a range of studies that utilize CDA to analyze political speeches, each offering a unique perspective on how political leaders use language to construct identities, manipulate ideologies, and influence public perception, providing a comprehensive overview of the intersection between language, power, and ideology in political discourse.

In their study, Sharififar and Rahimi (2015) focus on the linguistic spin in political speeches by Obama and Rouhani at the UN in September 2013, using Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework. The research highlights how discourse analysis operates on both micro and macro levels, emphasizing that "discourses are interpreted as communicative events because discourses between people convey messages beyond that of what is said directly" (Sharififar & Rahimi, 2015, p. 343). The study underscores the importance of examining both linguistic structures and the social contexts they operate within, asserting that texts serve as tools for understanding meaning and social processes. As Sharififar and Rahimi (2015) explain, "CDA investigates how social power is misused and how text and talk represent, procreate, and resist dominance and inequality in the social and political context" (p. 343). This framework integrates the analysis of language, discourse practices, and discourse events, providing a comprehensive approach to understanding political language.

Mahdiyan et al. (2013) adopt a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach, with a specific emphasis on Fairclough's framework and Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), to explore the relationship between language and ideology in translation. Their study aims

to uncover the underlying ideological assumptions that translators may impose, particularly in political discourse. As Mahdiyan et al. (2013) note, "In political discourse, words are at the service of transferring the power or ideologies of one group or nation to the other" (p. 36). The research emphasizes the role of linguistic choices in reflecting a text producer's ideological affiliations, which can establish unequal power relations. Moreover, the study highlights that "the objective of a political discourse analysis, which adopts critical goals, is to denaturalize ideologies" (Mahdiyan et al., 2013, p. 36); thus, revealing the implicit power dynamics in spoken and written discourse.

Bayram (2010) discusses the role of language in the realization of identity and background in political discourse, using the example of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos. The study is grounded in Norman Fairclough's assumptions in CDA, which examine how language can create and reflect power dynamics. Bayram (2010) explains that "language has a key role in the exchange of values in social life and transforming power into right and obedience into duty" (p. 27). The research delves into how language choices vary based on the speaker's identity, the context, and the intended audience. Bayram (2010) further asserts that "a linguistic analysis of political discourse in general, and political speeches in particular, can be most successful when it relates the details of linguistic behavior to political behavior" (p. 31), emphasizing the interconnectedness of language and politics.

In their study, Almahasees and Mahmoud (2022) analyze the persuasive strategies employed by King Abdullah II of Jordan in his speeches at various international forums between 2007 and 2021. The research adopts strategies such as intertextuality, creativity, and metaphor to uncover how language is used to achieve political goals. As Almahasees and Mahmoud (2022)

point out, "Politicians use language to convince others, mold others' thoughts, and achieve particular political goals" (p. 2). The study emphasizes the role of intertextuality, where political leaders link their speech with other texts to support cultural, social, religious, and historical contexts. This approach enhances the persuasive power of political discourse, as it allows leaders to "borrow from other texts to enhance the strength of the text" (Almahasees & Mahmoud, 2022, p. 8).

In her research, Abu Khaled (2020) investigates the manipulation of power and ideology in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's speech at the United Nations General Assembly in 2014. The study employs CDA to expose how language is used to justify political actions and ideologies. Abu Khaled (2020) identifies various topoi, or justifications, used in the speech, such as the topos of humanitarianism, which is employed to depict Hamas as an outlaw organization while portraying Israel as a law-abiding state. As she notes, "Netanyahu's speech uses the topos of humanitarianism to argue that Hamas's actions do not conform to human rights" (Abu Khaled, 2020, p. 38). The research highlights the strategic use of language to frame social actors in particular roles, with Hamas as the active criminal and Israel as the passive victim.

Furthermore, Cohen (2015) provides an empirical paradigm for understanding the dehumanization of Palestinians by Israeli ex-soldiers through the analysis of their testimonies. The study combines psycholinguistic and psychoanalytic tools to examine how language is used to dehumanize enemy members, particularly in the context of military occupation. Cohen (2015) explains that "dehumanization is conceptualized as a set of either non-human or sub-human attributes that are tightly associated with enemy members" (p. 246). The research underscores the psychological mechanisms that allow soldiers to view Palestinians as inferior and dangerous, which in turn justifies violent actions. As Cohen (2015) points out, "the implicit dehumanization

of Palestinian women may be viewed as an attempt to suppress the extension of human attributes to them in order to handle and contain them as inferior and potentially dangerous objects" (p. 268).

The study by Maalej and Zibin (2024) investigates the use of animal metaphors in the context of the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine, particularly focusing on how such metaphors are employed to justify violence and discrimination. The research highlights the role of metaphors in shaping perceptions of the out-group and legitimizing inhumane actions. As Maalej and Zibin (2024) argue, "the deliberate use of such metaphors by Israeli officials and sympathizers serves to portray Palestinians as less than human, thereby justifying discriminatory treatment and violence against them" (p. 16). The study emphasizes the power of language in constructing social realities and influencing public perceptions of the conflict.

Rababah and Hamdan (2019) conducted a contrastive CDA of speeches by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, focusing on the Gaza War of 2014. The study examines how linguistic choices reflect ideological positions and construct the in-group and out-group dynamics. Rababah and Hamdan (2019) note that "politicians tend to emphasize all meanings that are positive about themselves and their own group, while highlighting all meanings that are negative about the Other" (p. 179). The research highlights the role of transitivity structures in encoding these ideological positions, with the in-group presented as victims and peace seekers, while the out-group is depicted as aggressive and destructive. This aligns with Van Dijk's "Ideological Square," where positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation are central strategies.

Finally, Jaspal and Coyle (2014) explore the discursive construction of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in speeches by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime

Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during the 2011 UN state membership bid. The study highlights how both leaders employ discourses of victimhood and threat to bolster their respective positions and perpetuate negative intergroup dynamics. As Jaspal and Coyle (2014) explain, "discourses of victimhood and threat serve to bolster and perpetuate these negative intergroup dynamics" (p. 211). The research underscores the use of metaphors and other rhetorical devices to construct the in-group as innocent and nonviolent while portraying the out-group as aggressive and threatening. This discursive strategy is consistent with Van Dijk's observation that "in-group benevolence tends to be accentuated, while in-group negativity is completely attenuated" (Jaspal & Coyle, 2014, p. 199).

The concept of victimhood in political discourse is complex and multifaceted, heavily influenced by the perspectives of those who employ, claim, or reject the term. Meredith (2009) offers a comprehensive definition, stating that "a 'victim' is therefore commonly understood as someone who is or has been affected, injured or killed as a result of a crime or accident, or who has been cheated or tricked" (p. 260). This definition acknowledges the varied ways in which victimization can occur—whether directly or indirectly, intentionally or accidentally. In her study, she cautions that labeling an individual as a victim represents just one aspect of their identity, potentially overshadowing other dimensions such as nationality, profession, cultural or religious beliefs, and familial roles (Meredith, 2009). Moreover, Strobl (2004) emphasizes that recognizing individuals as victims is crucial for ensuring they receive the appropriate recognition, empathy, and support within the social context.

While the existing literature provides valuable insights into various aspects of the Israel-Palestine conflict regarding victimization and dehumanization, there is a noticeable gap in the literature concerning a detailed analysis of the political discourse within the ICJ regarding

genocide. Moreover, the nuanced understanding of victimhood in these studies highlights the need for a critical examination of how victim identities are constructed and mobilized within political discourse, a topic that has not been fully explored in the current literature. Hence, this study aims to fill this gap by conducting a detailed examination of the language and discourse in the ICJ speeches related to the Genocide Case against Israel in January 2024.

Methodology

This section outlines the research method and operationalizes key terms. It also explains how the collected data is analyzed and the ethical considerations employed in the study. It provides a roadmap for how the research questions are answered.

Research Method and Operationalization of Key Terms

The focus of this study is on the ICJ speeches related to the Genocide Case against Israel that took place on January 11, 2024. Moreover, the participants of this study are the six legal counsels who presented the South African case against Israel. They provided an overview of the risk of genocidal acts against Palestinians and the perpetual vulnerability to acts of genocide, examined Israel's alleged genocidal intent, emphasized prima facie jurisdiction, discussed the various Palestinian rights under threat, presented the argument of potential irreparable harm against Palestinians, and presented the foundation of ordering provisional measures.

The corpus of this study has been collected from the various speeches presented at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) by the South African committee regarding the Genocide Case against Israel. The speeches used for this study were sourced from the official transcripts and records of the ICJ speeches on January 11, 2024, which are accessible on the ICJ's official website. The study also made use of the video of the case hearing, which is accessible on YouTube.

This study acknowledges that there has been a lot of debate and controversy regarding the definition of *Genocide*, mainly because it has proven to be very difficult to define and operationalize. Levine & Cheyfitz's (2017) work on the legal dimensions of *genocide* allegations has shed light on the challenges and controversies surrounding the use of the term in the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Hence, this study will use the definition of the Convention on the

Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Genocide Convention), since the legal counsels refer to it while arguing their case. Article II of this convention defines *Genocide* as:

"Any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group."

This study understands that there have been a lot of disputes regarding a single definition for the concept of *individualization* due to the complexity of the term and its multifaceted components. Thus, this study will base the definition of *individualization* on Howard's *individualization thesis* which explains that human lives have been separated from the constraints of family, tradition, and social collectives (2007). This definition creates a separation between an individual and their surroundings, which allows individuals to take greater control of their own lives.

Language is a powerful tool for both reflecting and shaping social realities. According to Taylor (2013), *language* is not merely a neutral medium for conveying information; rather, it plays a critical role in constructing and negotiating meanings within social interactions. Taylor emphasizes that "*language* is constitutive, meanings are socially derived and also situated, negotiated and co-constructed" (p. 85). This means that the way language is used can reinforce social norms, legitimize certain power structures, and obscure or rationalize inequalities (Taylor, 2013, p. 77). In this study, *language* will be analyzed to uncover the underlying social and cultural resources that are recycled and modified in the ICJ speeches to construct particular

narratives about the Israel-Palestine conflict. The analysis will focus on how specific word choices and grammatical structures serve to perpetuate or challenge prevailing social interpretations of *language* (Taylor, 2013, p. 4).

Discourses are foundational elements in constructing and shaping social reality, particularly through the use of language. Lyons and Coyle (2007) define *discourses* as "sets of linguistic material that have a degree of coherence in their content and organization and which perform constructive functions in broadly defined social contexts" (p. 106). These *discourses* not only describe social phenomena but also actively construct them by offering different perspectives on objects, events, or situations. By analyzing *discourses*, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of how social life and interactions are linguistically constructed (Lyons & Coyle, 2007, p. 104). Operationally, in this study, *discourses* are identified through the systematic examination of texts, particularly the ICJ speeches. The focus will be on how these *discourses* provide subject positions and constitute social realities, thus revealing the power dynamics and ideologies at play in the Israel-Palestine conflict (Lyons & Coyle, 2007, p. 130).

Humanization is understood as a process that emphasizes the dignity, individuality, and complexity of human beings, often in contrast to its opposite, dehumanization. As Radloff et al. (2016) suggest, "*humanization* exists simultaneously in two dimensions: individual and collective" (p. 2000). Individual *humanization* involves the ongoing development of a person's capacities and talents across various dimensions of life, while collective *humanization* is revealed by empowering individuals to make decisions (Radloff et al., 2016, p. 2000). In political contexts, *humanization* can be seen as a counter to dehumanization, where opponents are often portrayed with 'subhuman' or 'animal-like' characteristics, reinforcing an 'enemy image' (Ahmed & Zahoor, 2020, p. 86). In this study, *humanization* will be operationalized by

examining how the ICJ speeches use language to emphasize the individuality and personal experiences of Palestinians, thereby countering the dehumanizing narratives constructed by Israel.

Victimization refers to the suffering and pain experienced by individuals or groups as a result of actions beyond their control, particularly in the context of war and conflict. Jauković (2002) defines *victimization* as "human suffering, i.e. as feeling pain and anguish caused by destruction or jeopardizing human values by acts which are beyond the control of victims" (p. 109). In the context of war, *victimization* is marked by widespread violence and the deprivation of essential human values, often resulting in long-lasting consequences (Jauković, 2002, p. 114). This study will operationalize *victimization* by analyzing the ICJ speeches for linguistic patterns that portray Palestinians as victims of such violence. The focus will be on how these speeches describe the impact of the conflict on Palestinians and how Israel contributes to this process of *victimization*; in other words, highlighting the ongoing suffering and powerlessness of the Palestinians (Jauković, 2002, p. 113).

Analysis of Data

A systematic coding process was applied to the data to identify recurring themes, linguistic patterns, and discursive strategies. This process involved both inductive and deductive coding. Inductive coding was utilized to identify emerging themes and patterns directly from the data without preconceived categories, allowing for a grounded and data-driven understanding of the discourse. The inductive coding was conducted using the Corpus Tool #LancsBox v. 4.x. (2018), which facilitated the analysis by highlighting the frequency of the word 'genocide,' identifying its collocations within the speeches, and recording the frequency of other recurring words. A color-coding system (Appendix) was employed to distinguish references to

Palestinians, references to Israel/Israelis, active and passive verbs, adjectives reflecting the grave impact of Israel's actions, and listings of three and four items.

For deductive coding, the research utilized predefined themes inspired by the literature review and the sub-research questions of the study. Specifically, the themes of 'Humanization of Palestinians' and 'Victimization of Palestinians" were used to analyze the data. This dual approach ensured a comprehensive analysis that integrated both emergent insights from the data and theoretical frameworks grounded in existing research and the study's objectives.

The analysis is guided by the principles of CDA to explore the language and rhetoric in the ICJ speeches and to understand the power dynamics at play between the conflicting sides. Charteris-Black points out that CDA analysts believe that social power relationships can be determined through the language used, which reflects the abuse of social power by a given social group (2018). He (2018) explains that "language represents a state of affairs 'in such a way that it either reflects, more or less closely, the social relations of the participants, or it projects – more or less plausible – versions of such a relation" (p. 88). The choice to focus on CDA is grounded in the belief that language is not merely a tool for communication but a potent instrument that reflects, reinforces, and sometimes challenges the power structures and ideologies underlying political conflicts.

Ethical Considerations

As the data are publicly available ICJ speeches, no direct interaction with participants is involved. However, proper citation and acknowledgment of sources are maintained.

Research Findings and Discussion

In their speeches, the legal counsels of the South African Committee used language to portray the gravity of the situation and clarify why Israel's actions are considered genocidal. The legal counsels based their analysis of the situation in occupied Palestine on the different articles of the Genocide Convention. In other words, the arguments presented by each member of the South African Committee gave a complete visualization of the serious bodily and mental harm inflicted on the Palestinians as well as the destructive conditions imposed on them. Additionally, the arguments illustrated the clear intent of Israel to impose different measures that led to the annihilation of the livelihood of Palestinians, mainly in Gaza.

The findings identify the importance of nouns, adjectives, and verbs in influencing how the process of genocide is represented. Charteris-Black (2018) clarifies this point by mentioning that "when analysing syntax, we might consider whether language is dense or simple, the extent to which agency is concealed by the use of noun forms, and the passive voice in preference to verb forms and the active voice" (p. 95). Moreover, a critical discourse analysis reveals two overlaying themes that embody the speeches and that answer the two sub-research questions of the study: Humanization vs. Dehumanization of Palestinians and Victimization vs. Victimizing of Palestinians.

Humanization vs. Dehumanization of Palestinians

This section explores the first research sub-question, which investigates how the language used in the speeches contributes to the humanization of Palestinians. There is a clear distinction between the terminology used by the South African Committee when discussing matters related to the Palestinians versus the Israelis. The legal counsels used terminology that reflected the

harm inflicted on individual Palestinian entities rather than on a collective Palestinian population.

One of the distinct methods employed was using the word 'Palestinian' as an adjective to describe distinct individualistic entities that were affected by the actions of Israel. The nouns being described by the adjective 'Palestinian' are divided into three categories: human, physical, and concepts. By doing so, the legal counsels presented the audience with a deeper emotional connection with the distinct individual victims of Israel's crimes. For example, instead of merely saying that Palestinian family members were affected by the war crimes, the legal counsels replaced the general term 'members' with Palestinian 'husbands, fathers, mothers, children, sons, etc.' (Table 1.1).

Table 1.1

Usage of the adjective 'Palestinian' – human category

Adjective	Object of Adjective	Frequency	Category
	people	27	
	population	5	
	children	5	
	women	4	
	civilians	3	
	men	3	
	[national, racial, and ethnical] group	2	
Palestinian	group	1	*Human*
	[newborn] babies	1	
	[five-year-old] baby	1	
	infants	1	
	boys	2	
	families	1	
	husbands	1	
	fathers	1	
	sons	1	

elderly	1	
teachers	1	
academics	1	
deans	1	
scholars	1	
[university] students	1	
[school] children	1	
pastor	1	

Charteris-Black (2018) points out that "The naming of a social group entails some form of social differentiation" (p. 112). The findings show that the Palestinians were differentiated when they were categorized into different social groups, rather than referring to them as a collective group. This differentiation supported the humanization process of the Palestinians and reminded the audience that different social groups were being displaced, injured, and even killed.

Similarly, different physical locations were also described in detail like towns, villages, bookshops, libraries, hospitals, and refugee camps rather than just mentioning a general geographical location like Gaza (Table 1.2).

Table 1.2

Usage of the adjective 'Palestinian' – physical category

Adjective	Object of Adjective	Frequency	Category
	territories	2	
	territory	1	
	state	1	
	towns	2	
Palestinian	villages	1	*Physical*
	schools	1	
	universities	1	
	bookshops	1	
	libraries	1	

hospitals	2		
refugee camps	1		

Jauković elaborates that the impact of war conflicts does not only affect individuals and different family entities "but also the communities in which people live, such as the cities and villages" (2002, p. 115). Moreover, mentioning specific physical entities that are being targeted by the Israeli forces, also contributes to the humanization of these Palestinian communities.

Likewise, different abstract concepts were also associated with the adjective 'Palestinian' to create a better connection with the individual entities being affected by Israel's actions, for example, homes, rights, life, etc. (Table 1.3).

Table 1.3

Usage of the adjective 'Palestinian' – concepts category

Adjective	Object of Adjective	Frequency	Category
	life	8	
	homes	3	
Palestinian	rights	3	*Concepts*
	[child] killings	1	
	infrastructure	1	

This individualization of Palestinians created a humanization process that highlighted the human entities that were affected by the actions of Israel and the damage inflicted on their surroundings and lives. Charteris-Black (2018) elaborates on the importance of social context by mentioning that it is "the identity of the relative social positions of speaker and addressee, and the role of language in constructing these relationships" (p. 90). The legal counsels utilize language to create a stronger relationship with the audience and maintain credibility while

presenting their arguments. Moreover, Professor Dugard, a Senior Counsel and Advocate of the High Court of South Africa, clarifies South Africa's reasoning behind submitting a case against Israel by mentioning that "It is in terms of this [Genocide] Convention, dedicated to saving humanity, that South Africa brings this dispute before the Court" (ICJ Rep, 2024). Van Dijk (2015) points out that "the victims or targets of such power are usually the public or citizens at large, the 'masses'" (p.478). Hence, the South African committee strongly believes that the actions performed by Israel amount to genocide, which has led to the committee's submission of an application for provisional measures to protect the 'masses' that are being negatively impacted by this conflict.

Conversely, the Israeli government and military officials used dehumanizing terminology when describing Palestinians. First, there was a direct association between the Hamas group and the Palestinians as a whole, rather than distinguishing between these two entities. For example, there are many instances where Israeli officials referred to the Palestinians as 'both Hamas and civilians', 'Hamas and the residents of Gaza', and 'Hamas and civilians' (Table 2.1). In other words, this association included all of the innocent Palestinians – who have not participated in the conflict between Hamas and Israel – as part of the *enemy* that Israel was targeting. This association contributed to the dehumanization of Palestinians by considering the innocent lives merely collateral damage for the ongoing conflict.

Table 2.1

Israeli reference to Palestinians – Hamas association

Word/phrase	Frequency	Association
terrorists	2	*All Palestinians are associated Hamas*
ISIS	1	
Both Hamas and civilians	1	

Hamas and the residents of Gaza	1
Hamas and civilians	1
people of children killers and slaughterers	1

Van Dijk (2015) explains that "if controlling the contexts and structures of text and talk is a first major form of the exercise of power, controlling people's minds through such discourse is an indirect but fundamental way to reproduce dominance and hegemony" (p.472). Israeli officials succeed in controlling the minds of the soldiers and fighters who are carrying out the war crimes by convincing them that all Palestinians are the *enemy*. Hence, this association has led to the dehumanization of Palestinians.

In addition, in different instances, Israeli officials used degrading terms and expressions to refer to all of the Palestinians, such as 'terrorists', 'human animals', 'murderers and human animals', 'these animals', and 'people of children killers and slaughterers' (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2

Israeli reference to Palestinians – animal association

Word/phrase	Frequency	Association
human animals	4	
murderers and human animals	1	*Association of Palestinians to animals*
these animals	1	

Ahmed & Zahoor (2020) emphasize that "dehumanization is often more common and visible in politics, where [politicians] openly associate their opponents with 'subhuman' or 'animal-like' characteristics (p. 86). Hence, Israeli officials contribute to the dehumanization of Palestinians by associating all Palestinians with 'subhuman' characteristics.

Finally, Israeli officials created a direct link between the Palestinians and the Amalekites – who are described in the Hebrew Bible as the enemy nation of the Israelites – by urging soldiers to "remember what Amalek has done to you". The officials insinuated that the current-day Palestinians are the same enemies of the nation of Israelites that existed in the 12th century BCE. The Israeli officials used similar expressions, such as 'seed of Amalek', 'Amalek seed', and 'Amalekites' (as seen in Table 5) while urging the soldiers to destroy different villages in Gaza. These expressions added to the dehumanization of the Palestinians through the Israeli lens.

Table 2.3

Israeli reference to Palestinians – enemy association

Word/phrase	Frequency	Association
enemy	5	
- the woman is an enemy		
- the baby is an enemy		*All Palestinians are associated with being the enemy of Israel*
- the pregnant woman is an enemy		
Amalek	4	
seed of Amalek	1	
Amalek seed	1	
Amalekites	1	

Charteris-Black explains that CDA allows the observation and recording of key details that take place around different discourses (2018). In other words, it is important to understand the context of the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine. Van Dijk (2015) elaborates on this by mentioning that "CDA especially focuses on the ways discourse structures may influence specific mental models and generic representations of the recipients, and especially how beliefs may thus be manipulated" (p.473). This association between the Palestinians and the Amalek revealed the Israeli officials' unjustified beliefs and perspectives regarding the Palestinian people

as the enemy, even though the Amalek existed centuries before the establishment of the state of

Israel. Additionally, Wilson (2015) explains that "representations can also be reinforced by the

repeated use of descriptions, where such repetition helps embed specific interpretations [and]

once [these] representations are established they are hard to shift" (p.778). Hence, by repeating

the Amalek representations to the soldiers and fighters, Israeli officials succeeded in embedding

the idea that all Palestinians are the enemy; thus, contributing to the dehumanization of the

innocent Palestinians.

Furthermore, when the legal counsels resorted to using the word 'Palestinian' as a noun

(Table 3), it was mostly associated with the ones who were physically present in the Gaza Strip;

in other words, the ones who were being displaced, injured, and killed by Israel. Hence, this

association between the noun 'Palestinians' and the prepositional phrase 'in Gaza' situates the

individuals in a geographical location that is directly linked to the genocidal acts of Israel.

Table 3

Usage of the noun 'Palestinians'

Noun	Phrase/clause following the noun	Frequency	Phrase/clause Category
Palestinians	ø	36	ø
	in Gaza	32	Prepositional phrase
	who are still in Gaza	1	Relative clause
	living in Gaza	1	Noun phrase

In addition, in the rare cases where the noun 'Palestine' was used (Table 4), it was also

associated with an individualistic notion relating to the people (n=2) or to a physical place (n=1).

This reinforces the individualization of Palestinians, by linking the state to its individual entities.

In the case where no defining phrases were linked to the word 'Palestine' (n=3), the legal

counsels used the term to indicate a geographical area.

Table 4

Usage of the noun 'Palestine'

Word/phrase	Frequency
Palestine	3
people of Palestine	2
areas of Palestine	1

Conversely, the legal counsels point out that the Israeli government and military officials

collectively referred to Palestinians rather than identifying the individualistic entities being

targeted. Even though in many instances these officials stressed that they were only targeting

Hamas and the 'terrorist' entities in Palestine. For example, the Israeli officials in many of their

quoted statements referred to the Palestinians as 'Gazans', 'entire population in Gaza', 'all of

Khan Younis and this house', 'entire Gaza', 'all of Gaza', 'everyone', and 'every house'. In other

words, the Israeli officials consciously chose to eradicate all Palestinians rather than singling out

the 'dangerous' entities (Table 5).

Table 5

Israeli's collective reference to Palestinians

Word/phrase	Frequency	Association
Gazans	1	
all Gazans	1	
entire population in Gaza	1	*Collectively referring to Palestinians*
all of Khan Younes and this house	1	
entire Gaza	1	

All of Gaza	1
everyone	1
every house	1

Fairclough explains that *participants* are the entities who are involved in a specific process, distinguishing between *actors* ('doers' of actions) and *patients* ('recipients' of the actions) (2010). In this context, the *participants* at play are Israel – representing the *actors* of actions – and the Palestinians – representing the *patients*. Additionally, Charteris-Black (2018) explains that "an agent can either be 'foregrounded' – brought to the front of our attention; or 'backgrounded' – that is, pushed further from the attention of the reader" (p.109). The findings show that the legal counsels used this strategy to stress the dehumanization process done by Israel and that was inflicted on the Palestinians.

On the other hand, the legal counsels resorted to using terminology linked to 'institutions' when talking about Israel. Charteris-Black (2018) elaborates that "When nouns are used to refer to the participants, the identity of agents can either be revealed explicitly by using their names or concealed by using a collective noun that refers to their institutional role or profession or nationality" (p. 111). The counsels mostly used the noun 'Israel' (n=110), the noun phrase 'state of Israel' (n=21), and the noun phrase 'government of Israel' (n=5) to link the genocidal actions with the state institution (Table 6.1). By doing so, the legal counsels create a larger emotional distance between the audience and the individual entities in Israel and they focus on the collective state that is inflicting harm on the Palestinians. Even when individual actors were mentioned in the speeches, they fell under the different institutional categories referred to in the speeches (Table 6.1). For example, the Prime Minister, the President, the Minister of Defense, the Minister of National Security, the Minister of Energy & Infrastructure, and members of the Knesset all fall under the 'State Institution' – linked to the collective Israel. The legal counsels

also used the possessive noun 'Israel's' and the adjective 'Israeli' to discuss different actors that

are part of bigger institutions, mainly the 'State Institution' and 'Military Institution' (Tables 6.1,

6.2, and 6.3).

Table 6.1

References to Israel – State Institutions

Word/Phrase	Frequency	Institutional Category
Israel	110	
State of Israel	21	
Government of Israel	5	
Government	1	*State Institution*
Embassy of Israel	1	
Israeli government	2	
Israeli cabinet	1	
Israeli Knesset	1	
Israeli leaders	1	
Israeli authorities	2	
Israeli officials	1	
Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu	1	
President	2	
Prime Minister	1	
Members of the Knesset (MKs)	1	
lawmakers	1	
senior politicians	1	*Individual actors linked*
qua Prime Minister, Mr Netanyahu	1	*to the State Institution*
Prime Minister Netanyahu	1	
Mr Netanyahu	2	
Deputy Speaker of the Knesset, Israel's Parliament	1	
Defense Minister Yoav Gallant	1	
The Minister of Energy and Infrastructure, Israel Katz	1	
Heritage Minister, Amichai Eliyahu	1	
President Isaac Herzog	1	
The Minister of National Security	1	
MK Moshe Saada	1	

Israeli flag	1	
Israel's campaign	1	
Israel's institutionalized régime of discriminatory laws, policies, and practices	1	*Other entities linked to the State Institution*
leadership of Israel	1	

Mayr (2015) explains that the power of sovereign and state institutions is "diffused and dispersed [and it] is characterized by a complex and continuously evolving web of social and discursive relations (p.759). By linking Israel to state institutions, the legal counsels also revealed how these institutions could abuse this power to oppress and control the Palestinians.

Furthermore, different noun phrases using the terms 'Israel's' and 'Israeli' can be directly linked to the Military Institution. The legal counsels use individual entities to reflect different aspects of this institution, for example, 'Israel's killing', 'Israel's attacks', 'Israel's military orders', and 'Israeli strike', etc. are linked to the activities associated with the Military Institution; 'Israeli army', 'Israeli commanders of the army', 'Israeli army reservist Ezra Yachin', 'Israeli forces', 'Israeli soldier Yishai Shalev', etc. are linked to the personnel associated with the Military Institution; and finally, 'Israeli army vehicle', 'Israeli weaponry and bombs', 'Israeli settlements', etc. are linked to other elements associated with the Military Institution (Table 6.2).

Table 6.2

References to Israel – Military Institutions

Word/Phrase	Frequency	Institutional Category
Israel's 75-year apartheid, 56-year occupation and 16-year siege	1	
Israel's military attack	1	
Israel's killing	1	*Activities associated with the Military Institution*
Israel's infliction	1	
Israel's attacks	1	
Israel's first evacuation order	1	

Israel's military assault	1	
Israel's military activity	1	
Israel's military operations	3	
Israel's continuing operation	1	
Israeli strike	1	
Israeli army's actions	1	
Israeli military orders	1	
Israeli Army Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT)	1	
The commanders of the army	1	
Israeli army Commander Yair Ben David	1	
Israeli army reservist Ezra Yachin	1	
Israeli army	1	
Israeli soldiers	3	*Personnel associated*
Israeli soldier Yishai Shalev	1	*with the Military*
Senior political and military officials	1	*Institution*
the army	2	
Defense Force	1	
Israeli forces	3	
Israeli Defense Forces	3	
Israeli armed forces	1	
soldier(s)	4	
troops	1	
Israeli army vehicle	1	
Israeli weaponry and bombs	1	*Other elements*
Israeli settlements	1	*associated with the*
Israeli army fatigues	1	*Military Institution*
Israeli declared "safe routes"	1	

Mayr (2015) points out that "authority in institutions is the rational extension of a social actor's legitimate role and power. In other words, power needs to be legitimate in order to be accepted by subordinates or the public" (p.758). The high frequency of references to elements associated with the military institution suggests that the authority of the Israeli institutions is forced onto the Palestinians rather than being '*accepted*'.

Similarly, the legal counsels also used different expressions that could be associated with both the Military and/or State institutions, for instance, 'Israel's violations', 'Israeli governmental and military officials', 'Israeli governmental and military officials', etc.

Table 6.3

References to Israel – Military and/or Institutions

Word/Phrase	Frequency	Institutional Category
State Attorney's office	1	
Israel's violations	1	
Israel's political leaders, military commanders and persons holding official positions	1	
Israeli governmental and military officials	1	*Related to Military and/or State institutions*
the Prime Minister; the President; the Minister of Defence; the Minister of National Security; the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure; members of the Knesset; senior army officials; and foot soldiers	1	

Van Dijk (2015) mentions that "power and dominance are associated with specific social domains, their professional elites and institutions, and the rules and routines that form the background of the everyday discursive reproduction of power in such domains and institutions" (p.478). Hence, the power and dominance of these institutions are channeled through the different entities that control the lives of the Palestinians.

The findings show that the agents of victimization were directly linked to different state and military institutions. The legal counsels reveal the identity of different military and state agents that enforced their war crimes on the Palestinians. Mr. Ngcukaitobi mentions that "*qua* Prime Minister, Mr. Netanyahu exercises overall command over the Israeli Defense Forces and in turn the Palestinians in Gaza" (ICJ Rep, 2024). Van Dijk (2015) supports this idea by explaining that "members of more powerful social groups and institutions, and especially their

leaders have more or less exclusive access to, and control over, one or more types of public discourse" (p.470). By revealing the identity of the agents, the legal counsels are holding Israeli personnel – who are part of bigger institutions – accountable for the genocidal acts practiced against Palestinians.

Even in the rare cases where individuals were linked to the word 'Israel', there is a clear debunking of the individualistic aspect of Israel. In the first case, where the expression 'people of Israel' was used (n=1), this was also linked to the collective nation rather than an individual entity (Table 5.4). In context, it is used as such "The people of South Africa and of Israel both have a history of suffering." In this case, the members of counsel are not referring to the people of Israel to highlight the individual entity but rather to associate the people with the whole institution of Israel. Additionally, the use of the phrase 'Israeli citizens' (n=2) further supports the institutionalization of Israel as mentioned "the Government of Israel – not Jewish people or Israeli citizens: the *Government* of Israel and its military – is intent on destroying the Palestinians in Gaza as a group." In another instance, the extent of the threat to Israeli citizens is outweighed by the genocidal attacks on the whole population of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, as mentioned:

> "No matter what some individuals within the group of Palestinians in Gaza may have done and no matter how great the threat to Israeli citizens might be, *genocidal* attacks on the whole of Gaza and the whole of its population with the intent of destroying them *cannot be justified*."

These two references to individual entities were not used to humanize the Israeli perpetrators, but rather to further support the case of Palestine.

Table 6.4

References to Israel – no institutional categorization

Word/Phrase	Frequency	Association
Israeli society	2	*Association to human entities*
Israeli citizens	2	
people of Israel	1	
genocidal conduct of Israel	1	*Association to genocidal acts*
Israel's genocidal acts and omissions	1	
Israel's alleged genocidal intent	1	
Israel's genocidal intent	2	
Israel's genocidal rhetoric	1	
Israel's special genocidal intent	1	
Israel's genocidal acts	2	
Israel's genocidal assault	1	
Israel's acts of genocide	1	
Israel's commission of the crime of genocide	1	
Israel's conduct	4	*Other activities associated with Israel*
Israel's ongoing conduct	1	
Israel's past and current conduct	1	
Israel's official and unequivocal denial	1	
Israel's failure	1	
Israel's willful defiance	1	
Israel's actions	6	
Israel's hindrances	1	
Israel's apparent inability	1	

Moreover, Gee stresses the importance of the influence of context, which he explores in terms of 'situated meanings' (2011). He explains that shared cultural knowledge plays an important role in determining situated meanings (Gee, 2015). The findings of this study illustrate that there is an expected shared 'cultural' knowledge of the concept of genocide and suffering. Charteris-Black explains that situational information – including anything that has happened up to the moment of the speech act – plays a critical role in analyzing the discourse used in a speech

(2018). Thus, Professor Dugard explains that "The people of South Africa and of Israel both have a history of suffering. Both States have become parties to the Genocide Convention in the determination to end suffering" (ICJ Rep, 2024). Hence, the legal counsels are holding Israel accountable for their harmful actions because they expect Israel to have an understanding of the 'meaning' of suffering and genocide, due to their shared history of suffering.

Victimization vs. Victimizing of Palestinians

      This section deals with the second research sub-question, which explores how the language used in the speeches portrays the victimization of Palestinians. There is a clear difference between the verbs used by the South African legal counsels when talking about the Palestinians versus the Israelis – a difference that mirrored the victimization and victimizing of Palestinians respectively. The majority of the verbs associated with the Palestinians were used in the passive form with both present and past tenses. The past simple and past perfect tenses were used to display the verbs enforced on the Palestinians in the past, for example 'were required *[to evacuate]',* 'were told *[to relocate]'*, 'was denied', and 'had *[just]* been killed' (Table 7.1). The legal counsels revealed the horrible conditions forced onto the Palestinians by using the past simple and past perfect tenses in the passive form – tenses that relate to actions that have taken place at a specific time in the past.

Table 7.1

Actions inflicted on Palestinians – past simple & past perfect tenses (passive form)

Verb phrase	Frequency	Verb Tense & Form
were required *[to evacuate]*	1	*past simple tense (passive form)*
were told *[to relocate]*	1	
were killed	1	

was permitted	1	
was denied	1	
was struck	1	
had *[deliberately]* been cut off	1	*past perfect tense (passive form)*
had been told	1	
had *[just]* been killed	1	

Moreover, the passive verbs used in the present perfect tense reflect the ongoing harm inflicted on the Palestinians by Israel. This can be seen in the following examples 'have been killed', 'have been wiped out', 'have been displaced', 'have been razed', 'have been blocked', 'have been injured', 'have been *[repeatedly]* forced', 'have been separated', 'have been damaged or destroyed', 'have been directed', and 'has been *[systematically]* decimated' (Table 7.2). The legal counsels visualized the severe harm inflicted on the Palestinians by using the present perfect tense in the passive form – reflecting an action that started at a certain time in the past and continues till the present.

Table 7.2

Actions inflicted on Palestinians – present perfect tense in the passive form

Verb phrase	Frequency	Verb Tense & Form
have been killed	3	
have been wiped out	1	
have been displaced	1	
have been razed	1	
have been blocked	1	
have been injured	1	*present perfect tense (passive form)*
have been *[repeatedly]* forced	1	
have been separated	1	
have been damaged or destroyed	1	
have been directed	1	
has been *[systematically]* decimated	1	

Furthermore, the present simple tense in the passive form mirrors the current actions imposed on the Palestinians, such as 'is prohibited', 'is inflicted', 'is provided', 'are subjected', 'are killed', 'are buried', 'are forced *[to move]',* 'are denied', and 'are condemned' (Table 7.3). Similarly, the present progressive tense in the passive form was used to reflect the ongoing current actions faced by the Palestinians, for instance 'are being deprived', 'are being wiped from', 'are being killed', 'are being rounded up and separated', 'being allowed through', and 'being permitted' (Table 7.3). The legal counsels depicted the current destructive living conditions forced onto the Palestinians by using the simple and progressive present tense in the passive form – tenses that are used to reflect verbs taking place in the present.

Table 7.3

Actions inflicted on Palestinians – present simple & present progressive tenses (passive form)

Verb phrase	Frequency	Verb Tense & Form
is prohibited	1	
is inflicted	1	
is provided	1	
are subjected	1	
are killed	1	
are found	1	*present simple tense*
are buried	1	*(passive form)*
are dropped	1	
are forced *[to move]*	1	
are allowed in	1	
are denied	1	
are condemned	1	
are being deprived	1	
are being wiped from	1	*present progressive tense*
are being killed	5	*(passive form)*
are being rounded up and separated	1	
being allowed through	1	

being permitted	1	

Additionally, the future simple tense in the active and passive forms predict the future atrocities that will be faced by Palestinians in the future, such as 'will continue *[to be attacked and killed]'*, 'will continue *[to be targeted]'*, 'will be killed', 'will be damaged or destroyed', 'will be bombed', and 'will be obliterated' (Table 7.4). The legal counsel used the future simple tense in both active and passive forms to remind the court of the expected outcomes if Israel continues to perform genocidal crimes. Jauković (2002) emphasizes that "the war victimization consequences are diverse and long lasting, some of them could be transgenerational" (p.109)

Table 7.4

Actions inflicted on Palestinians – future simple (active & passive forms)

Verb phrase	Frequency	Verb Tense & Form
will have *[one or both legs]* amputated	1	
will continue *[to be attacked and killed]*	2	*future simple tense (active form)*
will continue *[to be targeted]*		
will become *["WCNSF": "Wounded Child – No Surviving Family"]*	1	
will be killed	2	
will be wounded	1	
will be damaged or destroyed	1	
will be dug	1	*future simple tense (passive form)*
will be bulldozed and bombed	1	
will be forced *[to relocate]*	1	
will be bombed	1	
will be obliterated	1	
continue to be killed	1	*present simple tense (active form) **
continue to be bombed and killed	1	

*the time of the verb phrase is future

Therefore, the usage of the passive form with different tenses indicates that the Palestinians had no control over the actions that were inflicted on them, i.e. they were victims of these crimes. At a syntactical level, transitivity explains "how language is being used to describe, who does what to whom and why" (Wilson, 2015, p.782). Charteris-Black (2018) elaborates on this by explaining that "[transitivity] communicates the representation of actors, actions and those acted upon: what kinds of actions there are, who acts and who is affected by their actions" (p. 113). The findings show that Israel was the active agent enforcing their genocidal actions on the different Palestinian entities. Hence, the use of transitive verbs has a decisive role in presenting a situation from a certain perspective. The legal counsels utilized this strategy to contribute to the genocide narrative against Israel, by clearly disclosing the 'subjects' of these genocidal acts – the Israelis – and in turn the 'objects' of these actions – the Palestinians.

On the other hand, the majority of the verbs associated with Israel were used in the active form using different tenses. This indicates that the different Israeli actors consciously performed those harmful actions on the Palestinians. There is a variation in the verb tenses used; however, most of these verbs share a common destructive nature. The verbs used in the present simple tense mirror the current reality in Palestine, for example, 'bombs', 'attack', 'denies', etc. (Table 8.1). Moreover, the verb phrases that start with the verb 'continue' such as 'continues to exercise control', and 'continues to target', etc. show that Israel has done similar actions in the past and is continuing to do them in the present (Table 8.1). Furthermore, the verbs used in the past simple tense, present perfect tense, and past perfect tense similarly reflect the detrimental actions that have taken place in the past up to the present. These also share a similar destructive nature, for example, 'designed and maintained [to establish domination]', 'imposed on', 'has killed', 'has forced', 'has imposed', 'had destroyed', etc. (Table 8.1).

Table 8.1

Verbs associated with Israel – variation of tenses

Verb phrase	Frequency	Verb Tense & Form
continues	5	
- continues *[to exercise control]*		
- continues *[to impede]*		
- continues *[to target]*		
- continues *[to deny]*		*Present simple tense*
controls	1	*(active form)*
bombs	1	
targets	1	
denies	1	
attack	1	
designed and maintained *[to establish domination]*	1	
perpetrated (against)	2	*Past simple tense*
imposed on	1	*(active form)*
herded	1	
urged	1	
has transgressed	1	
has subjected	2	
has deployed	1	
has killed	1	
has forced	1	*Present perfect tense*
has pushed	1	*(active form)*
has imposed	1	
has intensified	1	
has persisted	1	
has failed *[to prevent or to punish genocide]*	1	
had destroyed	1	*Past perfect tense*
had killed	1	*(active form)*

Fairclough explains that the verb in a statement describes what has happened, i.e. the *process,* which in turn mirrors whether the participants were present (active form) or absent (passive form) (2010). The findings reveal that most of the verbs associated with Israel were

used in the active form, whereas the majority of the verbs associated with the Palestinians were used in the passive form. Moreover, Van Dijk (2015) mentions that the passive voice in sentences can "be used to hide or downplay the violent or other negative actions of state agents" (p.474). The findings show that different verb processes are used throughout the speeches to reflect the enforcement of power, the intent of genocide, and the victimization of Palestinians. Moreover, "the power of dominant groups may be integrated in laws, rules, norms, habits, and even a quite general consensus" (Van Dijk, 2015, p.469). The findings show that material verbs – which represent actions as real and concrete – were mostly used when describing the genocidal actions done by the Israeli actors. In other words, this verb process reveals the 'doer' of the action as Israel and the 'receiver' of the action as Palestinians.

Additionally, some verb phrases include adverbs of time and manner – used to describe the nature of the verbs being performed. The adverbs of time that were used linked the actions to the recent present such as 'has *now* damaged or destroyed' and 'has *belatedly* begun'. Similarly, the adverbs of manner were used to stress the consciousness of Israel while performing these actions, rather than linking them to chance. For example, the verb phrases 'has *deliberately* inflicted', 'have *systematically and in explicit terms* declared', and 'have *repeatedly* denied' show that Israel has knowingly inflicted damage and harm on the Palestinians and their surroundings (Table 8.2).

Table 8.2

Verbs associated with Israel – adverbs describing the verb

Verb phrase	Frequency	Components
has *[now]* damaged or destroyed	1	*Adverbs of time used*
has *[belatedly]* begun	1	*with the verb phrase*

have *[also]* decimated	1	
had *[flatly]* denied	1	
have *[systematically and in explicit terms]* declared	1	
have *[repeatedly]* called	1	*Adverbs of manner used*
has *[deliberately]* imposed	1	*with the verb phrase*
has *[deliberately]* inflicted	1	
has been *[deliberately]* calculated	1	

Van Dijk (2015) indicates that "most critical work on discourse is that of power, and more specifically the social power of groups or institutions" (p.469). In this case, Israel is the dominant social group that is enforcing its power over the Palestinians. Mr. Ngcukaitobi, a Senior Counsel and Advocate of the High Court of South Africa, points out that "There are more than 2.3 million Palestinians in Gaza. Israel is the occupying Power, in control of Gaza; it controls entry, exit, and the internal movements of [Palestinians] inside Gaza" (ICJ Rep, 2024). This portrays how Israel has been using its power to limit the Palestinian's freedom of movement and to inflict harm on them.

In addition, the legal counsels resorted to using gerunds to describe Israel's actions. This was predominantly done when listing the harmful actions done by Israeli actors against the Palestinians, such as 'killing', 'fighting', 'bombing', 'shelling', etc. (Table 8.3). Gerunds are used to express an action or a state of being. Put into context, the use of gerunds – which function as nouns in the phrases used – adds a layer of certainty to the actions executed by the different Israeli actors as seen in the following examples: 'killing members of the group'; 'the targeting of family homes and civilian infrastructure'; 'the bombing, shelling, and sniping of men, women and children'; 'depriving Palestinians in Gaza of basic needs'; 'destroying social infrastructure: homes, schools, mosques, churches, hospitals'; 'killing, seriously injuring, and leaving large numbers of children orphaned'; etc.

Table 8.3

Verbs associated with Israel – gerunds of conflict and war

Verb phrase	Frequency	Verb Tense & Form
killing	1	
fighting	1	
bombing	1	
shelling	1	
sniping	1	
injuring	1	
destroying	1	
depriving	1	
targeting	2	
imposing	1	
blocking	1	
indicating	1	
pursuing	1	
designating	1	
leaving	1	
using	1	

The findings also reveal the illegitimate forms of control enforced by Israel on the Palestinians. Van Dijk (2015) elaborates that powerful actors and institutions can abuse "such power […] at the expense of specific recipients, groups, or civil society at large" (p.472). In other words, when the exercised control benefits the actors rather than the recipients, then this is a case of power abuse (Van Dijk, 2008). Moreover, Mr. du Plessis, a Senior Counsel and Advocate of the High Court of South Africa, highlights that the situation in Gaza cannot be framed as merely a conflict between two parties, but "it entails, instead, destructive acts perpetrated by an occupying Power, Israel, that has subjected the Palestinian people to an oppressive and prolonged violation of their right to self-determination for more than half a century" (ICJ Rep, 2024). Israel has used its illegitimate power to control the destiny and

livelihood of the Palestinians living in Gaza and other parts of Palestine. Mr. du Plessis

elaborates on this situation by mentioning that "those violations occur in a world where Israel for

years has regarded itself as beyond and above the law" (ICJ Rep, 2024). This reflects how Israel

has victimized Palestinians through the abuse of power practiced by different Israeli actors in the

military and state institutions.

Therefore, the destructive pattern noticed in the verbs and gerunds associated with Israel

reveals the *victimizing* nature of their actions. Additionally, the use of the active form as well as

the aforementioned adverbs of manner exposes that this *victimizing process* was done

consciously and intentionally to eradicate all Palestinians, not only Hamas.

Conclusion

The analysis of the language employed by the South African Committee in their speeches before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) reveals a deliberate and nuanced use of language to emphasize the humanization of Palestinians and the dehumanization and victimization inflicted upon them by Israel. By carefully selecting nouns, adjectives, adverbs, and verbs, the legal counsels highlighted the individual suffering of Palestinians, distinguishing them from a collective identity and creating an emotional connection with the audience. This strategy emphasized the severity of the situation and presented the actions of Israel as genocidal.

In contrast, the Israeli government and military officials employed language that collectively dehumanized Palestinians, often equating them with terrorist entities and using historical references that further alienated them. The use of verbs in the active voice by the South African Committee illustrated the agency of Israel in these actions, while the passive voice used for Palestinians emphasized their victimization and lack of control.

The findings of this study underscore the power of language in shaping perceptions and narratives in legal and political contexts. The careful linguistic choices made by the South African legal counsels reflect a strategic effort to persuade the ICJ of the genocidal nature of Israel's actions, to create a broader understanding of the human impact of these actions, and to advocate for the protection and rights of the Palestinian people. Ultimately, this analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of how language can be employed to construct and convey complex legal and moral arguments in international forums.

By analyzing the ICJ speeches, the research shed light on the interplay between legal discourse and political narratives in the context of protracted conflicts. This understanding is crucial for scholars and policymakers examining the role of international legal institutions in

conflict resolution. Moreover, analyzing the language used in the speeches contributes to our comprehension of how legal language influences public perception. This knowledge is relevant for stakeholders, including the media, civil society, and international organizations, in interpreting and responding to complex geopolitical issues.

The research offers a deeper understanding of the rhetorical dimensions of the ICJ speeches, identifies recurring themes and linguistic patterns, and contributes to the broader impact of legal discourse on the Israel-Palestine conflict narrative. This study aspires to make a meaningful contribution to the ongoing dialogue surrounding the Israel-Palestine conflict. It strives to be a stepping stone toward a more nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics at play in one of the world's most enduring geopolitical conflicts.

As an ending note, I want to refer to the words of a Palestinian Pastor on Christmas Day of 2023. Munther Isaac mentions:

> *"Gaza as we know it no longer exists. This is an annihilation. This is a genocide. We will rise. We will stand up again from the midst of destruction […] No apologies will be accepted after the genocide . . . What has been done has been done. I want you to look at the mirror and ask, 'Where was I when Gaza was going through a genocide'."*

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Appendix

Colors for inductive coding	Reference
Blue highlighted	all references to Palestinians mentioned by South African Committee
Pink highlighted	all references to Palestinians mentioned by Israeli officials
Red underlined	all references to Israel
Purple highlighted	verbs used in passive form (inflicted on Palestinians)
Purple highlighted & red underlined	verbs used in active form (inflicted by Israel)
Yellow highlighted	adjectives and expressions used to show the grave impact of Israel's actions
Green highlighted	the use of listing (rule of 3 or 4) – mainly the listing of three or four items as a form of effective rhetoric