**Historical Narratives and International Law as Tools in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict**

**Abstract**

Historical narratives play a central role in international conflicts. They serve a basis for justifying the conflict from a historical point of view as well as for justifying the involved parties’ ambitions from a legal point of view. The differing historical narratives of the parties involved in a conflict play a central role in their internal identity formation. Further, their contradictory historical narratives make it difficult to settle the conflict. Therefore, it is essential to examine how historical narratives develop in international conflicts, especially complex and protracted ones. For international conflicts, the relevant legal framework is international law. There have been major developments in this field over the years, such that international law has become a language unto itself, outside the legal field. Therefore, this field is a relevant tool for the analysis of historical narratives.

The subject of the current study is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The goal is to investigate the interrelationships between the historical narratives and international law. To this end, this study focuses on the established historical narratives as presented by the leaders and main political actors in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, particularly in relation to three core issues: refugees, Jerusalem, and settlements.

In light of the significant developments and changes in international law, an interdisciplinary examination of the established narratives is undertaken, regarding the three selected core issues. This assesses the role of the legal discipline in shaping the historical narratives promoted by the leaders of the parties in the conflict, and analyze the interdisciplinary relationships among them. This integrated historiographic perspective enriches the existing research in the field, and adds another layer to the analysis of the development of historical narratives in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Over the years, various factors that shape historical narratives have been discussed, such as changes among the involved parties and their actions during the conflict. However, until now, this discussion has not looked at international law as a distinct factor unto itself in shaping historical narratives.

The existing discourse in historical research generally focuses on differences between the narratives and the development of the various approaches to historical events. This study examines the development of the narratives in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from another angle, namely through a “legal lens.” There has been extensive legal research and writings about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the main subjects of which have been the legal systems, people, and laws relevant to the various issues. This study focuses the legal lens on another topic, namely the historical narratives in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Using an integrated historical perspective, this study outlines, in an in-depth and precise manner, the place of international law in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This goes beyond an instrumental view of the issue as a purely legal measure or as part of a belated move in the discourse of the conflict. It reveals another dimension in the interdisciplinary realm, which enriches the existing research discourse and furthers understanding of the development of the historical narratives in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as their implications for how the conflict progresses, and for international law.

In order to formulate an integrated historical picture of the interrelationships between the historical narratives and international law regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this study examines several central research questions: What are the historical narratives promoted by the major Israeli and Palestinian political leaders pertaining to the three core issues under consideration? How have these changed over time? What key events and developments have taken place in international law over time, and how were these reflected in the parties’ historical narratives? What are the main interrelationships between the fields, and how were these manifested at different times? Along with the focus on international law, the study maps the variables and factors that have an apparent influence on the historical narratives in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and examines how international law interfaces with them.

Based on the findings, this research analyzes international law as a factor in shaping the historical narratives of the leadership of the parties involved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It considers the role of international law in the formation of the parties’ national identity. Additionally, the study examines how the interdisciplinary interactions play a role on other levels, within the historical development of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and even beyond it, on the broader international field.