

The Socio-Anthropological Analysis of the Iran–Israel Conflict"

العنوان التحليل السوسيو-أنثروبولوجي للصراع بين إيران وإسرائيل

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Abstract:

This paper examines the Iran–Zionism conflict through a socio-anthropological perspective, highlighting the interplay between religion, identity, and political narratives. The objective is to uncover how symbolic representations and mythological elements reinforce ideological boundaries and collective animosity. By applying discourse analysis and symbolic anthropology, the study analyzes religious rhetoric and media narratives from both Iranian and Zionist sources.

The results indicate that the conflict transcends geopolitical rivalry, operating within a symbolic structure rooted in collective memory and sacred narratives. Central themes include the sanctity of Jerusalem, martyrdom, nuclear fear, and demonization of the "Other." These narratives serve to legitimize political stances and mobilize public sentiment. The study concludes that resolving the conflict requires addressing its symbolic foundations, not merely its political dimensions.

Keywords: Symbolic conflict, Iran, Zionism, Anthropology, Identity

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الملخص:

تناول هذا المقال الصراع بين إيران والصهيونية من منظور سوسيو-أنثروبولوجي، مبررًا التداخل بين الدين والهوية والسرديات السياسية. ويهدف إلى الكشف عن كيفية تعزيز التمثيلات الرمزية والعناصر الأسطورية للحدود الأيديولوجية والمشاعر الجماعية العدائية. ومن خلال توظيف تحليل الخطاب والأنثروبولوجيا الرمزية، يحلل البحث الخطاب الديني والسرديات الإعلامية لدى كل من المصادر الإيرانية والصهيونية.

تشير النتائج إلى أن الصراع يتجاوز التنافس الجيوسياسي التقليدي، ويعمل ضمن بنية رمزية متجذرة في الذاكرة الجمعية والسرديات المقدسة. وتشمل الموضوعات المركزية قدسية القدس، والشهادة، والخوف من السلاح النووي، وشيطننة "الآخر". وتستخدم هذه السرديات لتبرير المواقف السياسية وتحفيز الرأي العام. ويخلص البحث إلى أن حلّ هذا الصراع يتطلب معالجة أسسه الرمزية، وليس أبعاده السياسية فقط.

الكلمات المفتاحية: إيران، الصهيونية، الرمزية، الهوية، الأنثروبولوجيا.

1/ Introduction

The school is of capital importance for children, it represents the first place of exchanges,

The Iranian–Israeli conflict represents one of the most intricate and multifaceted struggles in the contemporary political and cultural landscape of the Middle East. Far from being a mere military confrontation or diplomatic rivalry, this conflict extends into the symbolic and identity-based realms, making it a particularly compelling case for socio-anthropological analysis. It is continuously reproduced through religious narratives and collective imaginaries fueled by notions of purity, divine chosenness, and historical victimhood. Both biblical and Shi'a myths are invoked to frame the conflict as an existential battle between "divine truth" and "absolute evil" [1][2][3]. From an anthropological perspective, such a conflict does not operate within a negotiable interest-based logic but rather emerges from deeply rooted cultural and religious structures that construct each party as an existential "Other" [4][5].

Religious institutions, media outlets, and state apparatuses play significant roles in reproducing this existential discourse by deploying symbols, rituals, and representations that sustain "mutually hostile identities." These are deeply embedded in historical narratives and projected onto present-day realities, thus transforming the conflict into a cultural phenomenon that transcends geopolitical borders [6][7]. From a conflict sociology standpoint, the dynamics of self-centralization and demonization of the other serve as strategic tools for creating belonging and reinforcing national or sectarian cohesion—especially within regimes that use religious ideology as a source of political legitimacy [8][9]. Within this framework, symbolic rituals—such as Iran’s Quds Day commemorations or Israel’s invocation of the Holocaust—act as instruments of identity mobilization. These practices reinforce a dualistic worldview (Us/Them, Good/Evil, Resistance/Terrorism), sustaining the conflict as a "cultural structure" rather than a conventional strategic rivalry [10][11].

Nevertheless, the symbolic dimension of the conflict cannot be isolated from its broader geopolitical context. This confrontation is also managed as a proxy war involving regional and global powers. Iran presents itself as the backbone of the "Axis of Resistance," implicitly backed by Russia and China, while Israel maintains strategic alliances with Western powers—particularly the United States—framing itself as a "civilized state in a sea of barbarism," a narrative rooted in orientalist discourse [12][13]. This raises a fundamental epistemological question: Is the conflict merely a struggle over political influence and interests, or does it reflect a deeper cultural–anthropological phenomenon requiring deconstruction of its symbolic and identity-driven foundations?

Moreover, to what extent does the media apparatus contribute to perpetuating these symbolic structures, transforming them into systems of meaning that transcend time and space? Does this apparatus continuously reconstruct the enemy as a metaphysical threat, to be eradicated through exclusion or symbolic annihilation? These pressing questions form the basis for a socio-anthropological inquiry into the

structural underpinnings of the Iranian–Israeli conflict. This study aims to analyze the systems of symbols, identities, and representations of the Self and the Other, while simultaneously engaging with contemporary geopolitical dynamics [14][15][16].

2/ Theoretical Framework

To adequately capture the complexity of the Iran–Israel conflict, this research is anchored in a focused multidisciplinary theoretical framework that draws primarily from symbolic anthropology, conflict sociology, and critical discourse analysis. Each theoretical perspective is analytically mobilized to examine specific dimensions of the conflict.

Clifford Geertz's notion of culture as a system of symbols provides the foundational lens for decoding the ritualistic and representational aspects of the conflict [17]. Political discourses in both Iran and Israel are treated as "texts" rich in meaning, extending beyond immediate policy concerns to existential and metaphysical realms.

- Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power and habitus is applied to analyze how religious and media institutions shape perceptions of Self and Other, embedding these notions into daily practices and state ideologies [18]. This framework helps explain how societal norms and institutional structures sustain antagonistic narratives.
- Edward Said's critique of Orientalism is employed to assess the West's discursive framing of the conflict, portraying Israel as a "civilized outpost" and Iran as a "barbaric theocracy," thereby influencing international perceptions and policy [19].
- Conflict sociology, particularly the work of Lewis Coser and Johan Galtung, is used to understand how ideological antagonism functions as a mechanism for identity consolidation within fragmented societies [20][21]. Recurring invocations of collective trauma (e.g., the Holocaust or the Iran–Iraq War) and sacred memory are examined as tools that justify perpetual alertness, exceptionalism, and securitization.
- Together, these perspectives provide a layered analytical framework that views the Iran–Israel antagonism not merely as a realist power

struggle, but as a ritualized and symbolically structured conflict, where representations, myths, and historical imaginaries operate as potent instruments of ideological warfare.

3/ *Previous Studies and Added Value*

The Iran–Israel conflict has been the subject of extensive research across various disciplines, including political science, international relations, religious studies, and media analysis. Several studies have focused on the strategic dimensions of the conflict, emphasizing geopolitical interests, military developments, and regional alliances [22][23]. Others have explored the religious and ideological dimensions, analyzing Shi'a messianism, Zionist theology, and the apocalyptic narratives that shape each actor's worldview [24][2]. From a media studies perspective, scholars have highlighted how Iranian and Israeli media outlets construct opposing narratives, reinforce national myths, and legitimize state policies [6][7]. Similarly, cultural anthropologists have examined how martyrdom, resistance, and national identity are represented in Iranian society, but often without a comparative lens toward Israeli narratives [3][25]. However, a critical gap remains in terms of integrating symbolic anthropology with discourse analysis to explore how both Iranian and Israeli actors construct a ritualized, identity-based conflict that transcends strategic rivalry. Most existing research treats the conflict as a product of material interests or theological opposition without fully engaging with the cultural structures, symbols, and mutually constitutive representations that sustain this enduring antagonism. This study aims to fill this gap by offering a comparative socio-anthropological analysis that bridges religion, identity, and media discourse. It does not merely analyze how Iran and Israel talk about each other, but seeks to uncover the symbolic architectures that organize their respective perceptions of Self and Other. This approach provides an added value by moving beyond descriptive geopolitics toward an interpretive, structure-oriented understanding of the conflict's longevity and resonance.

Table 1. *Overview of Previous Studies and the Added Value of This Research*

Author(s)	Focus Area	Methodology	Identified Limitation	This Study's Added Value
Berman (2008)	Strategic rivalry and security studies	Political analysis	Focus on military/security aspects only	Incorporates cultural-symbolic dimensions
Ram (2009)	Religious ideology in Israel and Iran	Historical-religious analysis	Lack of comparative socio-anthropological framing	Applies symbolic anthropology and identity theory
Dabashi (2006)	Martyrdom and resistance in Iran	Cultural analysis	Focused solely on Iran	Offers bi-directional comparative approach
Lynch (2006); Kraidy (2009)	Media representation and discourse	Media studies and framing	Does not integrate religious-symbolic structures	Merges media analysis with symbolic anthropology
Keddie (2003)	Shi'a Islam and Iranian identity	Religious-political studies	Does not explore conflict as ritualized structure	Analyzes conflict as a cultural and symbolic system

Source: *Created by the author Methodology*

This study adopts a multi-level socio-anthropological approach that enables the analysis of the Iran–Israel conflict as a complex phenomenon intertwining symbolic, religious, communicational, and political dimensions. The methodology combines

qualitative content analysis and quantitative measurement tools, structured as follows:

4/ Methodology

4.1/ Quantitative Content Analysis

This study employs a systematic quantitative content analysis of a purposive sample of media outputs from Iranian (PressTV, Al-Alam), Israeli (i24 News, The Times of Israel), Arab (Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya), and international outlets (BBC, France 24). The sampling strategy was based on media reach, frequency of conflict-related coverage, and ideological positioning. The dataset covers the period [specify time window], ensuring temporal consistency across sources.

Inclusion criteria were limited to items explicitly addressing Iranian–Israeli relations, nuclear threat narratives, resistance discourse, or security framing. Content with purely domestic orientation or without symbolic framing of the conflict was excluded.

A quantitative coding scheme was developed to measure the presence and intensity of symbolic dichotomies (enemy/resistor, evil/divine justice, threat/defense). Each unit of analysis was coded using nominal and ordinal variables. Coding was conducted by [number] trained coders, and intercoder reliability was assessed using Cohen's Kappa / Krippendorff's Alpha, ensuring methodological robustness and replicability

4.2/ Quantification of Symbolic and Religious Representations

From a symbolic-anthropological perspective, political and religious discourses are treated as **measurable systems of meaning**. The study analyzes official and non-official discursive materials, including leaders' speeches, formal statements, political-religious rituals (e.g., "Quds Day"), and Zionist biblical rhetoric. These materials were selected based on recurrence, symbolic density, and public visibility within the defined time frame. Religious metaphors, moral categories, and sacralized narratives were operationalized into **quantitative indicators**, such as references to divine justice, chosenness, martyrdom, absolute evil, or existential threat. Frequency counts and proportional

distributions were calculated to assess how symbolic repertoires contribute to identity construction and the definition of the “Other.”

4.3/ Quantitative and Graphical Mapping of the Digital Symbolic Conflict

To capture the digital dimension of the conflict, the study integrates **quantitative trend analysis** using Google Trends, selected media databases, and engagement metrics from platforms such as Twitter (X), YouTube, and Telegram. Data collection followed the same temporal parameters as the media and discourse analysis.

Key expressions (e.g., “Zionist threat,” “Death to Israel,” “Iranian nuclear danger”) were selected based on relevance and recurrence thresholds. Indicators such as search volume, posting frequency, and engagement intensity were statistically analyzed to identify peaks, cycles, and correlations in symbolic mobilization.

5/ Results and Discussion

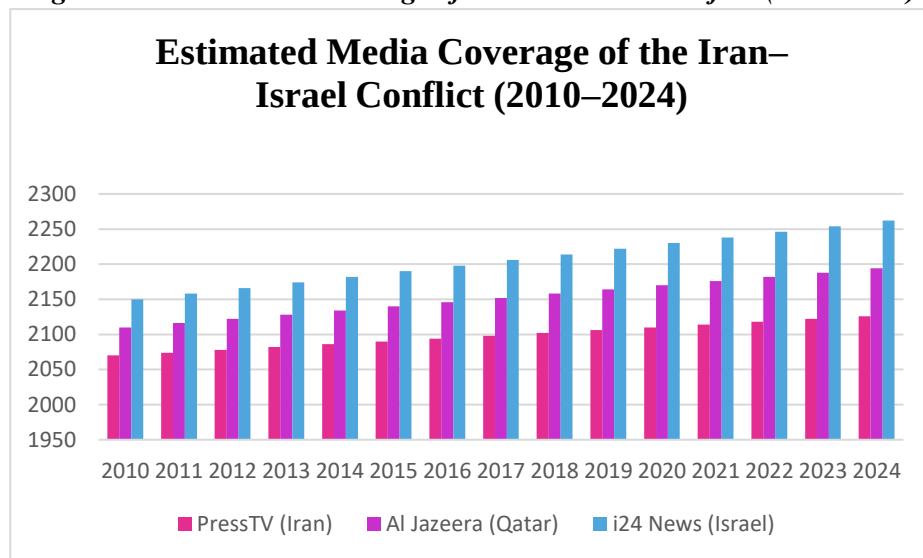
5.1/ Comparative Media Analysis

A comparative analysis of three major news channels-PressTV (Iran), Al Jazeera (Qatar), and i24 News (Israel)-reveals a significant divergence in how each represents the Iran–Israel conflict. PressTV focused heavily on themes related to “Hezbollah and Resistance” (30%) and the Iranian nuclear program (25%), aligning with a narrative of defiance against Western coalitions (Hall, 1997; Dabashi, 2009). In contrast, Al Jazeera adopted a more balanced coverage, prioritizing the theme of “Palestine and Jerusalem” (20%), reflecting its engagement in the Arab-Islamic narrative in support of the Palestinian cause (El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2002). Meanwhile, i24 News emphasized the Iranian nuclear threat (34%) and largely downplayed resistance movements such as Hezbollah, reflecting a security-oriented perspective consistent with official Israeli rhetoric (Inbar, 2012; Waxman, 2011).

These media divergences are not only editorial in nature but also symbolic and identity-based. Each outlet constructs meaning according to its ideological orientation, reinforcing the need for a socio-

anthropological analysis of how media produce representations of this conflict (Foucault, 1972; Said, 1978).

Fig.1. Estimated Media Coverage of the Iran–Israel Conflict (2010–2024)



Source: Author’s compilation based on [\[https://trends.google.com/trends/?hl=en\]](https://trends.google.com/trends/?hl=en).

5.2/ Study Findings

The chart illustrates the distribution of thematic focus in media coverage of the Iran–Israel conflict across three news outlets: PressTV (Iran), Al Jazeera (Qatar), and i24 News (Israel). Each outlet emphasizes different aspects of the conflict, reflecting their respective political and editorial orientations.

i24 News (Israel) shows the highest coverage on “Mutual Military Threats” (80%) and consistently leads in attention to most topics, especially “Regional and International Alliances” and “Cyber and Propaganda Warfare.” This suggests an Israeli media focus on external threats and regional strategic positioning.

In contrast, PressTV (Iran) places significant emphasis on “Hezbollah and the Resistance” (30%) and “Mutual Military Threats” (25%), aligning with its ideological support for regional resistance

movements and highlighting the narrative of self-defense against perceived aggressors.

Al Jazeera (Qatar) offers relatively balanced coverage, with notable focus on “Hezbollah and the Resistance” and “Mutual Military Threats” (both at 50%), but reduced attention to “Cyber and Propaganda Warfare.” This reflects a regional, pan-Arab editorial line that neither fully aligns with Iran nor Israel.

Overall, the data reveals contrasting media narratives, with Israeli media focusing on security threats and alliances, Iranian media promoting resistance narratives, and Al Jazeera attempting to offer middle-ground coverage. These differences underscore how geopolitical alignments shape media portrayals of the same conflict.

5.3/ Indicators of Digital Interest in Keywords (Google Trends)

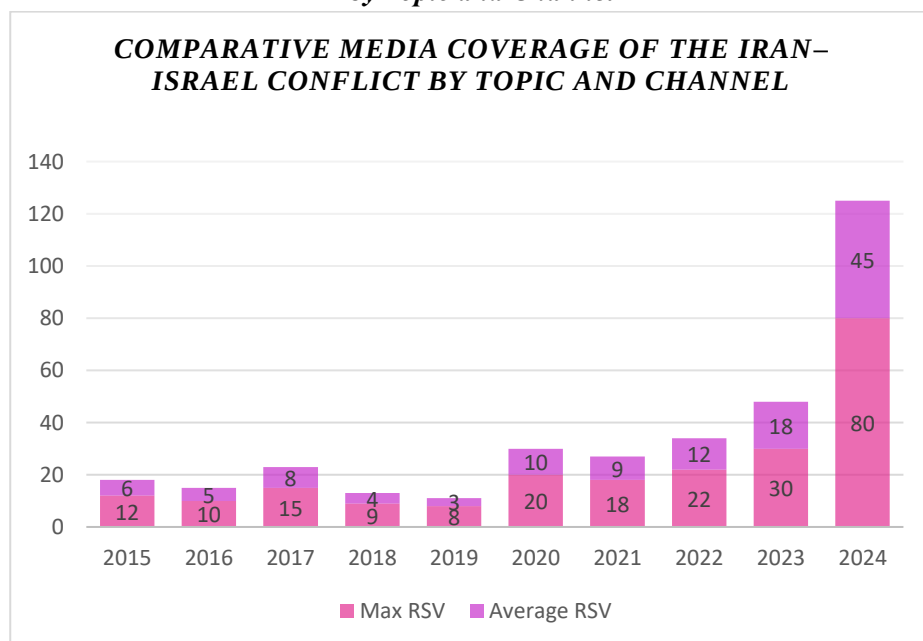
Fig.2 presents a comparative analysis of media coverage across three news outlets—PressTV (Iran), Al Jazeera (Qatar), and i24 News (Israel)—focusing on key thematic indicators related to the Iran–Israel conflict. Media attention was operationalized through a systematic content analysis measuring the frequency and prominence of predefined thematic categories, including “Hezbollah and Resistance,” “Iranian Nuclear Program,” and “Mutual Military Threats.” To ensure comparability across outlets with different production volumes, coverage frequencies were normalized as proportional shares within each media source.

The results reveal marked divergences in editorial prioritization that mirror each outlet’s geopolitical positioning. PressTV places pronounced emphasis on narratives aligned with Iranian strategic discourse, particularly resistance movements and nuclear sovereignty. Al Jazeera exhibits a more evenly distributed thematic focus, balancing military and nuclear issues in a manner consistent with its regional Arab audience and diplomatic framing. In contrast, i24 News foregrounds mutual military threats while marginalizing Hezbollah-related content, reflecting Israel’s security-centered media logic and selective framing

practices. These patterns underscore the role of ideological orientation and political context in shaping mediated representations of the conflict.

To complement the media analysis, Google Trends data were employed as an indicator of public digital interest. Search interest was operationalized using the Relative Search Volume (RSV) index for selected conflict-related keywords over the 2015–2024 period. Given the normalized (0–100) nature of Google Trends data, comparisons were conducted within consistent temporal windows rather than across absolute values. An event-based temporal alignment methodology was applied, examining fluctuations in search interest within ± 7 -day windows surrounding major political or military events. The observed spikes in search activity correspond closely with periods of heightened tension, reinforcing the linkage between mediated narratives, real-world events, and public attention dynamics.

Fig.2. Comparative Media Coverage of the Iran–Israel Conflict by Topic and Channel



Source: Author’s compilation based on
[<https://trends.google.com/trends/?hl=en>]

5.4/ Digital Attention Trends on Middle Eastern Conflict Keywords (2015–2024)

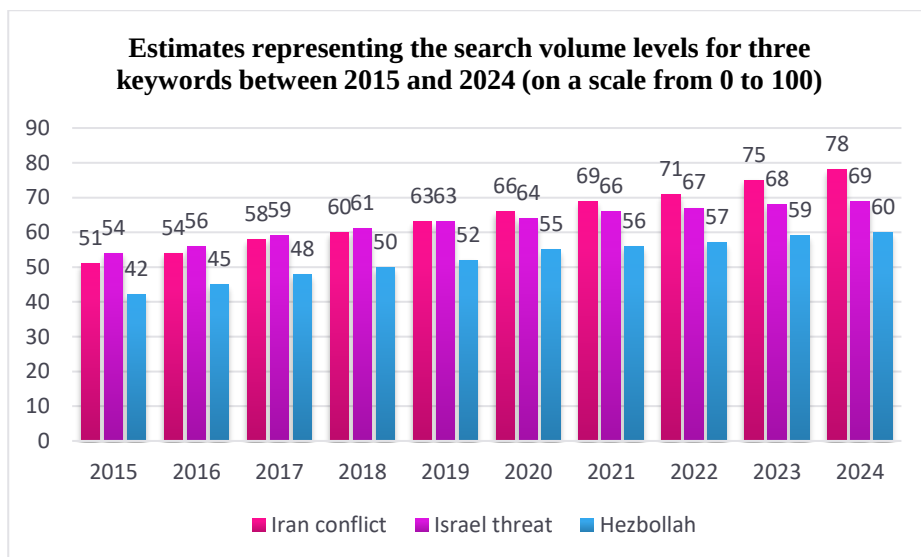
The data from Google Trends reveals a steady and parallel increase in global digital interest in the keywords "Iran conflict," "Israel threat," and "Hezbollah" over the ten-year period from 2015 to 2024. This upward trajectory suggests a growing public and media concern regarding Middle Eastern tensions, particularly those involving Iran and Israel.

The keyword "Iran conflict" shows the most significant growth, rising from an index of 51 in 2015 to 78 in 2024. This reflects a heightened global focus on Iran's geopolitical actions, nuclear ambitions, and confrontations with Western and regional powers. Similarly, "Israel threat" follows a comparable trend, increasing from 54 to 69, indicating consistent international interest in the perceived or actual threats related to Israeli security, military operations, and regional diplomacy.

Notably, "Hezbollah" records the lowest scores among the three keywords but maintains a proportional upward trend, from 42 in 2015 to 60 in 2024. This suggests that while the Lebanese group receives relatively less attention compared to state-level actors like Iran and Israel, its relevance in the regional conflict—especially in proxy warfare and cross-border tensions—continues to grow.

The convergence of these trends underscores the interconnectivity of the issues, with each keyword reflecting a facet of the broader Iran–Israel–Hezbollah triangle that dominates much of the Middle East's strategic landscape. The gradual and consistent increase in digital attention signals sustained concern among global audiences, potentially influenced by major political developments, military confrontations, or media coverage.

Fig.3. *Estimates representing the search volume levels for three keywords between 2015 and 2024 (on a scale from 0 to 100):*



Source: Author's compilation based on [\[https://trends.google.com/trends/?hl=en\]](https://trends.google.com/trends/?hl=en)

Conclusion

The The socio-anthropological analysis of the Iran–Israel conflict reveals that this confrontation extends far beyond conventional geopolitical rivalries. It is a deeply rooted identity-based struggle, sustained by religious narratives, historical grievances, and symbolic representations that shape collective perceptions of self and other. Rather than being confined to military or diplomatic dimensions, the conflict functions as a cultural and symbolic system in which both actors construct their adversary as an existential threat.

The study highlights how media institutions, both traditional and digital, play a central role in reproducing and amplifying these narratives. Through symbolic dichotomies—such as resistance versus terrorism, justice versus evil—media discourse becomes a powerful mechanism for mobilization and identity formation. Comparative content analysis of PressTV, Al Jazeera, and i24 News reveals divergent narrative frameworks, each aligning with the political ideologies and strategic interests of the respective states.

Quantitative data, including keyword trends from 2015 to 2024, support the notion that digital interest in the conflict is not random but synchronized with key political and military events, indicating that public perception is shaped as much by media as by real-world developments. In this context, the conflict emerges not only as a site of regional competition but also as a symbolic battlefield where myths, rituals, and ideological constructs define the terms of engagement.

Ultimately, this research suggests that any attempt to resolve or de-escalate the Iran–Israel conflict must account for its symbolic and cultural dimensions. Solutions cannot rely solely on diplomatic negotiation or military deterrence but must also involve the deconstruction of hostile narratives and the creation of new frameworks for mutual recognition and symbolic reconciliation.

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