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Constructing Victimhood and Public Opinion: A Discourse Analysis of Move Making

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Abstract **Original Research Article**

This research explores the intersection of ideology, political discourse, and cinematic representation, focusing on the film Plan A (2021), which depicts Holocaust survivors plotting retribution against post-war Germany. Using Teun A. van Dijk's Political Discourse Analysis (PDA), the study examines how political ideologies and power structures are embedded in cinematic language and visuals. Key PDA concepts such as context, cognitive processing, macro/microstructures, and polarization are applied to selected dialogues and scenes to reveal how the film constructs emotional appeals, reinforces group identity, and frames justice and revenge.

The analysis shows that Plan A functions not only as a historical drama but also as a political text that invites viewers to reflect on complex issues such as victimhood, trauma, accountability, and the ethics of revenge. By portraying the Holocaust's aftermath through emotionally charged language and symbolic imagery, the film contributes to ongoing discourse about justice and collective memory.

This research is significant because it highlights cinema's role in shaping political thought and public ideology. It demonstrates how film can reflect and influence societal attitudes, making it a powerful medium for ideological critique. Through PDA, the study underscores the need to critically engage with film as both art and political communication.

Keywords: political discourse analysis, cinematic representation, ideology and power, collective memory, Holocaust narratives.

Chapter One

1.1. Introduction

The Holocaust was the systematic state-sponsored killing of six million Jewish men, women, and children and millions of others by Nazi Germany and its collaborators during World War II. The Germans called this "the final solution to the Jewish question." Yiddish-speaking Jews and survivors in the years immediately following their liberation called the murder of the Jews the Ḥurban, the word used to describe the destruction of the First Temple in Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 BCE and the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 CE. Shoʾah ("Catastrophe") is the term preferred by Israelis and the French, most especially after Claude Lanzmann's masterful 1985 motion picture documentary of that title. It is also preferred by

people who speak Hebrew and by those who want to be more particular about the Jewish experience or who are uncomfortable with the religious connotations of the word Holocaust.

Less universal and more particular, Shoʾah emphasizes the annihilation of the Jews, not the totality of Nazi victims. More particular terms also were used by Raul Hilberg, who called his pioneering work The Destruction of the European Jews, and Lucy S. Dawidowicz, who entitled her book on the Holocaust The War Against the Jews. In part, she showed how Germany fought two wars simultaneously: World War II and the racial war against the Jews. The Allies fought only the World War. The word Holocaust is derived from the Greek holokauston, a translation of the Hebrew word ʿolah, meaning a burnt sacrifice offered whole to God. This word was chosen because in the ultimate manifestation of the Nazi killing program the extermination camps the bodies of the victims were consumed whole in crematoria and open fires.By Mecha Berenbaumel

Hitler wrote: "the nationalization of our masses will succeed only when, aside from all the positive struggle for the soul of our people, their international poisoners are exterminated," and he suggested that, "If at the beginning of the war and during the war twelve or fifteen thousand of these Hebrew corrupters of the nation had been subjected to poison gas, such as had to be endured in the field by hundreds of thousands of our very best German workers of all classes and professions, then the sacrifice of millions at the front would not have been in vain."

The racial laws to which Hitler referred resonate directly with his ideas in Mein Kampf. In the first edition, Hitler stated that the destruction of the weak and sick is far more humane than their protection. Apart from this allusion to humane treatment, Hitler saw a purpose in destroying "the weak" in order to provide the proper space and purity for the "strong."

Author: Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf, 18 July 1925

Inferior including Jehovah's Witnesses, gay men, people with disabilities, Slavic and Roma people, and Communists. However, historians use the term "Holocaust" also called the Shoah, or "disaster" in Hebrew to apply strictly to European Jews murdered by the Nazis between 1933 and 1945. No single statistic can capture the true terror of the systematic killing of a group of human beings and given its enormity and brutality, the Holocaust is difficult to understand. How did a democratically elected politician incite an entire nation to genocide? Why did people allow it to happen in plain sight? And why do some still deny it ever happened? By Erin Blakemore, January 27, 2023.

1.2. Political Discourse Analysis (PDA)

Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) is a field that focuses on analyzing political discourse, which encompasses the ways in which text and speech influence political contexts and processes. It examines how political messages are constructed and interpreted, emphasizing the role of textual structures like superstructures and genre (van Dijk, 1997).

One of the key aspects of PDA is its critical approach, which not only analyzes political discourse but also addresses issues of power, domination, and social inequality (van Dijk, 1993).

This means that PDA looks at how political actors use discourse to reinforce or challenge power dynamics, such as in discussions around racism and immigration. The analysis is not limited to the words of politicians; it also considers the broader implications of discourse in society and how it shapes political realities (van Dijk, 2009).

For instance, it investigates how political dialogue includes various strategies of verbal interaction, such as turn-taking in debates or the use of rhetorical techniques to legitimize actions or policies. In essence, PDA serves as a bridge between discourse studies and political science, providing insights that can enhance our understanding of political phenomena through a discursive lens. It aims to reveal the often subtle ways in which language and communication play a crucial role in

the exercise of political power and the construction of social meaning.

The main characteristics of Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) are as follows:

1. Focus on Political Discourse: PDA is concerned with analyzing texts and speech that are political in nature. This includes identifying what qualifies as political discourse and distinguishing it from non-political discourse (van Dijk, 1997).
2. Critical Approach: PDA is not just a descriptive analysis but also a critical endeavor. It examines how political power, power abuse, and dominance are reproduced through discourse, as well as the forms of resistance against this dominance (van Dijk, 1993).
3. Discursive Practices: Political actions, such as governing, legislating, and protesting, are often also discursive practices. PDA studies how these actions are shaped by language and their political implications (van Dijk, 2006).
4. Relationship between Discourse and Political Context: PDA emphasizes the connection between the subtle features of text and speech and the various dimensions of the political context, processes, and systems. This helps in understanding how discourse contributes to social and political inequality (van Dijk, 1997).
5. Interdisciplinarity: PDA is an interdisciplinary field relevant not only to discourse studies but also to political science and social sciences. It provides insights that other methods, such as content analysis or participant observation, may not offer (van Dijk, 1998).
6. Structures and Genres: PDA examines the role of textual structures, such as superstructures and genres, and how they influence the meaning and interpretation of political messages (van Dijk, 2009).
7. Political Actors and Relationships: It analyzes the role of political actors, such as politicians and social movements, and their interactions within the political arena, including the evaluation of their actions and decisions (van Dijk, 1993).

One of the key features of PDA is contextual analysis. Contextual analysis is a crucial part of political discourse analysis because it allows us to understand the complex relationships between text and the political context. It is not just about the words that are used but also about the underlying structures and meanings that these words carry in a particular political situation (van Dijk, 2006).

For example, in political speeches, the explicit content may sometimes appear neutral, but a detailed analysis can reveal hidden biases or political agendas. This is especially relevant in discussions on sensitive topics such as immigration and racism, where the way something is said often conveys more than the content itself. One important function of text and speech in this context is that they allow us to draw reliable conclusions about power relations and social dynamics that may not be immediately visible on the surface. This can help us understand the implicit messages and the strategic construction of political statements by different actors (van Dijk, 1993).

Furthermore, contextual analysis highlights that political discourse does not exist in isolation but is always intertwined with broader social and political structures. This means that we should not only study the textual features of political communication but also examine how they relate to the context in which they occur (van Dijk, 1998).

The Cognitive Approach in Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) focuses on how individuals and groups process, interpret, and construct political messages. It examines the mental structures, such as schemas, frames, and cognitive models that shape how people understand political discourse and respond to it (van Dijk, 2009).

1. Mental Representations and Frames: Political discourse activates specific mental representations or cognitive frames that influence perception (van Dijk, 1993).
2. Implicit Meanings and Presuppositions: Political language often contains implicit

meanings that shape opinions without direct persuasion (van Dijk, 2006).
3. Cognition and Ideology: Ideological beliefs shape how individuals process and accept political discourse (van Dijk, 2009).
4. Political Persuasion and Manipulation: Political actors strategically design discourse to trigger emotions and shape opinions (van Dijk, 1997).
5. Collective Memory and Social Cognition: Societies develop shared cognitive models based on historical narratives and collective experiences (van Dijk, 1998).

Macrostructure in Political Discourse Analysis refers to the overall organization, themes, and main ideas of a political text or speech. It focuses on the global meaning rather than specific words or sentences (van Dijk, 1997).

1. Main Themes and Topics: Identifies dominant themes in the discourse (van Dijk, 1998).
2. Narrative Structure: Examines how a speech or text is organized (van Dijk, 2006).
3. Argumentation Patterns: Analyzes logical structures used in discourse (van Dijk, 1993).
4. Ideological Framing: Investigates how reality is constructed to support a political stance (van Dijk, 2009).
5. Coherence and Consistency: Evaluates how different sections of the discourse connect (van Dijk, 1997).

Polarization refers to the discursive strategy of dividing groups into "us" vs. "them" in political discourse. It emphasizes differences between in-groups (supporters) and out-groups (opponents), often leading to conflict, ideological divisions, and emotional engagement (van Dijk, 1998).

1. In-Group vs. Out-Group Distinction: Politicians construct an "us" (the righteous) versus "them" (the corrupt elite) (van Dijk, 1993).
2. Demonization of Opponents: Opponents are portrayed as dangerous or morally inferior (van Dijk, 2006).
3. Emotional Appeal: Uses fear, anger, or pride to strengthen group identity (van Dijk, 2009).
4. Moral Superiority: One side presents itself as morally right while the other is a threat (van Dijk, 1997).
5. Media and Social Media Amplification: Political polarization is reinforced by biased media coverage (van Dijk, 1998).

Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) serves as a powerful tool for examining the intricate relationship between language, power, and political processes. By focusing on textual structures, ideological framing, and rhetorical strategies, PDA helps reveal how political messages are constructed, interpreted, and manipulated to shape public opinion and reinforce power dynamics (van Dijk, 1993).

Ultimately, PDA provides critical insights into the mechanisms of political communication, shedding light on both the overt and subtle ways in which language shapes governance, policymaking, and public perception (van Dijk, 2006).

Van Dijk defines political discourse as the language used by political actors (e.g., politicians, parties, institutions) to influence public opinion and policymaking (van Dijk, 1997). PDA focuses on uncovering implicit meanings, ideologies, and power dynamics within political texts and speeches.

Key Features of PDA

1. Contextual Analysis:Political discourse cannot be analyzed in isolation. Van Dijk emphasizes the importance of social, historical, and political contexts in shaping the meaning of political language (van Dijk, 2006).
2. Cognitive Approach:Van Dijk integrates cognitive psychology into PDA by analyzing how audiences process and internalize political messages. This approach highlights how ideologies influence individual and collective interpretations of political discourse (van Dijk, 2009).
3. Macrostructure: Focuses on the broader themes or topics of discourse, such as "national security" or "economic reform."

Microstructure: Analyzes linguistic details like word choice, metaphors, and syntax, which reveal hidden biases or ideologies (van Dijk, 1998).

4. Polarization: Political discourse often creates "us vs. them" narratives to gain support or discredit opponents. Van Dijk identifies this as a key strategy in political communication (van Dijk, 1993).

Van Dijk's PDA framework has been widely applied to analyze political speeches. For example, his analysis of U.S. presidential speeches highlights how leaders use inclusive language to foster national unity while subtly promoting ideological agendas (van Dijk, 2008).

PDA is also used to study media framing of political events. Van Dijk's research on immigration debates in European media reveals how negative language is used to frame immigrants as a threat, perpetuating stereotypes and societal biases (van Dijk, 2000).

In analyzing parliamentary debates, van Dijk uncovers how politicians use strategic language to justify controversial policies while maintaining public support. For instance, debates on national security often use fear-based narratives to legitimize restrictive laws (van Dijk, 1997).

One of van Dijk's seminal works involves the analysis of immigration debates in European parliaments and media. His research revealed how political and media discourses subtly dehumanize immigrants through terms like "illegal aliens" or "economic burden" while maintaining a façade of neutrality. This analysis demonstrates how language reflects and reinforces societal power imbalances (van Dijk, 2000).

Van Dijk's PDA offers important insights but has been criticized for placing too much emphasis on the language and actions of political elites. Teun A. van Dijk's Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) is an effective approach to understanding the role of language in politics. By examining the linguistic, cognitive, and contextual aspects of political discourse, PDA uncovers the underlying ideologies and power dynamics that influence public opinion and decision-making. Its use in analyzing speeches, media, and debates highlights its importance in modern political studies.Future research could enhance PDA by including non-elite political discourse and investigating the impact of digital media platforms on political communication. Teun A. van Dijk defines political discourse as the language used by political actors, such as politicians, parties, and institutions, to influence public opinion and policymaking. Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) focuses on uncovering implicit meanings, ideologies, and power dynamics within political texts and speeches (van Dijk, 1997).

A key feature of PDA is contextual analysis, which emphasizes that political discourse cannot be analyzed in isolation. Social, historical, and political contexts shape the meaning of political language, making it essential to consider these factors when interpreting political discourse (van Dijk, 2006).

Another major aspect is the cognitive approach, where van Dijk integrates cognitive psychology into PDA to analyze how audiences process and internalize political messages. This perspective highlights how ideologies shape individual and collective interpretations of political discourse (van Dijk, 2009).

PDA also examines macrostructure and microstructure in discourse. Macrostructure refers to the broader themes or topics of discourse, such as national security or economic reform, while microstructure analyzes linguistic details like word choice, metaphors, and syntax, which reveal hidden biases or ideologies (van Dijk, 1998).

Additionally, polarization is a central strategy in political discourse, where language creates "us vs. them" narratives to gain support or discredit opponents. This technique is widely used to establish ideological divisions and influence public perception (van Dijk, 1993).

While PDA offers significant insights into political communication, it has been criticized for placing excessive emphasis on the language and actions of political elites. Some scholars argue that future research should broaden its scope to include non-elite political discourse and explore the impact

of digital media platforms on political communication. Despite these critiques, van Dijk's PDA remains an effective approach to understanding the role of language in politics by examining linguistic, cognitive, and contextual aspects of political discourse. It continues to be a valuable tool for uncovering the underlying ideologies and power dynamics that shape public opinion and decision-making.

1.3 Power and Power Dynamics

Power is one of the most important concepts in social sciences because it explains how individuals and groups influence one another within society. Power refers to the capacity to shape decisions, control resources, and direct behavior, either directly or indirectly. Power dynamics describe how power is distributed, exercised, and negotiated across social relationships and institutions. These dynamics are essential for understanding authority, inequality, resistance, and social change in modern societies (Avelino et al., 2023).

In contemporary social theory, power is understood as a relational and contextual phenomenon rather than a fixed possession. Scholars emphasize that power exists only through social interaction and is shaped by institutional structures, norms, and discourse. Modern definitions highlight that power can operate subtly by influencing beliefs and values, not merely through force or authority (Pratto, 2020). This broader understanding allows researchers to examine power in everyday life, not only in political systems.

Power originates from various sources such as authority, economic resources, expertise, and social status. Institutional authority grants legitimate power, while knowledge and expertise create influence without formal control. Economic power remains one of the strongest forms, as control over resources enables dominance in decision-making processes. Contemporary research confirms that these forms of power often overlap and reinforce each other within social systems (Ernst, 2024).

Power dynamics are visible in everyday relationships such as teacher-student, employer-employee, and parent-child interactions. These dynamics are not static; they shift depending on context, knowledge, and resistance. Individuals with less formal authority may still influence outcomes through negotiation or collective action. Such interactions demonstrate that power is continuously produced and reproduced through social practice (ATLAS.ti, 2025).

Power dynamics are closely connected to social hierarchy and inequality. Differences in class, gender, and social status create unequal access to power and resources. Research shows that hierarchical power structures shape behavior, emotions, and opportunities, often maintaining long-term inequality even without direct coercion (Current Trends in Power, Status, and Hierarchy, 2020).

In organizational contexts, power dynamics influence leadership, decision-making, and control over resources. Traditional models view power as top-down; however, modern studies emphasize multidirectional power relations where influence can flow upward and laterally. Employees and groups can challenge authority and reshape organizational structures through collective action and expertise (Ernst, 2024).

Power dynamics play a crucial role in social transformation. Resistance emerges wherever power exists, and social movements demonstrate how marginalized groups challenge dominant structures. Contemporary research highlights that sustainable social change requires redistributing power and enabling participation across multiple actors rather than relying on centralized authority alone (Avelino et al., 2023).

In sum, power and power dynamics are central to understanding social life. Power is not static or solely possessed by individuals; it is relational, dynamic, and context-dependent. Power dynamics explain how influence is negotiated, maintained, and challenged within relationships and institutions. By analyzing power from modern theoretical perspectives, it becomes possible to better understand inequality, authority, and the potential for social change.

1.4 Ideology and Movie-Making

Ideology and Movie-Making: Exploring the Interplay of Culture, Power, and Art. Ideology plays a pivotal role in shaping societies, influencing perceptions, and guiding behaviors. At its core, ideology encompasses systems of beliefs and values that reflect societal norms and power structures. Movies, as cultural artifacts, serve as powerful vehicles for both reflecting and propagating ideologies. Through storytelling, character development, and visual aesthetics, films have the capacity to uphold or challenge dominant narratives. This paper explores the intricate relationship between ideology and movie-making, emphasizing how filmmakers use cinema to convey political, cultural, and social messages. By analyzing key examples from global cinema, this research highlights the influence of ideology on film production and the reciprocal impact of movies on societal attitudes.

Ideology significantly shapes storytelling in films. Directors and writers often embed their values and beliefs into narratives, whether consciously or unconsciously. For instance, Hollywood during the Cold War became a hub for anti-communist narratives, reflecting the political tensions of the era. Films like The Manchurian Candidate (1962) reinforced fears of communist infiltration, aligning with U.S. government propaganda .Similarly, films often mirror societal struggles and ideologies. For example, To Kill a Mockingbird (1962) challenged racial discrimination, aligning with the civil rights movement of the time.

As Ryan and Kellner (1988) assert, “Hollywood serves as a cultural apparatus to disseminate ideological messages,” whether reinforcing societal norms or challenging them.Movies frequently engage with issues of power, portraying or critiquing dynamics of race, gender, and class. Films like Thelma & Louise (1991) represent feminist ideologies, challenging traditional gender roles and promoting female empowerment. Conversely, Parasite (2019), a South Korean masterpiece, critiques capitalism and class inequality, exposing the harsh realities of economic disparity.

Representation of Power Structures is a double-edged sword; it can either challenge or reinforce stereotypes. As bell hooks (1992) argues, “Cinema reflects and perpetuates power relations in society, particularly regarding race and gender.” For instance, early Hollywood films often perpetuated racial stereotypes, while modern films like Black Panther (2018) celebrate African identity and cultural pride. Governments have often used movies as a way to spread political ideas. For example, Leni Riefenstahl’s Triumph of the Will (1935) was made to praise the Nazi regime and Adolf Hitler. Likewise, during World War II, Hollywood created patriotic films like Casablanca (1942) to inspire Americans and gain support for the war.While filmmakers embed ideologies into their works, audience interpretation plays a crucial role in determining the impact of these messages. As Stuart Hall (1980) highlights in his Encoding/Decoding model, audiences can accept, negotiate, or reject the ideological messages in media.

For example, Black Panther (2018) sparked discussions about African heritage and representation, resonating with audiences worldwide. Similarly, films like The Social Network (2010) initiated debates about power and ethics in the digital age. These examples demonstrate how films can shape cultural conversations and influence societal values.

Finally, the relationship between ideology and movie-making is multifaceted and dynamic. Films serve as both mirrors of societal beliefs and catalysts for change. By reflecting dominant narratives or challenging power structures, cinema plays a pivotal role in shaping cultural discourses.

This paper underscores the importance of critically analyzing films to understand their ideological underpinnings and societal impact. As the film industry evolves with digital platforms and global audiences, further research can explore how

new technologies and distribution methods influence the interplay between ideology and cinema.

1.4. Victimhood and Justification

Victimhood and justification are central concepts in contemporary social, psychological, and political analysis. Victimhood refers to the condition or identity of being harmed, oppressed, or wronged, while justification denotes the cognitive and moral processes through which actions, beliefs, or policies are rendered acceptable or legitimate. In modern academic discourse, victimhood is no longer understood solely as a passive state of suffering, but increasingly as a socially constructed identity that can shape power relations, moral judgments, and political claims (Bandura, 2016; Fricker, 2007). The interaction between victimhood and justification provides critical insight into how individuals and groups frame moral responsibility and legitimize behavior within complex social contexts.

From a sociological perspective, victimhood is deeply embedded in structures of power and recognition. Not all experiences of suffering receive equal acknowledgment, as social institutions and dominant discourses determine whose pain is considered legitimate. Scholars argue that victimhood functions as a form of moral capital, granting authority and credibility to those who successfully claim it (Fassin & Rechtman, 2009; van Dijk, 2023). Consequently, victimhood can be mobilized strategically, particularly in political and cultural arenas, where narratives of harm are used to justify demands, resistance, or even exclusionary practices.

Psychological research highlights the role of victimhood in shaping individual and collective identity. When individuals internalize a victim identity, it becomes a lens through which they interpret social reality. While this identity may foster resilience and solidarity, it can also encourage defensiveness and moral absolutism. Studies in social identity theory demonstrate that strong in-group victim narratives often lead to out-group distrust and reduced empathy (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Noor et al., 2022). In such cases, victimhood becomes a key mechanism through which harmful actions are justified as necessary or deserved responses to perceived

Justification, as a moral and cognitive process, plays a crucial role in maintaining a positive self-concept. According to theories of moral disengagement, individuals justify unethical actions by reframing them as morally acceptable, minimizing harm, or shifting responsibility onto victims or circumstances (Bandura, 2016; Moore, 2015). Victimhood narratives often facilitate these mechanisms, as portraying oneself as a victim can absolve moral responsibility and legitimize aggression or rule-breaking behavior. This dynamic is particularly evident in contexts of prolonged conflict and social polarization.

In political discourse, victimhood and justification are frequently intertwined. Political actors often invoke collective victimhood to justify controversial policies, including restrictive laws or the use of force. By framing the nation or group as under threat, leaders can normalize extraordinary measures and suppress dissent (Mälksoo, 2021; Volkan, 2018). Recent studies show that populist movements increasingly rely on victimhood rhetoric to construct moral binaries that divide society into innocent victims and corrupt enemies, thereby legitimizing authoritarian tendencies (Uscinski et al., 2023).

Media and cultural representations further reinforce the relationship between victimhood and justification. Media framing determines which victims are visible and which are ignored, shaping public perceptions of blame and responsibility. Communication scholars argue that selective victim representation can justify pre-existing power structures and political agendas (Entman, 1993; Chouliaraki, 2021). In digital environments, these narratives spread rapidly, amplifying emotional responses and simplifying complex moral issues into narratives of absolute innocence and guilt.

Ethically, the instrumentalization of victimhood raises significant concerns. While recognizing suffering is essential for justice and reconciliation, the uncritical elevation of victimhood risks transforming moral discourse into a competition of

grievances. Philosophers caution that when victimhood becomes the primary source of moral authority, it may justify further harm and perpetuate cycles of violence (Butler, 2020; Ricoeur, 2004). Thus, ethical analysis requires a balance between acknowledging sufferings and maintaining accountability for actions justified in its name.

Victimhood and justification are deeply interconnected concepts that shape moral reasoning, identity formation, and political legitimacy. Victimhood can empower marginalized voices and support claims for justice, yet it can also be exploited to justify exclusion, aggression, or moral exceptionalism. A critical understanding of these dynamics is essential for evaluating contemporary social and political narratives. By examining how victimhood is constructed and how justification operates, scholars can better illuminate the ethical challenges posed by modern discourses of suffering and legitimacy (Fricker, 2007; Bandura, 2016).

1.4. Literature Review

Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) is a method used to study how language contributes to building and sustaining political power and ideologies. Van Dijk (1997) describes political discourse as the language used by political figures, parties, and institutions to influence public opinion and guide decision-making. PDA looks beneath the surface of political texts and speeches to uncover hidden meanings, ideologies, and structures of power. Over time, it has become a valuable approach not just for analyzing political documents but also for examining how films and media carry ideological messages. This makes PDA particularly useful for exploring films that address complex and sensitive political issues like Nazism, the Holocaust, and the persecution of Jews.

A number of researchers have applied PDA to analyze how cinema portrays the Nazi era and Jewish experiences. For example, Ratković (2021) discusses how filmmakers like Resnais and Lanzmann use visual and narrative techniques to express ethical and political tensions, shaping how audiences remember the Holocaust. Hake (2012) examines how Nazi characters are depicted in Western films, often reflecting modern anxieties about democracy and identity. Stargardt (1998) highlights how Nazi propaganda films depicted Jews as threats to justify their mistreatment—an example of cinema being used for political influence in line with PDA theory.

Radović's PhD thesis, Framing Totalitarianism (2024), provides further insights into how film and language were used together to support Nazi ideology. He analyzes how cinema employed specific visual and linguistic strategies to reinforce the regime's beliefs. Similarly, an article in the Utah Historical Review (2012) explores how Nazi filmmakers used themes like loyalty to Hitler and the demonization of enemies to manipulate public opinion. These studies show that films do more than retell history they shape political beliefs and influence how events are understood.

In a similar vein, Linda Schulte-Sasse's book entertaining the Third Reich (1996) looks at Nazi films from a fresh angle, treating them as forms of entertainment rather than just propaganda. She compares them to Hollywood films, showing that both used familiar storytelling techniques to keep audiences engaged. Using theories from Lacan and Zizek, Schulte-Sasse argues that Nazi films created fantasies of unity and harmony, even as they promoted harmful ideologies.

Another important contribution comes from Hochscherf and Vande Winkel (2016), who explore how film theory evolved during the Nazi period. They explain that Nazi film thinkers adapted existing ideas about cinema to match the regime's political goals. Their work highlights how filmmaking during this time balanced ideological messages with commercial needs.

Together, these studies emphasize the importance of using PDA to understand how films from and about the Nazi era communicate political messages. They show that films are not just artistic expressions or historical records they actively help shape ideologies and public attitudes. Through PDA, it becomes clear that cinema is a powerful tool in political communication, capable of constructing narratives that influence collective memory and social values.

Chapter Two

2.1. Methodology

This research analyzes selected dialogue from the film" Plan A "using Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) based on Van Dijk's (2006, 2009) theory. The analysis explores how language constructs power, conveys ideologies, and influences audiences. The provided conversation, which contains emotionally charged and ideologically driven discourse, offers a rich basis for this analytical approach.

A qualitative approach is adopted to examine the deep meanings embedded in the political discourse within the text. Specific scenes featuring significant political interactions such as discussions on power, justice, and revenge were selected for analysis. This dialogue is particularly suited for the study because it includes elements of diplomatic discourse, ideological conflict, argumentation, and persuasion.

The research data consists of a transcribed dialogue from the film, which has been carefully cleaned and organized to focus solely on the relevant discourse. In addition to the verbal content, the analysis also considers related cinematic elements that contribute to the overall political message. These elements include narrative structures, scenes, shots, sequences, dialogue.

The analysis of the political discourse is conducted based on the following key aspects:

1. **Contextual Analysis**
   - Examination of the Historical and Political Background: Understand the broader socio-political context surrounding the dialogue (e.g., the legacy of the Holocaust and post-war sentiments).
   - External Events' Influence: Explore how external historical events and political developments shape the dialogue's meaning.

2. **Cognitive Approach**
   - Perception of Political Messages: Investigate how audiences process and internalize the political messages conveyed through the dialogue.
   - Impact of Ideological Framing: Analyze the role of underlying conspiracy theories or ideological assumptions in shaping interpretations.

3. **Macro- and Micro-Analysis**
   - Macro-Analysis: Identify the overall theme of the dialogue (e.g., the pursuit of justice or the drive for revenge).
   - Micro-Analysis: Examine specific word choices, metaphors, and rhetorical strategies to uncover implicit meanings and biases.

4. **Polarization Strategy**
   - "Us vs. Them" Narrative: Determine whether the dialogue constructs an "us versus them" dynamic, highlighting divisions between groups (e.g., victims versus perpetrators).
   - Portrayal of Opponents and Allies: Analyze how the dialogue characterizes adversaries and supporters within the political discourse.

By applying this methodology, the study aims to reveal how the film uses political discourse to shape audience perception and convey underlying ideological messages. The rich, multi-layered dialogue from Plan A provides an ideal corpus for examining the interplay of language, power, and ideology in a cinematic context.

2.2. Discussion

"Plan A "was produced in 2021. It is a historical drama film directed by Doron and Yoav Paz, based on true events following World War II. The film explores the story of a group of Jewish survivors who plan to take revenge on Germany by poisoning its water supply. The intended audience includes history enthusiasts, political scholars, and individuals interested in World War II narratives, particularly those focusing on Jewish resistance and the ethical dilemmas of revenge. It also targets audiences interested in human rights, justice, and moral questions surrounding post-war retribution.

Plan A explores themes of justice, revenge, and morality in the aftermath of the Holocaust. The film raises political and ethical questions about how

survivors of genocide should respond to their oppressors. It challenges the audience to consider the limits of justice and the consequences of vengeance, highlighting the emotional and psychological struggles of Holocaust survivors. The movie critiques the failure of international justice systems in holding all perpetrators accountable and emphasizes the importance of historical memory in preventing future atrocities. The "Jewish Question" was a term used by the Nazis to justify their systematic persecution and genocide of Jews. Hitler's Final Solution aimed to exterminate European Jewry, which resulted in the Holocaust, where six million Jews were murdered in concentration camps, ghettos, and mass executions. The film does not directly depict Hitler's actions but presents their devastating aftermath. It portrays how the genocide left deep scars on survivors, fueling their desire for retribution. Plan A reflects on how Hitler's plan led not only to physical destruction but also to long-lasting trauma and moral dilemmas among those who endured it.

The Politics of Memory and Testimony is clear in the The monologue from 50:28–51:45 is full of emotion and poetic language. Phrases like "my brother is in ruin, keeping hollow the landscape of our memories" use strong images to show how trauma has affected not just individuals, but an entire community. The "hollow landscape" suggests that the past has been deeply damaged and emptied because of the violence, leaving people without a clear sense of identity or place.

The repeated question, "What are you writing?" shows the struggle between staying silent and remembering. Writing becomes a quiet form of resistance it helps keep painful memories alive so they are not forgotten. The survivor feels guilty for small actions during the Holocaust, like smiling at victims, lying to them, and taking food from their luggage. These memories show the hard choices people had to make just to survive, and how that survival often came with deep feelings of guilt and moral conflict.

The transition from sorrow to retribution is clearly marked by the line:

"Never again will we go like sheep to the slaughter."

This metaphor reshapes collective identity from passive victims to determined avengers. The phrase "never again" acts as a moral pledge, transforming grief into political resolve. The character who says it is not only remembering the past but using it as fuel to prevent a repeat in the future.

The segment at 1:03:51–1:05:26 is deeply intimate. A survivor asks for a drawing of their child: "Draw my son." The language that follows brings the child to life his dark eyes, rosy cheeks, and kind heart. This use of descriptive, sensory language serves as a way of keeping the memory alive and resisting the dehumanization of mass violence.

As the parent recounts their escape through sewer tunnels and their child's eventual death, the pain becomes almost sacred. The line "Do you think the pain will ever go away? I hope not." captures how memory, even if it hurts, is essential to survival. Forgetting would be a second death a final erasure.

Mates the Holocaust as the culmination of centuries of persecution. The reference to "veins" is particularly striking it suggests that pain is not just remembered, but biologically and emotionally internalized, forming an essential part of the speaker's and group's very being.

The phrase "never again" operates as both a vow and a warning. It shifts the discourse from one of passive mourning to one of assertive resolution. This slogan, repeated throughout post-Holocaust discourse, carries ideological weight it implies that the world failed once, and that this failure must never be repeated, even if it requires violent intervention. In this context, "never again" does not advocate merely remembrance, but retaliatory action.

Moreover, the film's dialogues provide justification for revenge.

Two powerful lines from the film encapsulate the transformation of grief into militant ideology:

"A thousand years of pain in our veins – never again."

"An eye for an eye, six million for six million."

These utterances serve as emotionally charged slogans that reinforce a collective identity rooted in historical trauma. The first line invokes a long-standing continuum of suffering, not limited to the Holocaust. The phrase "a thousand years of pain in our veins" metaphorically situates the Holocaust kas the culmination of centuries of persecution. The reference to "veins" is particularly striking it suggests that pain is not just remembered, but biologically and emotionally internalized, forming an essential part of the speaker's and group's very being.

The phrase "never again" operates as both a vow and a warning. It shifts the discourse from one of passive mourning to one of assertive resolution. This slogan, repeated throughout post-Holocaust discourse, carries ideological weight it implies that the world failed once, and that this failure must never be repeated, even if it requires violent intervention. In this context, "never again" does not advocate merely remembrance, but retaliatory action.

The second line, "an eye for an eye, six million for six million," applies an ancient principle of retributive justice to modern genocide. This equation between Jewish victims and proposed German casualties is ideologically extreme, pushing the boundaries of moral discourse. It reveals the psychological state of the speakers: disillusioned with legal justice, they propose a mirror response—a symbolic and literal balance of loss. The use of biblical language here not only legitimizes their intentions but also elevates them to the level of divine justice, implying that their vengeance is righteous and historically ordained.

The selected dialogues from Plan A present a powerful sequence of emotional, ideological, and moral transitions from guilt and grief to anger and vengeance, and finally, toward reluctant attempts at healing. The language used by the characters reveals complex layers of trauma, memory, and justice. Through metaphor, repetition, fragmentation, and emotive imagery, the discourse constructs a post-war identity that is both fractured and fiercely resolute.

These linguistic choices do not merely describe historical events they reflect the inner lives of those who lived them. Political Discourse Analysis reveals how personal memories become political acts, and how language serves both to process trauma and to shape a collective future.

Conclusion

This research has examined selected dialogues from the film Plan A through the lens of Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) to explore how language functions as a tool for expressing trauma, shaping collective memory, and negotiating justice in the aftermath of the Holocaust. The film, rooted in historical events, presents the emotional and psychological struggles of Jewish survivors as they confront the limitations of legal justice and consider the morally complex path of revenge.

By analyzing key monologues and dialogues, this study has demonstrated how Plan A uses political and poetic language to transform personal grief into a powerful political stance. Expressions such as "never again" and "a thousand years of pain in our veins" encapsulate the transition from victimhood to agency, and from remembrance to retribution. These utterances not only reflect individual pain but also construct a collective identity shaped by suffering and resistance.

Political Discourse Analysis has revealed how the film's language bridges the personal and political, showing how the legacy of genocide continues to influence post-war identity, morality, and action. The dialogues illustrate the power of discourse in articulating justice, resistance, and the lasting psychological impacts of mass trauma. Ultimately, Plan A becomes more than a historical narrative it serves as a politically charged reflection on memory, survival, and the enduring struggle for justice in a world that once failed to prevent the unthinkable.

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Appendixes

Scripts from “Plan A” film

0:32

What if I told you that your family was murdered? Just imagine for a minute…

0:57

Your brothers, sisters, parents, and even your children everyone is murdered for no reason at all. Now, ask yourself: what would you do?

1:11

Who are these people?

They are the so-called “Jewish Avengers,” led by Abba. They call themselves “Nakam,” which is the biblical word for vengeance.

1:18

Dark and dangerous they are not like our own form of revenge. Our brothers, we might share the same rage, but we do not follow the same path. I wish you could stand with us; I only hope you won’t stand against us. Let’s go.

1:23

These people are trouble but you can’t go back, not looking like this.

20:28

Well, they just told me that my neighbors locked us

in the city hall for three days.

20:37

Your Ruth was there with me. After those three days, the soldiers came and took us to the woods. They forced us to dig.

20:43

When we were finished, they lined us up along the ditch.

20:49

When they ran out of bullets, they resorted to using their knives. And when they grew tired, they simply buried us alive.

20:56

The last time I saw Ruth, she was hugging someone.

21:03

When you say "protecting him," what do you mean? I somehow managed to escape into the woods. They told me that the next day, the ground was still moving some of them were still alive.

21:10

But after a while, it stopped. I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry… Is anybody there?

3:18

Why did you give us away?

3:29

The house is mine now. Where did they take them? Where did they take them?

3:35

Get off my property! Just because the war is over doesn't mean we can't still kill Jews.

7:09

This used to be our synagogue. I got married here I even caught my son's breath here. We have to get out of this damn country.

7:16

I heard there is a refugee camp at Tarvisio, where many Jews are gathered. From there, they believe it is Saint Palestine the land of Israel, if your family is still alive. That's where they will be. Come with me.

23:02

This soil is cursed it is soaked in our blood. You have got to let go of this place. Start a new life. I can't go with you.

23:27

Please…

23:33

Wait.

23:40

I will not need it in the Promised Land. Never open it, or it will take over your soul always keep it closed.

23:48

Come on, come on.

24:10

Max, can I ask you something? I just want to understand.

28:25

There were so many of you in the ghettos and the camps how many people, God? Fifty? One hundred? There were thousands of you. Why didn't you do anything? All of you just walking in one long straight line to your death. Why didn't you resist?

28:45

You saw them take your kids, your family, and yet you did nothing. Why didn't you fight back? 28:59 Stop it leave him alone. It's enough.

29:22

Go on. Do it.

29:43

What? No stop it! No, no, no, no. Let's stop it—stop it. No, not him. Yes.

29:49

You come out of the woods the war is over, you know.

32:12

Is it really over?

32:18

Can I have my gun back, please?

32:29

Who are these people? Jewish Avengers, led by Abba. They call themselves "Nakam" the biblical term for vengeance.

32:44

Dark, dangerous Not like our revenge. Our brothers, we might share the same rage, but not the same path. I wish you could stand with us; I just hope you won't stand against us.

33:04

Let's go.

33:12

These people are trouble. Well, you can't go back, looking like this.

33:20

Oh…

33:28

Thank you for letting me be part of this.

34:25

I'm not telling yet but the British know. They know that ex-Nazis are disappearing around this area, so they're sending us all to Belgium the whole brigade.

34:36

What about the list? This is just a drop in a bucket, Max. We'll never get them all.

34:43

So, the mountains of Jerusalem anything like this? Well, they're smaller, but they're far more beautiful, and it's the only safe place we have.

34:49

It's a military organization back home. The leadership wants me to stay behind and handle all sorts of problems, like Abba and his group. For them, everyone in Germany is guilty it's not just about killing war criminals, but also about killing German civilians too.

34:56

I can help you, Mikhail. These kinds of people they have been through hell. They will trust no one, but they might trust me. They're planning something big in Nirenberg we just don't know what it is yet and we're in a critical state. The world's in chaos, but there's a historical opportunity here. The world might grant us a land a country of our own where Jews will not be hunted or persecuted.

35:11

A country of our own a safe place where Jews will no longer be hunted and persecuted.

35:17

[Music]

36:32

Go ahead, you're part of the Haganano. I'll see you in Nuremberg.

Following Section:

(The dialogue shifts to scenes in an improvised setting, where identities and loyalties are questioned.)

*(Dialogue continues between characters as they interact in a setting where former affiliations and current motivations collide. One character is confronted with being monitored by groups like the "Jewish Brigade," and suspicions arise regarding spies among them. The characters debate their past, their roles during the conflict, and the fragile hope for justice and a new beginning in a reshaped land.)

45:03

"I'm a plumber by trade; I worked as a hydraulic engineer before the war." "You're allowed no, no, listen, next, give me a chance."

45:08

"I spent the last five years in the service of the Raj, protecting our race, keeping it pure." "They might hang me I need this job, please." "Thank you. Next."

45:36

"What are you doing here?"

45:54

“He’s placed in the filtration center, with access to the main well.”

46:05

“You trust him? Let him work.”

46:11

“Oh, the only friends follow me. Come on, move along.”

46:29

“I’m willing no, I missed working.”

46:36–47:13

Finally, we can begin to restore normalcy. The city’s water supply must be rebuilt as quickly as possible to provide clean, running water once again—to restore water to a great nation. As you can see, all over, your hard work is needed here. This is the main turbine of the filtration center the heart of the system. Once repaired, 20,000 cubic meters of water will flow through every hour. From here, chlorine is infiltrated to purify the water from bacteria, and then it flows to the entire city.

48:00

I’m in good shape very good.

48:10

What? What is it? This is much bigger than you thought. What are you talking about? Much bigger!

48:17

Abba has his people everywhere spraying all over Germany, forming new cells in Hamburg, Cologne, Munich, Berlin… And here in Nuremberg, this revenge is painted on a much bigger canvas. This is madness, but for them, it is justice.

48:29

I need you to find more information. Gang I must trust him. He is the key.

48:36

If we do not stop them, if they succeed in their devilish plan, everything will change. Everything—the world will view us differently, and we will not get our country. Do you understand that, Max? Look at me I trust you. I know.

49:XX

(Brief pause as another scene unfolds involving reflective dialogue on the past.)

50:28

“What are you writing?” “My brother is in ruin, keeping hollow the landscape of our memories. The guilt is not yours at your doorway; the appointed hour has rung. Your day, unimagined you chose nothing, and in nothing, nothing did you sin.”

50:36

“We were the first ones the people saw when they arrived at the camp. Families, children when I helped them off the train, I would smile at them.” 50:42 “What are you writing?”

50:51

“My work was to collect their suitcases and write their names down. I told them I would bring them back after they showered.”

51:05

“They walked calmly, and after they went inside, I would go through their luggage and take any food I could find.”

51:10

“We had food that’s why they called us the Canada Group, as if our lives were rich and relaxed.”

51:18

“I had to lie to them to give them hope, even though I knew there was none and there has not been any since.”

51:26

“Not a single day, not one moment, goes by where I don’t ask myself: Why didn’t I do anything? Why didn’t I warn them? Tell them to run something, anything?”

51:45

“Never again will we go like sheep to the slaughter. It is our time to make sure the rest of the world learns the same lesson.”

51:58

“Good night, Max. I can help.”

52:05–52:41

(A brief montage of recollections and shared grief as characters reaffirm their vows of retribution and remembrance, interspersed with the haunting refrain “never again, never again.”)

53:32–55:30

“We all fled the ghetto at the last minute, forced to leave our families behind. We ran into the woods by night, fought during the day, and made plans for our revenge. I’ll back him up with plenty; we will not wait for the courts to do their so-called justice. Look at them they saw us expelled from our schools, our businesses, our homes. They cheered. They knew about the death camps they heard our screams. They murdered our children and then went home to write bedtime stories to their own. They said some of them would be put on trial here in the city. The way we see it, the whole German nation should be on the stand a thousand years of pain in our veins. Never again: an eye for an eye, six million for six million.”

55:38–56:13

“After four years of service I ate this [expletive] out of the can and now the boys are over here. Look at me, still eating this pile. Where were you stationed? They sent me to the Eastern Front to fight the Russians. What about you? Where were you stationed? Auschwitz, Birkenau… Goddammit, Hitler!” (A brief moment of raw emotion breaks the tension.)

56:18–57:38

“One moment… The maps we have now are useless. I know, I tried but he’s scaring him everywhere. He never takes his eyes off him. I wouldn’t… You trust him he shares our pain. Never again, never again. We all fled the ghetto at the last minute, leaving our families behind. We ran off to the woods at night, fought during the day, and made plans for our revenge.”

1:03:51

“Draw for me draw my son.” He was seven years old; he had curly hair, big dark eyes, and rosy cheeks. He was kind, with a very big heart. You loved listening to music and my bedtime stories. Mentally he was strong, stubborn but physically, he wasn’t.

1:05:26

“We let the ghetto through the sewer tunnels, crawling for hours in darkness. It was too much; Ram, he couldn’t breathe. It was raining that night, and the water level rose high. I tried, but he was so weak. Do you think the pain will ever go away? I hope not.

1:06:07

“They think they can take everything back now. Hey, leave them alone we have to have something sweeter. Too much attention… be patient. They will all thicken with the desserts. Come on we’re already…”

1:06:46

“You all worked hard, but I still have a lot of work to do.Today, when you go home to your loved ones, you can all be proud. From now on, running water will reach every household. Come on!”.