

(RE)CLAIMING NARRATIVES ON THE GLOBAL STAGE: DECONSTRUCTING NETANYAHU'S SPEECH AT UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2025

Hadijah Rima, Sabarian
Universitas Gadjah Mada

e-mail: sabarian@mail.ugm.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Words are never only rhetorical; they serve as a powerful weapon of persuasion, especially when they are delivered on global platforms such as the UN General Assembly. In September 2025, despite facing escalating international isolation and calls for his arrest, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu managed to deliver a performative speech, reaffirming his agenda at the UNGA podium. While existing scholarship on Netanyahu's UNGA oratory has largely drawn from Critical Discourse Analysis and Speech Act Theory, this analysis offers a novel approach by employing a Derridean deconstructive methodology to uncover hidden layers of Netanyahu's propaganda. The analysis reveals that Netanyahu's rhetoric is fundamentally structured upon unstable binaries and contradictions. His linguistic strategy of othering redefines binary pairs, such as the notion of a "modern and peaceful world" versus "the past," to legitimize Israel's political and military ambitions. The discourse of anti-terrorism thus becomes selectively applied and directed exclusively toward others, while acts of violence committed by Israel are reframed as necessary measures of "self-defense." His use of metaphor seeks to construct a narrative of moral superiority by portraying Hamas as mindless and brutal while depicting the IDF as civilized. Furthermore, the repetitive emphasis on Israel's achievements functions as a form of reaction formation; a form of defense mechanism which implies his insecurity and fear of global isolation. All of these strategic rhetorical maneuvers demonstrate Netanyahu's attempt to (re)claim Israel's narrative on the global stage amid one of its most challenging periods of global marginalization.

Keywords: *Deconstruction; Benjamin Netanyahu; United Nations; rhetoric; global narrative; political discourse*

ABSTRAK

Kata-kata selalu punya konsekuensi; ia dapat berfungsi sebagai senjata kuat untuk mempengaruhi, terlebih bila disampaikan dalam platform raksasa seperti Sidang Umum PBB. Pada bulan September 2025, di samping isolasi publik dan seruan penangkapan Perdana Menteri Israel, Benyamin Netanyahu, ia tetap menyampaikan pidato dan menguatkan agendanya di podium PBB. Penelitian sebelumnya tentang pidato Netanyahu di Sidang Umum PBB menggunakan pendekatan Analisis Wacana Kritis, Teori Tindak Tutur, dan

pendekatan tematik, artikel ini akan mengisi celah yang ada dengan menganalisis pidato Netanyahu menggunakan pendekatan dekonstruksi Derrida. Hasil dari penelitian menunjukkan bahwa analisis-analisis sebelumnya terhadap pidato Netanyahu di forum PBB menggunakan pendekatan Analisis Wacana Kritis, Teori Tindak Tutur, atau kerangka tematik, penelitian-penelitian tersebut umumnya mengabaikan dimensi filosofis dan struktural dari retorikanya. Kajian ini mengisi kekosongan tersebut dengan menerapkan pendekatan dekonstruktif Derrida terhadap pidato Netanyahu di Sidang Umum PBB tahun 2025. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa retorika Netanyahu dibangun di atas oposisi biner yang tidak stabil. Metafora yang ia gunakan diutarakan untuk membangun konstruksi superioritas moral IDF atas Hamas, yang mereka patahkan sendiri dalam tindakan mereka. Selain itu, penekanan berulang pada capaian Israel berfungsi sebagai bentuk *reaction formation* yang merupakan mekanisme pertahanan diri dan penyangkalan atas ketakutannya terhadap isolasi internasional. Strategi retorik ini menunjukkan upaya Netanyahu untuk merebut kembali narasi Israel di panggung global pada salah satu masa paling sulit dalam sejarah diplomatiknya.

Kata Kunci: Dekonstruksi; Benjamin Netanyahu; Perserikatan Bangsa-Bangsa; retorika; narasi global; wacana politik

1. INTRODUCTION

Each year, world leaders gather at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City for the General Assembly, which is held this year under the theme "Better Together: 80 Years and Beyond for Peace, Development, and Human Rights." which successfully transformed the Assembly beyond a forum of diplomacy. As Gaza has been under attack for more than seven hundred days, the UN podium became the battlefield of a narrative war on Palestinian cause, where words sought to reclaim truth and reshape global perception.

Palestine voice echoing powerfully as most states using the UN platform to assert moral authority and ethical responsibility for genocide committed by Israel. The Amir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani assured the necessity of coordinated mediation as both a diplomatic and humanitarian act. Colombian President Gustavo Petro adopted a confrontational rhetorical strategy by declaring clearly that "what is taking place in Palestine amounts to genocide" and urging that "humanity must stop the genocide in Gaza." Through this moralized discourse, Petro reframed the crisis as an ethical emergency, explicitly implicating Israel and its condemning Western allies in complicity through silence and apathy. Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa employed a nostalgic approach by drawing on his nation's own history of suffering under previous regimes to align Syria's endurance with that of Gaza's civilians, repeatedly asserting, "we reaffirm our support for the people of Gaza." Similarly, Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto positioning his support within a historical narrative of struggle and recalling Indonesia's trajectory out of colonialism, poverty, and apartheid while highlighting the United Nations' crucial role in the country's independence and early development. Hence, the voice of Palestine resonated as a majority at UN General Assembly. This force was also strengthened by support from leading countries such as the United Kingdom, France, and China, which openly defied the positions of the United States and Israel.

In opposition, a smaller coalition of states showed their support and stance for Israel,

which at the time faced mounting international isolation over its ongoing assault on Gaza. Echoing a rhetoric of shared suffering, Argentinian President Javier Milei invoked collective memory to justify solidarity with Israel, demanding the "immediate release" of hostages still held in Gaza and recalling his nation's own trauma from the 1992 bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires. U.S. President Donald Trump, Israel's most unwavering ally, likewise called for the unconditional release of all captives while warning that any unilateral recognition of Palestinian statehood would amount to "a reward to Hamas for its horrible atrocities." The ultimate voice of Israel's position came from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu himself, who still managed to deliver his performative speech despite mass walkouts from most delegates.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Literature Review

Political discourse analysis, particularly focusing on how leaders use language to construct narratives has been studied through various critical lenses. Several studies such as *Ethos of Conflict in the International Arena* (Ushomirsky, Leshem, & Halperin, 2023) shows that UN leaders' rhetoric is shaped by asymmetrical power dynamics, with weaker parties often voicing both threats and hopes for peace. On the other hand, Benjamin Netanyahu's speeches have also been the subject of intensive studies, mostly using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). On the other hand, Osuna and Burton (2025) examined Netanyahu's speeches using a multidimensional populism theoretical framework to compare quantitatively and qualitatively 18 speeches by Mahmoud Abbas and Benjamin Netanyahu at the United Nations General Assembly between 2010 and 2019, and found Netanyahu's rhetoric to be highly populist and aggressive. In the same vein, Matush (2023) interprets Netanyahu's 2015 U.S. Congress speech as strategic antagonism to mobilize domestic support.

Some scholarship has also applied Derridean deconstruction to political discourse. Supriatin and Napitupulu (2025), in *Women and Indonesian Diplomacy on the Global Stage*, reveal gaps, contradictions, and fractures within the text that destabilize the idealized narrative of female diplomacy in the diplomatic speeches of Retno Marsudi. Similarly, Noy (2024) employs the concept of Derridean "yet to become" to analyze the speeches of Palestinian activist Saleh Diab by examining discourse of hope in the Israel-Palestine context and emphasizing the role of *différance* in political language. Despite these useful insights, limited research systematically applies Derridean deconstruction to Netanyahu's speeches. This study seeks to fill this gap by deconstructing and reconstructing his rhetorical strategies which aims to unravel his ambition and showing how binary oppositions, metaphors, and rhetorical style can contain fragility, contradictions, and inconsistencies that undermine their persuasive force.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This article employs a Derridean lens to deconstruct Benjamin Netanyahu's 2025 UNGA speech to analyze how rhetorical, symbolic, and performative strategies construct Israel's political legitimacy while simultaneously exposing its hidden insecurities and fragilities. Derridean deconstruction operates by disrupting hierarchical oppositions that

organize thought and discourse by revealing how dominant concepts depend on the marginalization of their opposites, namely binary oppositions in Derridean terms. Such oppositions demonstrate that a text contains internal contradictions and cannot be reduced to a single and fixed meaning. This framework mainly focused on three interrelated concepts structure: *différance*, text, and dissemination. The notion of *différance* rejects the idea of a fixed "center" of meaning, asserting that meaning is never stable but perpetually deferred and continuously reconstituted through context, contrast, and difference. As Derrida (1976) argues, linguistic meaning is not self-contained but produced through an endless play of signifiers. Although oppositional thinking remains operative within discourse, its inherent instability exposes the very tensions that deconstruction seeks to unveil. The second concept, text, is perceived through Derrida's claim that "there is no outside-text" (Derrida, 1976) which concept indicates that meaning is always mediated by textual relations rather than external referents. This does not imply textual closure but instead underscores the openness and intertextuality of discourse. The concept of dissemination highlights that literary texts can have many meanings. Interpretations can vary depending on the context, and no single interpretation can fully capture the 'truth' of a text.

In the context of metaphor, Derrida reconsiders the traditional notion of the sign, which assumes an equivalence between the signifier and the signified. For Derrida, meaning is never fixed as it is always mediated by context, difference, and the endless play of *différance*. From a deconstructive paradigm, metaphor is not only considered as a linguistic act that generates or conceals meaning within positivist or analytic logic. Rather, it embodies the very process of deconstruction by exposing how universal logic, logocentrism, singular truth, and the metaphysics of presence are constantly deferred and destabilized (Derrida, 1978). Consequently, metaphor operates as a rhetorical double bind: it could say one thing while meaning another, thus foregrounding the instability of meaning itself. The study of metaphor, as emphasized by Faruk (2012), becomes crucial once it is recognized that language does not merely reflect reality. Furthermore, Faruk (2012) also stated that deconstructive criticism takes metaphors seriously, as they cannot be reduced to literal or objective truth, as their very structure constitutes an integral part of the text itself. The deconstructive procedure thus directs its attention to the moments when a text conceals or disrupts its own grammatical structure. Furthermore, the possibilities of metaphor are infinite—each idea can generate countless metaphoric articulations. As Faruk (2012, p. 216) observes, reading and interpreting metaphors is an inherently creative act, one that mirrors the creativity of producing them and resists the constraints of fixed interpretive rules.

It should be noted that this study employs Derrida's deconstruction merely as a universal analytical approach without considering his views on the Palestinian cause. Wise (2001) argues that Derrida wrongly equates all Abrahamic religions as sharing a common Zionist obsession with reclaiming Jerusalem. By framing the "war for the appropriation of Jerusalem" as a collective religious struggle, Derrida overlooks the historical reality that it is primarily an Israeli enterprise marked by violence and oppression. His assertion that this "war" is occurring everywhere is, therefore, not merely hyperbolic but a distortion of the historical facts of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Furthermore, the suitability of Derrida's

deconstruction as a political analysis approach has been highlighted by Ramos (2014), who cites Blair (2007). Drawing on Derrida's later essay "*Force of Law: The Mystical Foundations of Authority*," Blair argues:

"Any system of justice needs a system of signs. These signs must be performative as such. As a consequence, the force at work here is the performative utterance. If language is about the possibility of being taken out of context and creating new meaning, then deconstruction involves the displacement and reinscription of language. By doing so, deconstruction necessarily intervenes and changes in all discourses, including politics. Therefore, deconstruction is justice and it is politics" (Ramos, 2014, citing Blair, 2007).

Based on the foregoing, deconstruction is employed in this study because it is particularly well-suited to addressing the challenges of application and articulation. As Thomassen (2010) notes, as a methodological practice, deconstruction involves an ongoing process of questioning and revising its own procedures while simultaneously being applied, making it a productive approach for political analysis. The deconstructive method is also considered suitable for this research because it aligns with the study's objectives which is to unravel Netanyahu's implied propaganda. As Hall (1999: 8) has stated, deconstructive methodologies have been applied in science to unmask hidden meaning.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

The primary data for this study consists of the transcript of Prime Minister Netanyahu's 2025 UNGA speech. The data were collected using the listening and note-taking method, obtained from the official Prime Minister's Office website and then cross-verified with the live broadcast available on the United Nations' official YouTube channel. According to Faruk (2012, p. 24), the listening and note-taking technique is a methodological approach for identifying and recording facts relevant to the research problem. The collected data were then analyzed using a deconstructive approach. First, Derrida's method of close reading was applied to interrogate the text and challenge its underlying assumptions, particularly binary oppositions. The analytical procedure for binary opposition unfolds in two main stages. The first stage involves identifying key binary oppositions to uncover hierarchical structures and ideological dominance. The second stage examines these hierarchies through *différance*, demonstrating how meaning is continuously deferred and constructed through contrast and absence. Furthermore, the analysis of metaphor is also applied to the data to reveal how figurative language inherently destabilizes fixed meanings, exposing the ideological assumptions both sustained and subverted by the text's rhetorical instability.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the deconstructive reading of Netanyahu's 2025 UNGA speech, several main findings were identified from the speech which consists as selected binary oppositions, metaphors, and an analysis of the fragility of meaning, as follows.

4.1 Iran's Threat

In Netanyahu's 2025 UNGA speech, at least twenty-two pairs of binary oppositions were identified. These oppositions are analyzed based on their shared intended meanings and subsequently deconstructed to reveal new layers of interpretation. The first group of binary oppositions relates to the notion of Iran's threat and is presented below:

Table 1. The first group of binary oppositions

Binary Opposition 1	Binary Opposition2	Intended Meaning 1	Intended Meaning 2
Peace	Threat	Including the entire world in his problem	Iran's terror
Stability	Threat	Emphasizing on Israel	Iran's terror
Claimed million lives	Existential threat	Israel and US's attempt to prevent Iran's nuclear	Iran's terror to Israel

Source: Author's analysis.

The first group of binary oppositions identified in Netanyahu's 2025 UNGA speech includes *peace* ↔ *threat*, *stability* ↔ *threat*, and *claimed million lives* ↔ *existential threat*. In all these pairs, the notion of *threat* consistently refers to attacks allegedly perpetrated by Iran. This section reveals how profoundly Israel perceives Iran as an existential danger, as Netanyahu seeks to provoke a global response by framing Iran as a shared enemy of the international community.

The first and second binary pairs appear in Netanyahu's statement:

"This axis [Iran's attack] threatened the peace of the entire world. It threatened the stability of our region and the very existence of my country Israel."

The term *threat* in Netanyahu's speech often associates with terror, lack of safety, attack, and horror—all of which he deliberately attributes to Iran. His rhetorical strategy is mostly patterned by emphasizes the danger posed by the Iranian assault to global peace at first and then narrows the focus to Israel's national stability. Derrida (2003) states that "The worst, most effective 'terrorism,' even if it seems external and 'international,' is the one that installs or recalls an interior threat at home. This perspective also explains why Israel frames Iran as a threat: Iran attacked Israel's "homeland," even though the attack was initiated by Israel. Historically, the perception of Iran as Israel's latent enemy has persisted for more than three decades. Leslie (2019) notes that the threat narrative referred to Iran emerged as early as 1993, when Ephraim Sneh became the first Israeli government official to use the phrase "*existential threat*" (אייום קיומי) to describe danger allegedly committed by Iran.

In Netanyahu's speech, Iran is positioned as the aggressor while Israel is framed as the victim. In this context, the "*attack*" refers to Iran's alleged strike on Israel in June 2025,

although the initial aggression was actually launched by Israel which Netanyahu did not mention. According to the Center for Middle Eastern Studies (ORSAM, 2025, p. 3), the Israeli offensive first targeted Iran's air defense systems in the western regions and later extended toward the capital and southern areas. Later in his speech, Netanyahu referred "the attack" to Israel's 12-day war with Iran by stating that "this 12-day war will go down in the annals of military history." Factually, the claim that the June 2025 attack threatened world peace was first initiated by Israel's own military actions to Iran, which indicates that the label *threat*, which Netanyahu attributes to Iran, might more accurately describe Israel's actions in this context.

Netanyahu's "claim of innocence" is shaped by the binary opposition *claimed million lives* ↔ *existential threat*, which frames Israel and the United States' intervention against Iran's nuclear program as a necessary act to prevent mass casualties. In this opposition, Iran is positioned as a latent existential threat, as illustrated in his statement:

"President Trump and I promised to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons. And we delivered on that promise. We removed an existential threat to Israel, and a mortal threat to the civilized world. We lifted a dark cloud that could have claimed millions and millions of lives."

Here, the pattern mirrors previous binary constructions: Iran is portrayed as the aggressor, while Israel claimed the role of the global savior. Hierarchically, Netanyahu casts Iran as the attacker and Israel as the heroic actor that neutralizes the threat. Factually, the 2024 U.S. Intelligence Community Annual Threat Assessment clearly stated that "Iran is not currently undertaking the key nuclear weapons-development activities necessary to produce a testable nuclear device." But this phrase is absent from 2024 and 2025 ODNI assessments of Tehran's nuclear program (Kerr, 2025, p. 1). Thus, claiming Iran as an "existential threat" is unfounded. To date, Iran's nuclear facilities have not posed a global threat, as shown in the figure below.

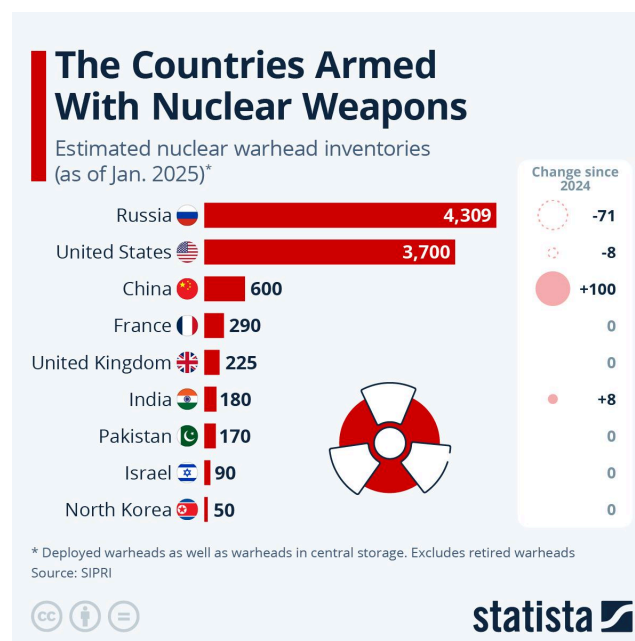


Figure 1. Statista, *The Countries Holding The World's Nuclear Arsenal*, 5 August 2025

The table shows that Iran's nuclear capacity does not even rank among the top ten worldwide, whereas Israel, supported primarily by the United States, possesses a far larger nuclear arsenal that could potentially threaten global security. This analysis deconstructs Netanyahu's claim, revealing its opposite: Iran is not the world's greatest threat; rather, Israel occupies that position and cannot be regarded as the "hero of the world" for its attacks on Iran. Moreover, the perception of danger generated by this narrative outweighs any potential benefits that peace might appear to offer. The premise that Israel is under constant threat is a key justification for obstructing progress toward Middle East peace and perpetuates insecurity not only for Israelis but, to a far greater extent, for Israel's neighbors, particularly the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza (Ira, 2015, p. 5).

4.2 Israel and The World

In the second group of binary oppositions, Netanyahu attempts to involve the global community in his propaganda, as shown in the table below:

Table 2. second group of binary oppositions

Binary Opposition 1	Binary Opposition 2	Intended Meaning 1	Intended Meaning 2
no longer remember	remember	world in case of October 7th	Israel in case of October 7th
past	modern world	violence, fanaticism, and terror	the opposite

Source: Author's analysis.

The first pair, *no longer remember* ↔ *remember*, refers to the events of October 7th, as he stated:

"Much of the world no longer remembers October 7th. But we remember, Israel remembers October 7th."

Through this statement, Israel implicitly accuses the world of apathy and indifference toward the massacre of October 7, while portraying itself as the only actor that truly remembers, cares, and continues to bear the trauma of the event. However, the factual reality contradicts this claim. Boycott movements, for example, have increasingly moved from the margins to the mainstream, targeting Israel's economic, cultural, and academic sectors. *The Guardian* reports that while criticism of Israeli policies is not new, the Gaza war has acted as a catalyst in breaking taboos, amplifying dissent, and reshaping global public and political sentiment. This shows that Netanyahu's accusation of global apathy did not reflect reality. The world not only remembers October 7th; The October 7th even triggers memory of Nakba, a catastrophe that Israel seems to forget. In this context, October 7 alarmed as a trigger that reignited awareness of Israel's prolonged occupation of the region. Derrida (2003, p. 87) argues that we are never fully prepared to address an event like 9/11 directly or with the proper vocabulary; deconstruction therefore both analyzes the event and generates the language to articulate it.

Moreover, Netanyahu's implication that Israel alone remembers October 7 and portrays itself as the primary victim is further contradicted by empirical statistics as follows:

Table 3. Victims by Number

Category	By Numbers	Source
Palestine deaths (Gaza + West Bank)	67,000	Gaza MoH / UN summaries (7 Oct 2025) (costsofwar.watson.brown.edu)
Israeli deaths	1,600 – 2,000	Reuters / aggregated reporting (Oct 2025) (Reuters)

Source: Author's analysis.

The table shows that, in terms of fatalities alone, the number of Palestinian victims since October 7 far exceeds that of Israelis. Consequently, the traumatic experience is more relevant to Palestinians than to Israelis. Therefore, the intended meaning associated with "remember" in this context is misleading. Hierarchically, Palestinians are perceived as the aggressors, while Israel is portrayed as the victim. This could also be considered a linguistic strategy of othering, whereby Israel seeks to rally the world to its side using inclusive terms such as "us," while simultaneously isolating Palestinians as "others". Huynh (2015) stated that among the most used linguistic strategies in any written or spoken public political discourse concerns the forced opposition between two or more groups. This is more commonly known as 'Othering', or the 'Us versus Them' dichotomy. The othering strategy has found repeatedly leads to real-world catastrophes. Grego (2022, p. 58) notes that history has consistently been characterized by this dichotomy, which has at times resulted in catastrophic events. Furthermore, Grego explains that othering is often marked by four primary mechanisms that produce alienation and distance: objectification, decontextualization, dehistoricization, and deauthorization.

The second pairing in this group is *modern world* ↔ *the past*, in which Netanyahu once again seeks to persuade the global audience to align with his agenda. The context of this binary opposition is illustrated in his statement:

"Of course, you understand that the war in Gaza has affected every Israeli. But I am sure there are people in New York, London, Melbourne and elsewhere who are probably thinking – what does all of this have to do with me?

The answer is... EVERYTHING.

Because our enemies are your enemies. Our enemies hate all of us with equal venom. They want to drag the modern world back to the past, to a dark age of violence, fanaticism, and terror."

In this context, Israel is hierarchically positioned as a modern nation which is futuristic, tolerant, and devoted to maintaining security. Conversely, all those opposing Israel are depicted as regressive, bound to the past, and associated with violence, fanaticism, and terror. However, Israel's actions consistently contradict this self-portrayal. What nation that professes peace would attack the mediator during ongoing ceasefire negotiations, as Israel did with Qatar? What state that claims to uphold security would have its leader's address at the

United Nations centered almost entirely on aggression and warfare, as seen in Netanyahu's 2025 speech? And what nation that prides itself on tolerance would proclaim itself as a "chosen people" while justifying territorial domination in the name of divine entitlement "the promised land"?

This deconstruction reveals that within Netanyahu's word, the notion of a "modern and peaceful world" is redefined to legitimize Israel's political and military ambitions. The discourse of anti-terrorism thus becomes selectively applied and directed exclusively toward others, while acts of violence committed by Israel are reframed as necessary measures of "self-defense." Similarly, Leslie (2019, p. 250) finds that Netanyahu's leadership has gained strength by amplifying conflict on two fronts: first, against the enemy itself which is associated with Iran and its proxies; and second, any parties who disagreed with him. In Beardsworth's (1996) reading, Derrida's deconstruction exposes the violence concealed within every "horizon of thought," because horizons in all forms constitute political decisions that delineate the limits of intelligibility and justice while claiming universality through the repression of their own contingency. Netanyahu's binary opposition between the "past" and the "modern world" exemplifies such horizon-making: his rhetoric dichotomy of a world divided between "modern civilization" and "archaic barbarism," thus conduct as a moral geography that legitimizes Israel's domination and continuous acts of aggression in the name of "modernizing the world." On the other hand, his populist strategy has also proven effective. By 2015, Netanyahu's rhetoric of populism had successfully consolidated the Israeli public around a common external adversary, reinforcing his image as the nation's protector (Leslie, p. 2019).

4.3 The "Terror Machine" and "Rising Lion"

In his speech, Netanyahu employs the term "*terror machine*" to construct a particular image of Hamas, as illustrated in the statement, "*We crushed the bulk of Hamas's terror machine.*" The word *machine* connotes a mechanical object rather than a living being, thereby reinforcing a hierarchical distinction between Israel Defense Force (IDF) and Hamas. This metaphor is used to create a sense of fear and insecurity, presenting Hamas as a shared enemy that threatens world peace. At the same time, this rhetoric uses an "*othering*" strategy: the IDF is shown as superior, humane, and civilized, while Hamas is portrayed as the ruthless, mindless, uncivilized, and immoral "other."

Still within the context of military operations, Netanyahu uses the phrase *Operation Rising Lion* to name Israel's twelve-day war with Iran, which he said came from biblical terms. This metaphor compares Israel to a lion that is commonly associated with strength, power, courage, and bravery. The lion metaphor is further re-stated by Netanyahu's statement, "*Our sons and daughters fought like lions*" which attributes bravery to Israeli soldiers. However, the actual behavior of the IDF undermines this valorized image. Reports from *The Forward* (2024) document instances of misconduct among Israeli soldiers, including "hanging bras on the fronts of their tanks; modeling for their friends wearing lacy negligees; and dangling white silky underwear over the open mouth of a fellow soldier." Moreover, widely circulated videos on social media which are shared by IDF soldiers prove similar shameless acts. Such realities expose the dissonance between Netanyahu's rhetoric of moral superiority

and the on-ground practices of the military he seeks to glorify. In this context, the assumptions of the lion metaphor which is commonly and deliberately associated with strength, bravery, and courage distorted into legitimization for unethical attack, cowardice, and shameless behaviour.

4.4 Power in Words, Fragility in Meanings

One notable aspect of Netanyahu's 2025 UNGA speech is his attempts at securing international validation through the repeated statements of Israel's "achievements." The culmination of these accomplishments, according to Netanyahu, lies in the claimed destruction of Iran's nuclear and ballistic programs:

"Most importantly, and above everything else that I could say to you or that we did in this past year, in this past decade: we devastated Iran's atomic weapons and ballistic missile programs."

This statement is followed by a series of assertions regarding the elimination of various regional actors:

"Half the Houthi leadership in Yemen—gone. Yahya Sinwar in Gaza—gone. Hasan Nasrallah in Lebanon—gone. The Assad regime in Syria—gone. Those militias in Iraq? Well, they're still deterred. And their leaders, if they attack Israel, will also be gone. And for Iran's top military commanders and its top atomic bomb scientists—well, they're gone too."

While these claims may be intended to project Israel's strength and strategic competence, their repetition indicated hidden layers. In psychological terms, such discursive behavior can be examined through the Freudian concept of *reaction formation*, a defense mechanism emerges to counteract instinctual anxiety or perceived threats to the ego. Reaction formation manifests as an exaggerated or overtly assertive stance that conceals an opposing unconscious impulse. As Peters (1956) explains, it "consists in an exaggerated tendency in opposition to the unconscious wish, in which the personality is permanently prepared for the onset of an insistent instinctual danger" (p. 7). Similarly, Zainal Arifin Mochtar argues in *Dirty Vote* (2025) that governments' boastful language may stem from a sense of insecurity, which indicates low political legitimacy. This is precisely what occurs in Netanyahu's case: he repeatedly employs boastful rhetoric because he has never before faced such unprecedented global isolation, which makes him perceive signs of threat and respond defensively by exaggerating his rhetoric. Such boasting also reflects a denial of what truly occurred in reality. As Garver (1993) notes, drawing on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, such self-denial is really a kind of boasting. Aristotle (1954) also implies that boasting functions to conceal or obscure the truth itself. Evidence of Israel's insecurity is further reflected in Netanyahu's own statements to his people. In *The Times of Israel*, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu acknowledged that Israel is facing increasing isolation on the international stage and recognized that this situation could precipitate arms embargoes and "the beginnings of economic sanctions. In the same vein, Martinez Plazas (2024) also emphasizes in her thesis that Israel consistently issued statements of strength by combining a victim narrative with an image of unity and resilience to project Israel as a victimized yet strong nation.

5. CONCLUSION

The deconstructive reading of Netanyahu's 2025 UNGA address has demonstrated that his attempt to reclaim his narratives is built upon three aspects: the use of unstable binary oppositions, metaphors, and boastful language. The binary aspects, as stated ('modern world' vs. 'past', 'peace' vs. 'threat'), are often used as primary tools for *Othering*. As Grego (2022) warns, such dichotomies function as mechanisms that de-historicize and de-contextualize the conflict providing a moral license for the very "catastrophic events." Netanyahu's speech thus may ethically 'erase' Palestinian trauma and political legitimacy. Furthermore, Netanyahu's use of metaphors such as "terror machine" and "Operation Rising Lion" seeks to construct a narrative of moral superiority by portraying Hamas as mindless and brutal while elevating the IDF as civilized. Finally, the repetitive, boastful diction of "achievements," as shown through his emotional statement "gone... gone... gone...", reveals underlying insecurity and a form of self-denial against the reality of global isolation. All these strategic maneuvers illustrate Netanyahu's attempt to reclaim Israel's narrative to regain global support. The ultimate implication of this performance is the potential normalization of the 'Othering' of the Palestinian struggle, framing it as a necessary cost for a 'better,' civilized world. The success of such a narrative on the global stage thus carries the severe risk of undermining international efforts for Palestinian liberation, which have now gained momentum.

REFERENCES

Academic journals:

- Hall, Stuart. 1999. "Whose Heritage?: Un-Settling the Heritage,' Re-Imagining the Post-Nation." *Third Text*. 13 (49): 3–13.
- Huynh, Nina (2015). *The "Us" vs. "Them" Dichotomy That Leads to Dehumanization*. University of British Columbia.
- Khaled, D. Y. A. (2020). A critical discourse analysis of Benjamin Netanyahu's speech at the United Nations General Assembly in 2014. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation (IJLLT)*, 3(3), 34-47. <https://doi.org/10.32996/ijllt.2020.3.3.5>
- Matush, K. (2023). Harnessing backlash: How leaders can benefit from antagonizing foreign actors. *British Journal of Political Science*, 53, 902-918. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123422000370>
- Noy, C. (2024). "I repeatedly tell you, the future is yours-the righteous, not the liars": Hope in Saleh Diab's political speeches in East Jerusalem. *Language in Society*, 53, 857-879. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404524000940>
- Olivas Osuna, J. J., & Burton, G. (2025). Populism at the UN: comparing Netanyahu's and Abbas's speeches, 2010-19. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 52(3), 746-768. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2024.2339885>
- Peters, R. S. (1956). Freud's Theory. *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, 7(25), 4–12. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/685932>
- Rafik, L. Y. (2018). *Self and other representation in Netanyahu's speech (2018) in the 73rd session of the UN General Assembly and its Arabic interpretation: A critical discourse analysis*. Faculty of Al-Alsun, Ain Shams University.
- Soukni, A. (2025). *The power of political speeches and linguistic strategies: A qualitative critical discourse analysis on Benjamin Netanyahu's speech to the 2024 United Nations General Assembly*. Uppsala University.

- Supriatin, A. R., & Napitupulu, F. (2025). Dekonstruksi peran diplomasi perempuan dalam teks pidato Menteri Luar Negeri RI Retno Marsudi. *Jurnal Pustaka Komunikasi*, 8(1), 250-260. <https://doi.org/10.32509/pustakom.v8i1.5710>
- Thomassen, L. (2010). Deconstruction as method in political theory. *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft*, 39(1), 41-53.
- Ushomirsky, I., Leshem, O. A., & Halperin, E. (2023). Ethos of conflict in the international arena: Power predicts expression of threat for security and hope for peace in speeches of leaders of nations in conflict. *Political Psychology*, 44(6), 1215–1232. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12896>
- Wise, C. (2001). Deconstruction and Zionism: Jacques Derrida's "Specters of Marx." *Diacritics*, 31(1), 56–72. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1566315>

Books:

- Aristotle. (1954). *Rhetoric* (W. R. Roberts, Trans.). Modern Library.
- Beardsworth, R. (1996). *Derrida and the political*. Routledge.
- Derrida, J. (1976). *Of Grammatology*, translated by Gayatri C. Spivak. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.
- Derrida, J. (1978). *Writing and Difference*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Derrida, Jacques (2003). Autoimmunity, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, in: Giovanna Borradori (ed.): *Philosophy In A Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*, Chicago, 85–136.
- Faruk. (2012). *Metode Penelitian Sastra, Sebuah Penjelajahan Awal*. Pustaka Pelajar.

Thesis:

- Grego, V. (2022). *Deconstructing diplomacy: A critical analysis on the strategic use of language by American political figures during the Vietnam War* (Master's thesis, Università degli Studi). <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14247/11733>
- Leslie, J. G. (2019). *Fear and Insecurity : Competing Narratives of the Iran-Israel Relationship* [PhD thesis, SOAS University of London]. <https://doi.org/10.25501/SOAS.00032460>
- Martinez Plazas, L. (2024, January 10). 'Half a truth is often a great lie' (Master's thesis, Global History and International Relations). <http://hdl.handle.net/2105/75118>

Internet sources:

- Al Jazeera English. (2025, September 26). *Netanyahu addresses 80th UNGA in New York* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8snMmn2Nrvw>
- Berman, N. (2024, March 29). 'The most moral army in the world' is posing with Palestinian women's underwear in Gaza. *The Forward*. <https://forward.com/opinion/598153/israeli-soldiers-underwear-gaza-photos/>
- Chernus, I. (2015). *The myth of Israel's insecurity*. *Historians Against the War*. <https://historiansagainstawar.org/resources/Chernus2015.pdf>
- Dirty Vote. (2025, October 20). *DIRTY VOTE II o3 - Full Movie* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=895Cqij7i00>
- Fleck, A. (2025). *The countries holding the world's nuclear arsenal*. *Statista*. <https://www.statista.com/chart/8301/the-countries-holding-the-worlds-nuclear-arsenal/>
- Freiberg, N., Berman, L., & ToI Staff. (2025, September 15). Netanyahu admits Israel economically isolated, says will need to become 'super-Sparta'. *The Times of Israel*. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-admits-israel-is-economically-isolated-will-need-to-become-self-reliant/>

- Garver, E. (1993). Deception in Aristotle's Rhetoric: How to tell the rhetorician from the sophist, and which one to bet on. *The Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy Newsletter*, 231. <https://orb.binghamton.edu/sagp/231>
- Ramos, R. (2014, January 3). *The status of the political in Derrida's work*. *TELOScope*. <https://www.telospress.com/the-status-of-the-political-in-derridas-work/>
- Reuters. (2025). *In Gaza war, tens of thousands killed and widespread destruction*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/gaza-war-tens-thousands-killed-widespread-destruction-2025-10-07/>
- Smith, D. (2025, October 11). *Boycotting Israel has gone mainstream: 'We've never seen such traction before'*. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/oct/11/israel-global-boycott>
- TOI Staff. (2025, September 26). *Full text of Netanyahu's speech: We won't let the world shove a terror state down our throat*. *The Times of Israel*. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/full-text-of-netanyahus-speech-we-wont-let-the-world-shove-a-terror-state-down-our-throat/>

Reports:

- Crawford, N. C. (2025). *The human toll of the Gaza war: Direct and indirect death from 7 October 2023 to 3 October 2025*. Costs of War Project, Watson School of International and Public Affairs, Brown University. https://costsofwar.watson.brown.edu/sites/default/files/2025-10/Human-Toll-in-Gaza_Costs-of-War_Crawford_7-October-2025.pdf