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Mythical Thought and the Constitution of Israeli Foreign Policy*

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Abstract

Israel's foreign policy at times diverges from prevailing realist expectations, specifically rational considerations and prudence. This article argues that this is the result of what Ernst Cassirer calls mythical thought or what can be called a myth-based discourse that constructs the mindset of policy makers and has made the emergence of non-realist elements in Israel's foreign policy possible. In this discourse, quantity, quality, similarity, space, and time acquire specific characteristics and, in the field of foreign policy, this primarily leads to maximalist aspirations, volunteerism, reactivity, lack of proportionality between capabilities and actions, and at times refraining from diplomatic engagements. However, we encounter a state's identity as a modern ruling state which, to gain international recognition and acceptability, must abide by the norms and laws that define statehood. On the other hand, we face an identity stemming from a mythical discourse, encompassing non-modern, irrational elements and self-definitions based on rules that often contradict legal discourse. Relying on discourse analysis, the texts produced by Israeli foreign policymakers are analyzed to show how this specific way of thinking has made non-realist elements in Israeli foreign policy possible.

Keywords: Discourse Analysis, Foreign Policy, Identity, Israel, Mythical Thought

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1. Introduction

A significant portion of the existing literature discusses the hostile environment in which Israel has found itself since its inception as a justification for the policies that it has pursued, and argues that its policies have always been realistic¹. Since its establishment, however, Israel has been accused of having expansionist and revisionist aims in its foreign policy². Some view Israel's approach as unrealistic and a source of tensions with neighboring countries. Israel's leaders could have resolved many international issues without turning them into regional crises. Among Israeli officials, the use of force often seems to be viewed as the easiest and most convenient way to settle international disputes, as they have consistently employed it throughout history. The scholars who do not consider these policies to be realistic, point to the role of elements such as ideology (Shlaim, 2014; Kisler, 2023; Rubin, 2022; Said, 1985), discourse (Rynhold, 2007; Barnett, 1999), and myths in justifying and legitimizing Israel's unrealistic foreign policy (Merom, 1996; Zerubavel, 1995).

It seems that certain elements that realists would consider as the key aspects of a realistic foreign policy have not always been present in Israel's foreign policy. At times, Israel has pursued policies involving unrealistic elements, including a mismatch between capabilities and actions, volunteerism, reactive behavior, maximalist demands, and weak diplomacy. Thus, Israel's force-based policies cannot be solely justified on the grounds of security imperatives and increasing national power.

Israel has not consistently pursued policies based on its actual

1. See, for example, David, 2009; Liberman, 2009; Inbar, 1990

2. See, for example, Maoz, 2009; Shlaim, 2014; Bani salameh, 2022; Kurtulus, 2007

capabilities in a way that leads to desired outcomes¹. On October 29, 1956, for example, Israel attacked the Sinai Peninsula in coordination with Britain and France. At first glance, reasons like eliminating Egypt's weapons to gain regional balance, ending Egyptian sabotage, guaranteeing free navigation through the Suez Canal, and creating deterrence against Arab forces may have seemed realistic. However, Israel achieved only partial success in meeting its stated goals. Furthermore, it demonstrated a lack of understanding of the international environment by not informing the emerging superpower, the United States, about the attack beforehand. This led to criticism from the U.S., and Israel only obtained limited permission for shipping with major power approval. The Soviet Union also threatened Israel and condemned the attack. The aims Israel set for itself in this war appear to have been unrealistic in hindsight. These overambitious goals stemmed from elements like weak diplomacy and a maximalist policy approach (Maoz, 2009; Morris, 2001, p. 297).

In June 1967, Israel launched attacks against Egypt, Jordan and Syria. A series of escalating threats had made Israel feel endangered - Arab leaders made speeches about destroying Israel, Egypt and Jordan established a joint military command, while moving commando units into Jordan, and Israel had concerns about a joint Arab attack. Feeling the need to preempt, Israel seized control of Jerusalem, the Golan Heights, Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, and the West Bank within 6 days (Freedman, 2009).

Subsequent research has shown that the actions by Arab states did not warrant Israel's attack in the first place. Scholars have

1. All the example presented in the introduction can also be partially analyzed realistically. Here, the aim is to demonstrate alternative analysis to evaluate their feasibility.

argued that Israel could have defused the crisis through active diplomacy instead. Historical analysis has identified additional factors such as domestic politics, accidental escalation, and psychological spillover effects as potential underlying causes of the war, rather than genuine security threats (Maoz, 2009; Sucharov, 2005; Bar-Siman-Tov, 1984; Lawson, 1996).

Alongside these analyses, it can be said that part of this expansionism reflected the policy of “from the Nile to the Euphrates”. Given that the Levi Eshkol government had no political program for expansionism and power-seeking, and even Dayan raised this lack of program in the Knesset, one cannot easily speak of the existence of a purposeful and rational program at the time. Disregard for other countries' vital interests, lack of prudence, and disproportion between capabilities and actions in foreign policy were other non-realistic elements of this policy. Furthermore, it appeared that Israel would proceed as far as its appetite allowed with no primary plan. It was only when the Soviet Union explicitly threatened to intervene on June 10 that Israel halted its expansionism.

In August 1982, Israel initiated an aggressive war against Lebanon that lasted 18 years until Israeli forces formally withdrew from southern Lebanon in 2000. Israel entered the conflict using guerrilla tactics, compounding the complexities. It is clear that the expansionist ambitions of Israeli leaders were among the driving reasons - they pursued goals like consolidating control over the West Bank by occupying the territory, as well as destroying the Palestine Liberation Organization's presence in southern Lebanon (Bregman, 2016).

While Israel succeeded in eliminating the PLO's presence in southern Lebanon, it failed to achieve its primary objective of

establishing a Christian government in the country (Sandler, 2018, p. 109). Moreover, it could not diminish Syria's influence in the region, nor could it convince Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and West Bank to accept the limited autonomy plan proposed by Menachem Begin (Freedman, 2009). Furthermore, Israel sought absolute rather than relative security by expanding its operational zone throughout Lebanon, which can be interpreted as a maximalist policy. This action was accompanied by non-realistic elements such as high-risk behavior and the prioritization of militarism over diplomacy, as Israel could have initially pressured the PLO through diplomatic channels and the Security Council. Additionally, one can point to Israel's reactive measures during temporary ceasefire negotiations, when it suddenly decided to bombard Beirut (Shlaim, 2014, p. 1099).

It can even be argued that in the process of reaching and/or enforcing peace agreements and treaties signed by Israel with Arab nations, some unrealistic elements were present. This was evident in cases like the Camp David Accords and the Madrid Conference, where Israel exhibited maximalist demands and pursued a weak diplomacy, failing to achieve agreements fully beneficial to itself. After signing the 1979 Camp David Accords with Egypt, Israel did not abide by the overall framework of reaching accommodation with other Arab parties. Instead, it expropriated the agreement for its own benefit (Sayegh, 1978; Shlaim, 2014, pp. 1005-1024, 1045). The situation was even more pronounced at the Madrid Peace Conference. Despite receiving reasonable proposals, including establishing a joint Palestinian-Jordanian confederation, the Israelis persisted in opposing the agreement. This indicated an unrealistic foreign policy approach containing elements of maximalism, reactive policies and weak diplomacy (Shlaim, 2014).

In general, it seems that even when a realist foreign policy is initiated, some emotional elements such as anger, vengeance, hatred, obstinacy and the like arise to transform it into imprudent and hence unrealistic decisions. The question of how such an emotion-driven unrealistic/imprudent foreign policy becomes possible is worth examining – a question the answer to which not only makes us understand Israeli foreign policy, but also helps researchers to better understand non-realist elements in many countries' foreign policies.

This article seeks to answer this question within a general constructivist framework by showing how a particular mindset prone to emotions is formed. It is argued that mythical form of thought, (a concept borrowed from Ernst Cassirer) leads to the formation of a myth-based discourse that constructs the mindset of policy makers and thus makes Israel's non-realist foreign policy possible. In this discourse, quantity, quality, similarity, space, and time acquire specific characteristics and, in the field of foreign policy, these may lead to underestimating diplomacy, maximalist aspirations, volunteerism, reactivity, and lack of proportionality between capabilities and goals/actions. Even when such a foreign policy faces constraints imposed by the international structure, it does not necessarily turn to a realist solution, but a new mythical objective is set.

This theoretical framework can contribute to understanding how mythical discourses constitute emotions that pave the way for foreign policies in which realist elements fade away even if they were the initial approach to decision making. It links together a form of thought to a discursive structure that constitutes agents' understanding of the world and their position therein, and thus, allows them to choose tactics and even strategies that may not work

or have a huge cost, both material and non-material. Therefore, although it has similarities to other constructivist explanations such as ontological security (Mitzen, 2006; Steele, 2008), respect and disrespect (Wolf, 2011), cultural explanations (for example Friedrichs, 2015), and emotional approaches (such as Hutchison and Bleiker, 2014) as it explains non-realist foreign policies, it gives us a background (mythical thought) that itself can be seen as the source of both beliefs and emotions.

In what follows, first we show the characteristics of a mythical way of thinking as a discursive form with foreign policy implications. Then the manifestation of this way of thinking in an ideological foreign policy and the limitations it faces when entering into the international “symbolic order” (a term borrowed from Jacques Lacan) are discussed. This is followed by a short discussion on discourse analysis as the method applied to understand Israel’s mythical foreign policy. The manifestation of mythical discourse in Israel’s approach to foreign policy is examined in the fourth part. The article ends with some concluding remarks.

2. Myth-based Discourse as a Way of Thinking

The theoretical framework of this article is derived from the ideas of German mythologist Ernst Cassirer and discourse theory. From Cassirer’s perspective, man is a symbolizing animal. That is, he thinks, reflects, and perceives the world around him in the form of images. Cassirer inherited this view from Kant’s epistemology. According to Kant, human beings encounter the world and objects through concepts of transcendental categories. These categories, including time, space, etc., are the framework of mental faculties and are activated when an individual encounters an empirical

object and wants to perceive it (Cassirer, 1955a, p. 10). Based on this, Cassirer argues that human beings think within forms, and each of these forms possesses elements (categories) that achieve unity within the form. The elements or categories to which he refers (including quantity, quality, space and time, and similarity) are analogous to Kant's schemas of the mental faculties that make thinking possible. From Cassirer's point of view, not only mythical thinking, but also other models of thinking, including scientific, artistic and philosophical thinking function in this way. However, mythical thinking has features that distinguish it from other forms of thinking. It is one step closer to intuition and dwells in a world of pure images. In other words, mythical consciousness is in the immediate presence of the object, and the mythical object overpowers it. Hence, mythical consciousness loses its ability to reflect on itself in relation to the real world (Cassirer, 1955b, p. 35).

According to Cassirer, mythical thinking does not differentiate between image and thing, the world of dreams and the world of objective reality, and therefore cannot have meaning in the exact sense of the word (Cassirer, 1955a, p. 36). For example, in politics, one can refer to the presence of great leaders and founders whose legacy remains in collective memory and enters the domain of foreign policy. Mythical thinking prioritizes the ability to influence over causal relationships and the analysis of phenomena. In this mode of thought, if a deceased person is still perceived to have the power to exert influence on the world, she is considered to be alive, regardless of her physical state. Consequently, any action taken upon the image of a person is believed to directly affect the person him/herself. This belief can lead to intense reactions against, for example, the tearing of images of beloved leaders or the burning of national flags.

In mythical thinking, the establishment of “identicalness” (sameness, uniformity, equivalence) between different phenomena is prevalent. The mythical mind disregards the conditions under which phenomena come into being and equates different levels of a phenomenon, presenting them as lacking depth. Another characteristic of mythical thinking is the emphasis on the fundamental role of causality without considering the specific conditions surrounding the occurrence of a phenomenon in relation to that causal element. In other words, mythical thinking attributes every event to a specific cause (Cassirer, 1955b, p. 47). The notion of a conspiracy against one's country can be viewed as an example of this type of perception of causality.

Furthermore, the mythical mind perceives every act as having a goal and purpose, with all the forces of nature being nothing more than the expression of the will of either the devil or God (Cassirer, 1955a, p. 49). This can be exemplified by the utopian visions that politicians present to their people and the heavenly promises made to them. The categories of mythical thinking, including quantity, quality, similarity, space, and time, operate within the framework of these characteristics and in conjunction with them, enabling the distinct style of mythical thought.

Quantity: Within the category of quantity, the mythical mind operates differently from the scientific-critical mind. Rather than synthesizing and analyzing phenomena to establish logical relationships between objects, such as the relationship of an individual to its species or genus, mythical thinking relies on the principle of equalizing differences and distinctions based on the perceived similarity of objects. This is because mythical thinking is fundamentally grounded in relationships of identity (Cassirer, 1955b, p. 65). In other words, in mythical thinking, the relationship

between genus and species is considered identical, and unlike scientific thinking, which takes into account logical differences, mythical thinking involves the equating of relationships through a process of identification.

This category can manifest itself in various contexts, including foreign policy. For example, certain foreign policy leaders may envision themselves as having a prophetic mission and position themselves accordingly, drawing on the mythical understanding of identity and equivalence to establish their role and purpose.

Quality: Quality refers to the relationship of an object to its attributes. In mythical thinking, quality also encompasses the entity's totality due to its substantial unity (single causality). This is because in mythical thinking, there is only one cause, and that one specific cause determines the quality of the whole object (Cassirer, 1955a, pp. 65-66). For example, in Nazism, the German people were identified by their Aryan race, which gave them superior characteristics that distinguished them.

Similarity: The articulation of the chaos of sensory impressions, in which definite groups based on similarities are picked out and specific series are formed, is, again, common to both logical and mythical thinking; without it, myth could no more arrive at stable configurations than logical thought at stable concept. In mythical thought, there is no precise relation between what is called essential, non-essential, inward, and outward, since myth regards any resemblance as an unmediated apprehension of the essence of that phenomenon (Cassirer, 1955b, p. 67). For example, with the nationalist definition of the national self, a binary relationship of self and other can be constructed, which leads to dichotomization and hostility.

Space: Mythical thinking divides space into two distinct spheres: the sacred and the non-sacred. The realm of sacred territory is separated from its surrounding environment and protected from the public domain. This distinction causes areas and spatial directions to differentiate from each other, and, as a result, they acquire contrasting and complementary symbolic meanings. Another feature of mythical thinking is the act of limitation related to the sacred coordinates of space, which has a juridical-religious sense, in a way that even the boundaries of public and private space become specified (Cassirer, 1955a, p. 100). And finally, another characteristic of mythical space is its structuredness, meaning that the relationship between parts and whole of a space is a static one, and no matter how much we divide space into its parts, we still see traces of the whole in each part (Cassirer, 1955b, pp. 85-89). For example, in nationalist thought, the homeland is sacred, and sometimes this land is defined beyond existing borders, providing the grounds for territorial expansionism along with sanctity and thus legitimizing it. In this case, attacking the land of others, as it is considered non-sacred, will be permissible.

Time: Time is a vital element for myth because myth, in its original sense, is mostly an insight about time rather than place. The mechanism of time becomes activated after the differentiation between the sacred and the profane is specified, and at this stage, the dimension of time is added to place, giving it depth. The way the phenomenon develops in the element of time is such a way that myth sanctifies and justifies the past. Mythical thinking does not accept physical, extended time, but present time carries the past and contains the future. The mode of consciousness of time is like a process that creates a kind of repetitive orderly system, meaning events and occurrences become comprehensible in general and directly in a way that they are repeatedly alternating. It should be

added that what is important in the discussion of time in myth is the element of destiny, and it is only within this unbreakable realm that the life and action of humans and gods becomes possible (Cassirer, 1955a, pp. 104-112). In the realm of international politics, again nationalisms such as American exceptionalism often entail a sense of a special fate or mission for a national unit, or reference to a golden past present in the political culture of many countries.

So far, we have attempted to concisely explain the form and elements of mythical thinking to describe its formation and functioning. However, articulating the mythical thinking of foreign policy actors is possible by examining the characteristics of mythical forms and their specific categories within the context of discourses and narratives. Mythical thinking emerges through the statements of norm-setting subjects, and by analyzing these statements, the hierarchy of categories and the mythical discursive form can be grasped. It is important to note that mythical thinking manifests itself through the language and narratives employed by foreign policy actors, providing the framework within which mythical forms and categories are expressed and perpetuated.

Discourses, as structures of signification, construct social realities (Milliken, 1999, p. 229) and make social lives meaningful. In other words, we become aware of the world through discursive categorizations. Within these systems of meaning, some types of actions become possible while others become inconceivable. Social cognition of the world involves different social actions with specific consequences (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002).

What is the relationship between discourse and forms of thought? As Cassirer argues, humans are symbolic creatures who make sense of the social world through forms. For Cassirer, forms are unifying frameworks that contain elements that become

meaningful when articulated through patterns of thought. The elements of a mythical thought-form are intrinsic to the form and only gain wholeness within that form. However, given that forms exist within the domain of culture and its symbolic, semiotic exchanges, they take on a discursive aspect. Similarly, discourses comprise sets of signifiers organized around a central signified to become meaningful totalities. Due to this analogy, the semantic system of a “form-driven discourse” can enable a framework through which subjects and agents understand their surrounding environment. Moreover, based on the constitutive and regulatory rules that it reproduces, a discourse makes certain actions possible and others impossible. Mythical discursive forms can be seen, for example, in Zionism, Nazism, and exceptionalism.

To disseminate themselves throughout society, discourses employ narratives. By providing a unified account of a state's past, present and future, narratives construct an identity of state “selfhood” that matters significantly (Steele, 2008, p. 20). This is undertaken by norm-setting subjects. Mythical thought categories manifest in politics through narratives which, owing to their myth-based quality, reveal the world in a particular way. However, the self-portrayal in such narratives also exhibits unconscious traits - while consciously storytelling and organizing the “self,” state agents do not always do this intentionally. For instance, the exceptionalism of the United States as the “city on hill” is sometimes explicitly referenced in presidential speeches, framing America’s global role accordingly. At other times, when adopting certain positions or actions, this self-concept unconsciously at play can be discerned without explicit mention – like America’s state- and nation-building efforts abroad stemming from its perceived “mission,” an endless narrative that, despite recurring failure, persists in guiding U.S. foreign policy.

3. From Myth and Narrative to Ideological Foreign Policy

When a mythically-centered discursive form becomes dominant in the realm of foreign policy, it enables certain actions while rendering others impossible. Such a discourse is derived from the internal context of the state and the definition of the "self" presented by its agents through narrative. This discourse is unconsciously represented in foreign policy, drawing upon elements of mythical thinking. Given its past-oriented perspective and the categories of mythical thought, it engages in extreme binary oppositions. In this regard, it portrays some actions as legitimate and others as illegitimate. Moreover, this discourse, considering the internal context, constructs part of the state's identity. Another part of the state's identity/statehood arises from modern elements such as sovereignty, diplomacy, and the constitutive and regulative rules of international discourse. International discourse refers to the set of rules according to which states act and consider their actions legitimate, such as international law, diplomacy, and the rules of war. In a general formulation, all the aforementioned elements construct the state's "statehood".

To this point, we can say that the mythical discursive form, as an overarching macro-discourse, shapes the context within which a state's foreign policy discourse is situated. However, elements of this foreign policy discourse also achieve coherence by articulating with components of the international discourse. Accordingly, on one hand, we encounter a state's identity as a modern ruling state which, to gain international recognition and acceptability, must abide by the norms and laws that define statehood. On the other hand, we face an identity stemming from a mythical discourse, encompassing non-modern, irrational elements and self-definitions

based on rules that often contradict legal discourse¹. It is an identity that can be reckless, risk-taking, seeking revisionism coupled with militarism. What Wendt (1999) termed the "corporate identity" of states can be constituted on the basis of this mythical discourse. Here, mythical thinking, by blending past, present and future, sacralizing national territory or expansionist ambitions, intertwining signs/symbols with objects, and constructing self/other divides, can envision the state as more powerful than it is. It can claim moral righteousness, delegitimize others, opt for costly choices unlikely to succeed, rule out prudent policymaking, and gravitate toward aggressive, extremist, emotional and disproportionate policies. Examples of this mythical discourse driving national identities and foreign policies can be seen in American exceptionalism, German Nazism, and the Zionist ideology.

4. Discourse Analysis as Method

In order to show how more or less non-realistic foreign policy is constituted and hence becomes possible, this study employs Norman Fairclough's approach to discourse analysis. For Fairclough, discourse refers to the representation of the material, mental and social world. Discourses make the social world meaningful for actors, allowing them to view and participate in representing social life in different ways. In Fairclough's approach, "text" has an expansive meaning - it can be said that for him, nothing exists outside of text; it encompasses not only writing, but

1. While it is true that the mythical agent operates effectively within domestic structures, when entering the international arena, it cannot fulfill the narrative and achieve its goal, thus becoming anxious (See Lacan, 1977, p. 232; Evans, 1996, p. 12). However, this is not the subject of this article, and it has been discussed in detail in another article.

also images and speech (Fairclough, 2003, p. 21). To the extent an author or individual is committed to the propositions and sentences used in a text, their identity becomes apparent. That is, based on the propositions applied, the author demonstrates her level of commitment to the text. Likewise, texts with a high degree of commitment contain significant authority, while those where the author has used equivocal phrases embody less authority (Fairclough, 2003, p. 118). One important element through which discourses reproduce subjects is narrative. Broadly speaking, narratives are stories comprised of a beginning, middle and end. Without narratives, the histories of humans, individuals and peoples would be meaningless. Narratives take infinitely diverse forms that make individuals' experience of their environment possible (Sadriu, 2021, p. 4).

States employ narratives to convey their understanding of foreign policy. In the case of Israel, its mythical discursive form, operating within the categories of mythical thought, enables it to experience action and reaction in its foreign policy. These categories, such as time, space, quality, quantity, and similarity, serve as containers into which narrative content is poured, thereby illuminating the mythical mentality of the agents involved (Sadriu, 2021; Fairclough, 2003; Dunn & Neumann, 2016).

One characteristic of discourses is the homogenization of floating elements and signifiers within chains of equivalence. This occurs in contrast to another feature which is the exclusion of heterogeneous elements; i.e., signifiers which do not fit into the chain of equivalence enter into the chain of difference. These elements are excluded so that the elements of the discourse become commensurable. The construction of this duality is common in discourse analysis in order to depict the utopian visions without flaws.

In mythic thought as well, the construction of dualities is commonplace, since according to Lévi-Strauss, mythic thought emerges from contradictions and dualities; according to Cassirer, the division of space into sacred and profane areas affirms this idea. Mythic thought constructs dualities in order to make the realm of myth more real for the subject, for example, the dualities of good/evil, devil/angel, friend/enemy, elected/non-elected, etc. Therefore, by discovering these dualities, one can take a step towards uncovering and determining the hierarchical structure of mythic thought. The data for textual analysis in this study is selected from a collection of speeches by Israeli leaders and prime ministers found in Israeli newspapers and websites. Regarding the selected texts, the authors attempt to choose diverse events in which the texts were produced in order to demonstrate the breadth of the mythic mentality among Israel's leaders. For this reason, eight texts comprising statements by key foreign policy decision-makers have been selected: two texts from Benjamin Netanyahu, and one each from Shimon Peres, Ariel Sharon, Yitzhak Shamir, Menachem Begin, Golda Meir and Yitzhak Rabin. When examining the texts produced by these agents, as major producers of Israeli foreign policy, once the content of key selected mythical elements such as time, space, quantity, quality, similarity and form is repeatedly represented in various forms across the texts to reach an adequate level; from a discourse analysis perspective, it can be said that the required adequacy has been attained. In other words, instead of existing formulas about sample representativeness in statistical analyses, in discourse analysis we can say a kind of textual saturation (or representativeness) has been achieved when repetition of categories and relationships shows we are no longer encountering new ones (Milliken, 1999).

5. Israeli Foreign Policy as a Myth-Based Discourse

In this section, we endeavor to firstly describe the mythical discursive form in terms of legitimizing actions, individuals, and heroes, while delegitimizing the other and his actions as an adversary. We will also present an overview of the characteristics of the mythical discursive form. Subsequently, by delving into the unconscious narratives of foreign policy agents and focusing on the categories of mythical thinking, such as quantity, quality, similarity, time, and space, we will demonstrate the elements of this type of thinking and how it is formulated. Finally, we will explain/constitute our findings regarding the formation of the mythical discursive form and its elements.

5. 1. Legitimizing the Self and Delegitimizing the Other

One of the main characteristics of the mythical discursive form is the extreme legitimization of the self and delegitimization of the other. This occurs in various ways and by employing aspects and attributes of the “self” such as mystical and religious imagery, use of heroes, linking ancient and modern eras, as well as the use of highly epic signifiers that distinguish “we” from the “other”:

The Jewish people are small nation in number but large in spirit¹ ... And a clear line between resistance in the ghettos, camps, forests, and bravery of the State of Israel. It is a line of dignity, of renewed independence, of mutual responsibility, of exalting God’s name² ... Rising of heroism is not just matter of

1. It refers to the legend of Masada, in which a small number of defenders were able to resist a much larger besieging force.

2. The text refers to the legend of Bar Kokhba, which relates to a revolt aimed at securing Jewish independence from the Roman rule.

doing justice to their bravery. It is an existential need, for each one of us, for all of us as one people¹ (Peres, 2013).

Here, as we see, the self is characterized and praised on the basis of its bravery, dignity, responsibility, and transcendental connections and its unity is urged. Sharon (2005) remarks:

The Jewish people have a long memory, a memory which united the exiles of Israel for thousands of years; a memory which has its origin in God's commandment to our forefather Abraham: "Go forth", and continued with the receiving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, and the wanderings of the Children of Israel in the desert, led by Moses on their journey to the Promised Land, the Land of Israel.

Here again a sacred past is resorted to in order to both call for unity and justify the return of the Jewish to the "Promised Land". The legitimization in the chain of equivalence causes the Zionist discursive form to exclude others and present them as a hostile "other"; others who, if present, would disrupt the utopia envisioned by the Zionist mythical thought. "Iran's goons in Gaza, its lackeys in Lebanon, its Revolutionary Guards on the Golan Heights are clutching Israel with three tentacles of terror" (Netanyahu, 2015). The Other, here Iran and its allies, are portrayed as the source of terror in order to delegitimize them. Such delegitimization is also seen in the words of Peres (2013) and Netanyahu (2015, 2020).

Another legitimizing element of the Zionist discursive form is seeing matters as principle of purpose. Given that in the mentality of foreign policy agents, the Jewish people are chosen and unique and are specifically approved by God, hence the "national revival",

1. The text refers to the legend of the Hills of Tel and the emergence of Yosef Trumpeldor, who was killed in a battle against Arab forces.

"protection of the Jewish people" and "attaining peace and tranquility" are seen as God's promise given to Abraham and his ancestors. In other words, the "salvation of the Jewish people" is one of the distinguishing aspects of this people from other peoples. Within this framework, the form of domestic discourse sees *national revival as a divine destiny* promised by God to the Jewish people thousands of years ago: "We will ensure that every person will have the right to be different ..., different and equal. We will never despair. After all, we were commanded: Do not fear my servant Jacob, the Lord will give strength to his people" (Peres, 2013). The teleological feature is also repeated in the texts of Netanyahu and Ariel Sharon.

The mythical Zionist discursive form is based on an intellectual structure and enables a mechanism whose basis must be sought in the narrative and unconscious categories of foreign policy agents. Accordingly, the categories of this type of thinking are important.

5. 2. Fundamental Categories of Mythical Thought

5. 2. 1. Similarity: Ideologization of Symbols and Loss of Their Polysemous Quality

The authors of this discourse, considering their mythical formalist perspective, utilize signifiers and symbols that carry a substantial emotional weight and possess the quality of irrationality, consequently losing their interpretive nature. In this discourse, signifiers such as the chosen people, being active, bravery, pride, power, freedom, life, and peace are contrasted with powerlessness, abyss, extinction, slavery, death, and war. These signifiers are imbued with immense emotional charge, and although they can possess rational qualities, the authors' mythical outlook causes

their emotional and affective aspects to prevail. This can be exemplified by a statement made by Netanyahu (2020): "Your presence in Jerusalem honors the memory of six million victims of the Holocaust. Israel and the Jewish people thank you. Auschwitz and Jerusalem: the abyss and the peak; Auschwitz – extermination. Jerusalem – revival. Auschwitz - enslavement. Jerusalem – freedom. Auschwitz – death. Jerusalem - life".

The dichotomies presented by the author in various texts position "us" against the "other", creating a version of ourselves that is incapable of establishing communication through the interpretable symbols of language. Instead, the focus is solely on the emotional and affective interpretation of signifiers and propositions. This mythical framing of the world and its events leads to a stark division between the in-group and the out-group, with the in-group being associated with positive signifiers such as life, freedom, and power, while the out-group is linked to negative signifiers like death, slavery, and powerlessness. Furthermore, the general and even ahistorical or pan-historical victimhood is there to justify never-ending retaliatory efforts.

The prevalence of emotional and affective aspects in the interpretation of signifiers and propositions within the mythical discursive form hinders the possibility of rational communication and understanding between the two sides. The dichotomies presented in the discourse reinforce this division, making it difficult for the in-group to perceive the out-group as anything other than an adversary or a threat. This mythical thinking, characterized by the dominance of emotional and affective interpretations, shapes the way in which the author and his audience perceive and interact with the world around him.

Furthermore, the author's formalist perspective focusing on the ritualization of life and immersion in the collective causes the emotional intensity of such words to increase doubly. Additionally, the collective nature of rituals causes individuals to see themselves as belonging to a single creed and to maintain a biased position against others, preventing them from entering into communication with this group. It should be added that rituals seek the collectivization of subjects. This characteristic causes the subject to understand him/herself as part of a collective and within a group, no longer seeing the world as an individual, and instead dissolving into a collective idealistic fervor that the mythical discourse form promises to achieve, which can be seen, for example, in Netanyahu's (2020) discourse:

Seventy-five years ago, our people- the Jewish People – emerged from the largest killing field in the history of humanity. The survivors do not forget anything: The helplessness, the endless suffering, the flames and the smoke, the bereavement and the loss. But they also remember, with deep gratitude, the day of liberation, the entry of the Red Army into Auschwitz, the immense sacrifice of the allies soldiers and peoples alike.

5.2.2. Quality: The Chosenness of the Jewish People

The mythical formal perspective views the Jewish people as chosen. In this view, what is valuable and worthwhile is not the path traversed by the Jewish people, but the path traversed by the "chosen people". For this reason, good, bad, beautiful, ugly qualities and attributes, peace, war and land emerge from an abstract and complex state and manifest themselves in the chosen Jewish people. In other words, instead of the Jewish people being

characterized by these qualities, it is the Jewish people that give value to the stated qualities. As we see in the text by Shimon Peres (2013):

The journey for justice and freedom has not yet over. When I hear the four words "Let my people go" I feel again and again that the journey out of the house of slavery, which began in our people has not ended, must not stop. It must not stop until slavery, in all its forms, is stopped. Until wind of freedom will blow away the stench of racism and decimate the evil smoke.

The mission of reaching the holy land, establishing a state, and then striving to improve the world are among the characteristics of the Jewish people. The Hebrew term "tikkun olam" refers to the notion that the Jewish people, in addition to seeking to build a better world for themselves, aim to build a better world for all humanity. This term outlines a special mission for the Jewish people, wherein this nation, given its unique status and the watchful gaze of "Yahweh" upon it, constantly strives to fulfill what has been placed upon its shoulders. To this end, the Jewish people endure hardships to fulfill the command of Yahweh and their prophets, who contemplated this world in the heavens, to bring about beauty and goodness to reign over the world and eliminate ugliness, war, and evil. In fact, throughout all historical periods, this mission has been upon the shoulders of the Jewish people, but now that they have risen from the ashes and are seeking to build security and create from nothing, that unconscious narrative image appears to them as if the stage is set for a mythical action, and in this context, only the "chosen people of God" can cleanse the world of evil and ugly forces and bestow upon it a beautiful, moral form accompanied by peace. As we can see in Peres's (2013) discourse:

The Jewish people today are fewer in number than on the eve of World War II. We decreased in number, but not in spirit. We are working with all our might to fill the void. Physically and spiritually. To grow out of the ashes, to create out of nothing, to build protection. To build a new independence, and tire from working for a better world, for Tikkun Olam.

Here again chosen-ness acquires an ahistorical characteristic that can make any form of compensatory attempt justifiable.

5.2.3. Space: A Conception of a Sacred National "Territory"

The mythical form has a unique quality in its view of space and sacred land. Foreign policy agents conceive the Jewish people as a separate and distinct people in sacred space. Sacred space allows them to see themselves as separate from others and have a conception of a national "us" whose populace and land are different from others. Overall, the elements of sacred space in the space category are divided into three components, establishing a fundamental distinction between "us" and "the other": 1) The act of limitation of rights, whereby the mythical agent ties the religious and legal boundaries of the sacred land to Jewish history. For example, Sharon's states: "Every inch of land, every hill and valley, every stream and rock, is saturated with Jewish history and replete with memories" (Sharon, 2005). 2) The mythical structural space, where Jerusalem is situated is represented as the beating heart of the land of Israel, representing the whole of that land. 3) The mythical origin of sacred space, the author typically attributes it to Jerusalem, the city that is the "beating heart" of Israel. As such, it is always represented as the origin of the sanctity of the land of Israel.

... Page after page, our unique land is unfurled, and at its heart is united Jerusalem, the city of the Temple on Mount Moriah, the axis of the life of the Jewish people throughout all generations, and the seat of its yearning and prayers for 3,000 years [has been the site] (Sharon, 2005).

This is repeated in Rabin's (1993) words: "We have come from Jerusalem, the ancient and eternal capital of the Jewish people. We have come from an anguished and grieved land".

In the texts above, Rabin and Sharon speak of eternal and historical nature of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Even after the Oslo Accords, Rabin portrays Jerusalem as part of the Holy Land that has been preserved following the agreement, emphasizing that the Oslo Accords have not undermined the sanctity of the Holy Land with Jerusalem as its capital. The same theme can be followed in Ben Gurion's 1949 speech, where the status of Jerusalem as "the origin of sacred space is mentioned".

5.2.4. Time: Past-Centricity and a Fate-Oriented View

Past-centricity and a fate-oriented view of time are common in the formalist Zionist discourse. The discursive form of Zionist thought sees time in a past-centric way and posits an essential foundation for the past – one that brings the past into the present and connects it to the future. In the texts presented by myth agents, such a view of time prevails, in a way that the mythical past of this form of thought has taken root in the unconscious of the Jewish people who cannot forget it. The quality of the Jewish people's past time is so traumatic and this leads to translating the present and future into the past as well and to use symbols with great emotional load to reconstruct the past. In the discussions above, we showed

ahistorical implications that repeat themselves in the following texts as well. Here we see how it is as if the past sufferings are always present and justify various acts of “compensation” and “revenge” that can be repeated endlessly, even not against the ones really responsible for them, but against others:

The Holocaust will not sink into the dark hole of history. It is here with us, burning, real. It resonates as we step on the stones of ghettos. It floats like a ghost in barracks of the camps. It cries from the prayer shawls, the hair, the shoes that we saw with our own eyes. It whispers from the tears that dried before we said goodbye. It is reflected in the photograph of the babies in their mothers' arms. The noise of those murderous trains which have ceased still rings in our ears. The smoke which has not faded as it drifted into sky above. Survivors walk among us; the Holocaust and its horror is with them every day. Their blood flows through their veins. Their bravery accompanies every step of our lives. There was no greater horror in history of mankind. Nothing can remove the greatest darkness humanity has known. The 74 years which have passed are more like a biography than history (Peres, 2013).

In Netanyahu's (2020) speech, the elements of destiny and victory of the Jewish people are represented:

We will continue our marvelous journey of the revival of our people that emerged from the valley of dry bones. From bones to independence, and from independence to strength, from Auschwitz to Jerusalem, from darkness – to light. In the word of the prophet Isaiah, "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light".

It should be noted that all these developments revolve around time for the Jewish people, and time is the mythical thought that

defines the object of consciousness; it is the power that glorifies Yahweh, the prophets and the Jewish people to move in the direction and orientation it allows for them, although it must be said that the center of this movement and its focal point is with God and ultimately He will make the final decision for His chosen people:

The Jordanian King goes on talking about Arab Jerusalem. Since when has the city been under Arab rule? Jordanian rule was imposed on part of Jerusalem by violence, by military occupation. The Jordanian Army expelled the Jews from Old City to the very last man (Meir, 1969).

In the above text, Golda Meir's statement illustrates that Jerusalem has been portrayed as an eternal city for Israel, the Arab population in the city is ignored, rendering it indivisible and non-negotiable. Such a perspective, rooted in a formalist discursive myth, derives from a mythical sense of time, which fails to comprehend the transformations in the surrounding environment. Consequently, with a unilateral understanding of time, it brings the past into the present and seeks a solution for the future based on this premise. In Shamir's (1991) text, the element of time is represented in a different manner:

We are the only people who have lived in the Land of Israel without interruption for nearly 4,000 years. We are the only people who have had an independent sovereignty in this land. We are only people for whom Jerusalem has been a capital. We are the only people whose sacred places are only in the Land of Israel.

It appears that Shamir's mythical consciousness is influenced by a repetitive time that has systematically captured his mentality. This mythical time continually reproduces his consciousness in this

way. For this reason, he claims that only the Jewish people have lived in the land of Israel during these 4,000 years, and Arabs had no place in this land.

5.2.5. Quantity: Spiritualization of Politics and the Emergence of a Spiritual Leader

Although different parties hold power in the Israeli society, separation of powers exists and rule of law is established; the leadership that comes to power through institutional arrangements, due to the mythical imagery and discursive form of dominant mythical thought, sees itself in the position of spiritual leadership on par with the prophets chosen by God to guide the Jewish people towards salvation. Through the identification it establishes in the spatio-temporal situation, such a leader imagines himself in the position of God's messengers, and thus engages with God in pure immediacy, imagining that in these circumstances it is he who has taken control of guiding the Jewish people and must lead them towards their collective aspirations:

Facing me right up there in the gallery, overlooking all of us in this chamber, is the image of Moses. Moses led our people from slavery to the gates of the Promised Land. And before the people of Israel entered land of Israel. Moses gave us a message that has steeled our resolve for thousands of years. I leave you with his message today. "Be strong and resolute, neither fear nor dread of them" (Netanyahu, 2015).

Another instance is Begin's (1982) words as:

Now may I tell you, dear Mr. President, how I feel these days when I turn to the creator of my soul in deep gratitude. I feel as a Prime Minister empowered to instruct a valiant army facing

“Berlin” where amongst innocent civilians, Hitler and his henchmen hide in a bunker deep beneath the surface. My generation, dear Ron, swore on the altar of God that whoever proclaims his intent to destroy the Jewish state or the Jewish people, or both, seals his fate, so that which happened once on instructions from Berlin—with or without inverted commas—will never happen again.

In the text above, Begin sees himself in a direct and unmediated relationship with God, similar to that of prophets, as if receiving orders from his Creator and believing that he must save the Jewish people from those who wish to destroy them. For this reason, he sees himself in an absolute, unmediated position before God, fulfilling what he perceives as his “divine mission”. This gives him a kind of religious/spiritual legitimacy and may legitimize whatever he finds appropriate to do. Additionally, by drawing parallels between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Hitler, he attempts to construct an absolute evil out of this organization to strengthen the spiritual position of his leadership and legitimize such enmity.

6. Conclusion

It was argued that a myth-based discursive form, by constructing the subjectivities of Israel's norm-setting agents, makes the pursuit of unrealistic foreign policies possible. Such a discursive form prevails in Israeli politics and ideologizes it, and makes it possible for the foreign policy to be diverted in some cases away from conventional rationality and prescribed elements such as prudence, risk-averting, prioritizing diplomacy over war in pursuing interests, and considering the vital interests of the other side. Even Zionism

and the Zionist discourse, as a secular ideology, is imbued with a mythical form of thought and its elements.

Such a myth-based discursive formation shapes the mindset of Israeli leaders by reproducing mythical discourse categories such as self-legitimization and delegitimization of the other, ideologization of symbols and loss of their polysemic qualities, the concept of Jewish chosenness, the notions of sacred national territory, past-centricity and fate-oriented view, spiritualization of politics, and the emergence of spiritual leadership, thereby removing foreign policy from strategic rationality. Furthermore, Zionist ideology constitutes the mythical mindset of Israeli leaders during specific events, facilitating the formation of a myth-based discourse. This process occurs both consciously and instrumentally; for instance, through the legitimization of aggressive policies, and unconsciously, rooted in the culture and collective mindset of the Israeli society.

This form of thought enables unrealistic and irrational elements such as expansionism, over-reliance on force, actions exceeding capabilities, diplomatic weakness, maximalist positions, spiritualization of politics, and voluntarism. This kind of foreign policy, with extreme binary oppositions of self/other, sacred/profane lands, a past-centric perspective sanctifying the past, self-legitimization and delegitimization of the perceived enemy known as the "other," limits the role of caution in foreign policy actions, while prioritizing an audacious, militaristic foreign policy. In essence, the mythical discursive form molding the subjectivities of Israeli decision-makers enables and perpetuates an unconventional, high-risk foreign policy that can be disconnected from rational calculations of power and security.

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