

The Role of the Holocaust in Israeli Political Rhetoric (1948-2020)

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TC660B
Plan II Honors Program
May 5, 2020

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Abstract

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This paper explores how the Holocaust has been evoked in political rhetoric from four prime ministers across four time periods in Israeli history: 1948-1967, 1967-1985, 1985-2000, and 2000-2020. The paper examines changes and continuity in the rhetoric over time as national and societal priorities have shifted in Israel. The paper also gives a historical background of Israel and the Holocaust as context. As the Holocaust and the foundation of the State of Israel were two fundamental events in modern Jewish history and occurred within a few years of each other, it can be difficult to identify the extent to which one influenced the other. This paper sheds light on this relationship and provides a preliminary explanation of how genocide can affect national collective memory and subsequent political actions and mindsets.

Four speeches were selected using a random generator to demonstrate that the political rhetoric examined in this paper reflect typical evocation of the Holocaust in Israeli political rhetoric for each time period. In this thesis, I argue that throughout Israeli history, the Holocaust has served as a common touchpoint for Israeli political leaders seeking to connect their audiences to a national collective memory. However, I argue that it is Israeli perception of threat, rather than temporal distance from the event, that shapes how politicians invoke Holocaust rhetoric.

Acknowledgements

This project would not be possible without the help of my advisor and second reader, Dr. Amelia Weinreb, and Dr. Stephanie Holmsten. From the beginning, Dr. Weinreb helped me synthesize my ideas into an interesting and researchable topic. She continued to give me advice and guidance all the way from Israel, and I greatly appreciate her flexibility and thoughtfulness throughout this experience. Dr. Weinreb challenged me to dig deeper, think more critically, and write more succinctly, all of which will help me in my future academic endeavors.

Dr. Holmsten was an incredible resource throughout this time. She helped me focus my research and ask tough questions to keep my progress on track. She was enthusiastic and encouraging throughout this process, and her comments on my work always reflected thoughtful suggestions on how to improve and redirect my research. Dr. Holmsten encouraged me to conduct stronger analysis, spend more time reflecting on how my ideas connected to each other, and craft an argument that had continuity throughout my paper. I am forever grateful for the mentorship and growth that Dr. Holmsten has provided me during this process.

I would also like to thank Dr. David Crew, whose class on the Holocaust first inspired me to return to scholarship on the subject and learn more. His dedication and attachment to this material encouraged me to find my own connection to this research. I am forever grateful for his insistence that we continue to wrestle with issues related to the Holocaust, no matter how uncomfortable it may be to return to that dark time.

Lastly, I would like to thank the Plan II Honors program for a world-class education and academic experience throughout my time at UT. From academic advising to internship and volunteering opportunities, Plan II has challenged me to be a more well-rounded, curious, and passionate person. The Plan II education has helped me explore interests that I never knew I had and has allowed me to learn from professors that are some of the most talented, thoughtful, and intelligent people I have ever met. Thanks to Plan II, I look forward to a future of lifelong learning and exploration.

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Introduction

The Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel (1948) are the two most defining moments of twentieth-century Jewish history. The Holocaust was widely considered the epitome of Jewish helplessness-- many Jews were unable to flee Europe to escape Nazi wrath, and instead found themselves at the mercy of hostile governments and neighbors. There was relatively little resistance as Jews were deported to their deaths, and even those who sought to fight the Nazis had little means or support to do so. In contrast, the foundation of the State of Israel symbolized a departure from Jewish passivity in an effort to change the Jewish condition entirely into a state-seeking nation that valued self-sufficiency and strength. As European Jewry was decimated in Europe, Zionist pioneers in Palestine were building the foundations for what would become the State of Israel. Israel was created just three years after the concentration camps of Europe were liberated, and 360,000 Holocaust survivors sought refuge in Israel after World War II (Porat pg. 344). The proximity of these profound events make them necessarily-- and controversially-- intertwined.

For this reason, close associations between Israel and the Holocaust have allowed the Holocaust to leave a profound, lasting impact on Israeli identity. Though Holocaust survivors population in Israel has dwindled over time, the trauma is still a relevant moment for Israelis that can be harkened back to foster a sense of unity or universal understanding. Even for Israelis who do not have family connections to the Holocaust, the presence of the Holocaust in Israeli society encourages engagement with this event in a variety of arenas (Klar et al. pg. 127). The purpose of this project is to investigate how the rhetoric of Israeli prime ministers' speeches on Yom HaShoah reflect the political climate and national priorities at the time, and how the rhetoric has

shifted over time to express changes in national priorities or political concerns. In this thesis, I argue that throughout Israeli history, the Holocaust has served as a common touchpoint for Israeli political leaders seeking to connect their audiences to a national collective memory. However, I argue that it is Israeli perception of threat, rather than temporal distance from the event, that shapes how politicians invoke Holocaust rhetoric.

To achieve this goal, I will first provide a short discussion of how key events shape national collective memory. I will then give a historical overview of the Holocaust, the foundation of the State of Israel, and the role of the Holocaust in Israeli society. Afterwards, I will explain why rhetoric is important to this project and how rhetorical analysis can reflect the needs and concerns of leaders and society in general. I will then give an overview of Israeli history to provide important context for the political speeches analyzed in this paper. Lastly, I will analyze four prime ministers' speeches on Yom HaShoah that will come from four different time periods in Israeli history. These four speeches will be randomly selected within each of the time periods.

Key Events and National Memory

Critical events can have considerable influence in shaping national collective memory. These events are “extraordinary...relevant to group members' lives...[and] are widely publicized through the group's channels of communication and provide information which cannot be discarded” (Bar-Tal and Labin, 268). They can serve as a touchpoint for politicians and laypeople alike to harken back to a particular moment of strength, loss, or fear. While some of these touchpoints vary from generation to generation, others are so impactful that they become timeless in their ability to captivate their audiences regardless of age (Schuman pg. 17-18). The

subjective importance that a person, family, or culture places on a particular event may influence how they choose to commemorate it, which in turn typically strengthens connection to the critical event (Schuman pg. 19-20). Additionally, continued education about an event will strengthen personal connection to it (Chanzanagh pg. 132). This means that memory, as well as continued engagement with the critical event, are key to reiterating the event's importance years, or even generation, later.

However, collective memories of critical events can have long term implications for the affected parties and their socio-political situations. Rafi Nets-Zehngut argues that “when...a narrative is adopted in the collective memory it plays a major role in the course of a conflict, insofar as it shapes the psychological and behavioral reactions of each party positively towards itself and negatively towards its rival” (Nets-Zehngut). Additionally, national memory “represents countries in the international arena and thereby influences their interactions with other countries” (Nets-Zehngut). This shows that collective national memory is not only important to the country itself, but shapes how it may interact with allies and adversaries.

Historical Overview: The Holocaust, Israel, and the Role of the Holocaust in Israeli Society

In order to understand how the Holocaust and the foundation of the State of Israel are connected, it is vital to understand what each event entailed and how it affected the Jews. This section will provide a brief summary of both events followed by an analysis of how the Holocaust has impacted Israeli society.

The Holocaust

The systematic murder of six million Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators in Europe during the Holocaust marked a catastrophe in the Jewish world. Some of the oldest Jewish communities in Europe were decimated, and prominent centers and institutions of Jewish life were completely wiped out. The Holocaust marked irredeemable destruction, and Jewish leaders struggled to make sense of the aftermath of annihilation (Porat pg. 338-339). Many survivors physically recuperated in European Displaced Persons camps, however they still suffered from the loss and trauma that they endured during the Holocaust. They desired a normal life, however Holocaust survivors suffered from many side effects that made it difficult for them to re-integrate into normal life, including anxiety, introversion, paranoia, depression, and survivor's guilt (Segev and Watzman pg. 159-160).

Various images emerged about the Holocaust as the world began to understand the extent of Nazi terror. Some iterations of the Holocaust focus on the hardships and trauma of the victims, and more extreme versions of this emphasized the victims' helplessness under Nazi persecution (Segev and Watzman pg. 158-159). Other images highlight Jewish heroism and resistance during the Nazi era (Lustick pg. 137-138).

The Creation of the State of Israel

The creation of the State of Israel marked the culmination of over fifty years of active Zionist efforts to cultivate and establish a home for the Jewish people in the historic Land of Israel. Zionism was an all-encompassing ideology, which sought to not only change the physical location of Jews but to essentially alter the basic character and existence of the Jewish people (Aronson 41, 53). In other words, Zionism was not only a political revolution, but it also tried to

revolutionize Jewish identity. In doing so, Zionist leaders and thinkers created the archetypal “New Jew” (Aronson 41, 53). The New Jew was a strong, fearless, native-born Israeli that could defend himself and his family from threat and did not dwell unnecessarily on the pain and traumas of the Jewish past. He cultivated his land himself, defended his land himself, and was not reliant on ancient Jewish customs and traditions to guide his way of life (Shapira pg. 133-137). The act of returning to the historical Land of Israel was undoing two-thousand years of exile, passivity, and victimhood. The creation of a new, Israeli-born identity inverted the Jewish condition that, according to Zionist ideology, was responsible for much of Jewish suffering in the Diaspora (Porat pg. 337-340).

However, news of the Holocaust shook the Zionist movement to the core (Porat pg. 338-339). The Zionist leadership saw the never-ending, ever-shifting antisemitism of Europe as a terminal illness of the continent that would result in devastation for the Jews. They did not imagine that this desolation would occur to the scale and degree of the Holocaust, however the notion that Jewish life in Europe was unstable was not unthinkable in the early years of Zionism (Segev and Watzman pg. 98). The Holocaust deeply affected the Jews living in the British Mandate for Palestine during World War II who, like the survivors themselves, felt survivor’s guilt for their family members that they had left behind in Europe. They struggled to understand the Holocaust in light of the utopia that they had dedicated their lives to building. Their new society focused on self-sufficiency and strength, and the trauma of the Holocaust was seen by many Israelis as the quintessential example of the fate of Jews if they remained in the Diaspora.

The establishment of a Jewish state was supposed to absorb vulnerable Diaspora Jewish communities, who would in turn help build up the idealistic homeland. When it became clear

that most of these communities had been annihilated by Hitler, Zionism faced serious ideological and demographic setbacks (Segev and Watzman pg. 98). Though there were some successful efforts to rescue Jews stranded in Nazi-occupied Europe, the movement was generally paralyzed in its lack of agency to save more Jews from their deaths. Additionally, British restrictions on Jewish immigration to Palestine made rescue efforts dangerous and improbable (Friling pg. 215-216). However, the totality of the Holocaust also suggested that the central thesis of the Zionist movement may be correct: without a state of their own, the Jews were subject to the ruthlessness of other nations without any form of protection (Segev and Watzman pg. 98).

Following the declaration of Israel's independence, Israeli leaders legally terminated any restriction on Jewish immigration to the area and opened their borders to Jews around the world. Around 360,000 Holocaust survivors left war-torn Europe and immigrated to the nascent State of Israel, whose population at the time totaled 650,000 Jews (Porat pg. 342). In other words, in 1949 approximately one in every three Israelis was a Holocaust survivor. Furthermore, many Israelis had come from Eastern Europe and were mourning the news that most of their family members were murdered in the Holocaust (Klar et al. pg. 125-126).

However, there was little room to explore or uncover the extent of the Holocaust in the nascent years of Israel (Segev and Watzman pg. 159-160). The new country was immersed in nation building efforts and could not bear the additional burden of indulging in the particularities of the recent trauma. In the first five years of Israel's existence, the country tripled its population, and many immigrants brought with them the traumas associated with leaving their home countries. Inflation and war plagued early Israel, and there was little room to dwell on any past trauma no matter how severe (Porat 345-346; Resnik pg. 305). The Jews of Palestine struggled to

understand the perceived passivity of Jews in the Holocaust, and often accused victims of going to their deaths “like sheep to the slaughter” (Lustick pg. 131).

Israeli education in the 1950s avoided engaging with the Holocaust, despite (or perhaps due to) the time period’s proximity to the event itself. Israeli leaders had a difficult task: to simultaneously place the Holocaust within the Zionist narrative while reiterating that the Diaspora life that was lost in the Holocaust was not as meaningful as the Zionist project in Palestine had been (Lustick pg. 137-138). Israeli education emphasized instances of heroism and resistance during the Holocaust, despite their rarity (Resnik pg. 305). There was a clear historical timeline in which the devastation of the Holocaust is ultimately redeemed by the struggle for and establishment of the State of Israel (Brog pg. 69; Lustick pg. 137-138).

This approach of incorporating the Holocaust into the Zionist narrative did little to educate the Israeli public on the horrors of the Holocaust (Lustick pg. 137-138; Resnik pg. 303-305). In particular, young Israelis developed an aversion for Diaspora Jewish life altogether and viewed it as a continuation of Jewish weakness and passivity. To combat this, a special committee was established in 1956 to reconsider the Israeli educational approach to the Holocaust (Lustick pg. 137-138).

Over time, Israelis were able to grapple with the Holocaust and come to terms with the multidimensional nature of the national trauma. In particular, the capture and trial of Adolph Eichmann in the early 1960s marked a profound turning point in the relationship between Israel and the Holocaust (Stein pg. 231-236). As Israelis listened to survivors testify about their experiences during the Holocaust, they were shocked by the vulgarity and totality of the violence. Israeli Jews soon realized that the Holocaust was not simply a matter of Jewish

passivity, but represented a real trauma to the Jewish people. The narrative began to shift in Israel, and Israeli Jews acknowledged that all victims and survivors of the Holocaust, regardless of their involvement in resistance, deserved to be commemorated and remembered (Gutwein pg. 37).

The Relationship between Israel and the Holocaust

Israel commemorates the Holocaust in ways that, for many, cement the trauma as a national tragedy. Since the 1950s, the Holocaust has been a central theme of Israeli poetry. As Anita Shapira notes, in the early years of Israel, “most of the cultural activity surrounding the Holocaust at the time was the fruit of public...initiative” (Shapira pg. 46). This shows that from the beginning of Israel’s existence, interacting with the memory of the Holocaust was, to some degree, a national endeavor. Israeli leaders argued for Israel’s legitimacy by evoking the Holocaust, making Israel the redemptive force that the Jews needed after the catastrophe of the Holocaust (Brog pg. 69; Resnik pg. 307-308). They interpreted and presented external threats to the Israeli public using Holocaust-related language, instilling into Israelis the severity of the threat and the need to do all that is necessary to adequately defend themselves (Shapira pg. 47-48). In Israel, there are 400 Holocaust monuments, which physically imprint the importance of the tragedy in the Israeli national identity (Brog pg. 69). Additionally, ceremonies, the repeated recitation of well-known texts related to the Holocaust, Israeli youth delegation visits to concentration camps, memorial projects, and the role of the education system in passing down the memory of the Holocaust to the next generation all help situate the Holocaust as a national collective memory (Resnik pg. 297; Shapira pg. 43).

However, it is important to note that for some Jews and non-Jews in Israel, they do not feel as if the Holocaust is their tragedy. There are also ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel who may feel deeply connected to the Holocaust, but choose not to participate in Holocaust commemoration that is so closely tied to Zionism. Because the Holocaust is such a powerful national memory for some Israelis, “an alternative position that deviates from the [Israeli] official line is therefore liable to be perceived as harmful to the Israeli people” (Leon pg. 472). Thus commemorating the Holocaust as a national tragedy poses a challenge for Israelis who may not feel personally connected or invested in this national collective memory.

Officially established in 1959, Yom HaShoah, or Holocaust Remembrance and Heroes’ Day, is celebrated in Israel every year on the 27th of Nissan in the Jewish calendar. In the Gregorian calendar, it typically falls in April or May. The day commemorates the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, falling in line with the Israeli emphasis on heroism and resistance during the Holocaust (“Yom Hashoah”). The remembrance day is celebrated from sunset to sunset, and businesses and restaurants are closed (“Yom Hashoah”). Customarily, Israelis wear white and attend commemoration ceremonies. Important figures in Israeli society, including the prime minister, give speeches commemorating the tragedy. Additionally, a siren plays throughout the country and all people, regardless of what they are doing or where they might be, rise to a moment of silence. Cars stop in the middle of the highway and passengers step out of their car to sanctify the moment (“Yom Hashoah”).

In the Israeli calendar, Yom HaShoah falls a week before both Yom Hazikaron (Israeli Memorial Day) and Yom Haatzmaut (Israeli Independence Day), two very important days that are commemorated rather intensely by the Israeli public (“Yom Hashoah”). The timeline of these

days relays the notion that Holocaust Remembrance Day, Memorial Day, and Independence Day are closely tied together. This order of events creates a story arc connecting Israeli mourning of Jewish devastation during the Holocaust to the following celebration of Jewish redemption and independence. In other words, by situating the commemoration of the Holocaust within a week of two patriotic, Zionist days of commemoration, Israeli leaders ensured that the national memory of the Holocaust is firmly placed within the Zionist narrative (Wolowesky pg. 32-33). In order to truly be able to celebrate Independence Day, Israelis have to first feel the pain and loss of Holocaust victims as well as fallen soldiers and victims of terror. This time of intensity signals to the Israeli public that these three days and the feelings associated with them should be in tandem (“Yom Hashoah”). In other words, the placement of Yom HaShoah around two key national holidays demonstrates that like independence and commemorating fallen soldiers, the Holocaust is a national event that is central to Israeli identity.

Reviewing the Literature: Israel and the Holocaust

There are a variety of opinions regarding the extent of the relationship between Israel and the Holocaust and the role of the Holocaust in Israeli politics. Most scholars agree that there has been a shift in the relationship between Israel and the Holocaust over time, and that Israeli society was reluctant to engage with the Holocaust in its early years. Some scholars note that the Zionist leadership genuinely sought to rehabilitate and welcome Holocaust survivors into Israel, even if the original attitude of Israeli society towards survivors was that of ambivalence or hostility. Others argue that Zionist leaders consistently used the Holocaust to their own political advantage, even to the detriment of the Holocaust survivors’ well-being.

Some scholars mark three distinct eras of Holocaust influence in Israel: divided memory (1945-1961), nationalized memory (1961-1980s), and privatized memory (1980s-present) (Gutwein pg. 37). In the era of divided memory, the Holocaust was a moment of commemoration for Israelis as well as a method for consolidating Zionist values (Gutwein pg. 37). However, the Holocaust was largely absent from discourse in Israeli society: researchers at Hebrew University were not devoting time to the issue, nor was it a central theme in Israeli culture (Porat pg. 345). In the era of nationalized memory, the trauma of the Holocaust in its entirety was adopted by Israeli society, and the notion of “Never Again” took center stage (Gutwein pg. 37). Mooli Brog notes that the Eichmann Trial fundamentally changed Israel’s approach to the Holocaust and Holocaust survivors. He notes that “From a general sense of identity as the “victim,” the public in Israel was transformed into the “accuser.” In this way, the survivors became “heroes”” (Brog pg. 76). When the Holocaust shifted into privatized memory, it transformed from a narrative of a national trauma into that which expressed the individual experiences of Jews. As Daniel Gutwein notes, “One of the outstanding expressions of privatized memory was the replacement of the ghetto uprising with its national-collective message as the main focus of Holocaust memory, with individualized commemoration epitomized by the poem ‘Unto Every Person There is a Name’” (Gutwein pg. 37).

Other scholars note that the Zionist leadership had many futile rescue efforts throughout World War II. Zionist efforts to save the Jews of Europe were largely unsuccessful, but it had more to do with the Zionists’ lack of influence and ability to intervene in Europe than its disinterest in the dire situation of the European Jews (Friling pg. 215-216). When it became clear that Zionist leaders in Palestine could not save the millions of Jews trapped in occupied Europe,

some saw strengthening the Zionist movement in Palestine as the appropriate response to the Holocaust (Aronson pg. 72; Porat pg. 338). In the eyes of Zionist leaders such as David Ben-Gurion, the creation of the strong State of Israel was the way to deal with the losses of the Holocaust. Other options, such as looking back on the history of the genocide and engaging with it, were given the uncertain future of the Zionist enterprise in Palestine (Aronson pg. 72).

Though the establishment of the Zionist movement in Palestine under Ben-Gurion had a controlled reaction to the Holocaust, other Zionist factions reacted openly and angrily to the news of Jewish annihilation in Europe (Aronson pg. 78; Porat pg. 49-51). In general, the Jewish community of Palestine reacted angrily and emotionally when details of the Nazi genocide were released to the public (Porat pg. 49-51). Because the British were actively engaged in fighting the Nazis during World War II, the Jews largely refrained from any uprisings or acts of violence directed at the British. Instead, they hoped to put pressure on the British to allow increased Jewish immigration (Porat pg. 50-52). However the Stern Group, a radical Zionist group in Palestine, revived their campaign of committing acts of terror against the British upon hearing of the Final Solution (Aronson pg. 78). Like other Jews in Palestine, this group was outraged by British restrictions on Jewish immigration to the area. Once they discovered the extent of Nazi genocidal policies against Jews in Europe, they were overwhelmed with loss. They understood that had the British allowed more Jews to immigrate to Palestine, fewer lives would have been lost. As a result, the Stern Group retaliated against British imperial rule in Palestine (Aronson pg. 78).

For those that are skeptical of Zionist leaders and their use of the Holocaust, the leadership of David Ben-Gurion provides ample examples of moments where Zionist leaders

invoked the Holocaust as a means to a political goal. For example, throughout World War II and afterwards, the Jews of Palestine resisted British restrictions on Jewish immigration by illegally bringing ships of European Jews to the shores of Palestine (Porat pg. 344). In 1947, the *Exodus* departed from southern France carrying 4,515 Jews from displaced persons camps in Germany (Stein pg. 14-15). As the ship approached Palestine, the British boarded it and violence ensued, which was filmed and broadcasted all over the world. The British insisted that the Jews had to return to France, but the survivors refused to disembark and remained on the docked boat for weeks in protest (Porat pg. 344). The passengers were ultimately returned to the camps of Germany, which Ben-Gurion insisted was an outrage and proclaimed the passengers to be heroes. However, the focus on Holocaust survivors was relatively short-lived, especially once the goal of influencing the findings of UNSCOP was fulfilled (Lustick pg. 142; Stein pg. 15). In this instance, it is clear that Ben-Gurion was primarily concerned with demonstrating the plight of the Jews to the international community rather than the needs of the survivors themselves (Lustick pg. 142). This was exemplified in his refusal to comply with Dutch, British, and French efforts to reroute the survivors to their countries instead of Germany. The symbolism of Jews being forced to return to the camps of Germany was the most powerful for the Zionist narrative, and therefore that was the preferred outcome for Zionist leadership at the time (Lustick pg. 142-143).

Dina Porat echoes these claims, arguing that since there were few cultural, academic, or societal attempts to engage with the Holocaust in the early days of Israel's existence, "concern for the murdered European Jews seems to have been limited to formal state declarations" (Porat pg. 346). However, she notes that many Holocaust survivors struggled to come to terms with the events of the Holocaust themselves and preferred to engage with the newly-created Israeli

society rather than dwell on the past (Porat pg. 345-346). Though the Holocaust did shift over time as Israeli society was increasingly able to engage with the topic, Zionist leadership continued to invoke certain aspects of the Holocaust as a means to achieve political goals.

Moshe Zuckerman rejects the use of the Holocaust by Israeli politicians to rally nationalist or security, however he believes that invoking the Holocaust to appeal to universal rights and humanity is acceptable (Gutwein pg. 44). In this way, the Holocaust can be used as a tool to fight oppression and garner support for humanitarian ideals.

These differing opinions and approaches to understanding the role of the Holocaust in Israel demonstrate the richness and importance of this topic in Israel. Though scholars may disagree on how Zionist leadership and the Jews of Palestine responded to the Holocaust and its aftermath, it is clear that the Holocaust had an impact on the Zionist project and subsequent State of Israel.

Effects of the Holocaust in Contemporary Israel

Seventy-five years after the liberation of Auschwitz, the Holocaust continues to impact contemporary Israeli society. In this section, I will explore the degree to which the Holocaust informs how Israelis view themselves and their situation in the world. This is crucial to understanding why this scholarship remains relevant many years after the liberation of Nazi concentration camps.

Ayelet Rinkevich-Pave surveyed 378 Jewish Israelis of different ages, ethnicities, socioeconomic classes, and levels of religious observance in her research (Klar et al. pg. 127). She used twenty-seven different behaviors and attitudes about the Holocaust to measure the presence of the Holocaust in modern Israeli life. Rinkevich-Pave found that though two-thirds of

respondents had no familial connection to the Holocaust, Israelis nevertheless feel connected to the Holocaust, feel its legacy, and fear that the Holocaust could happen again (Klar et al. pg. 127). From this research, it is clear that Holocaust-related imagery is commonplace in Israeli society. Furthermore, there are key familiar images of the Holocaust to which Israelis feel connected.

The Holocaust has also permeated Israeli literature: The National Library of Israel (2011) found that Holocaust-related books are the largest category of newly published Hebrew titles (Klar et al. pg. 127). Israel's national media is also saturated with images and news about the Holocaust. In 2008, Rinkevich-Pave found that in the Israeli newspaper, *Haaretz*, the word "Holocaust" was mentioned an average of 132 times per month. In comparison, the phrase "Israel-Arab conflict" or its equivalent was mentioned an average of 140 times per month (Klar et al. pg. 127). In other words, news or issues related to the Holocaust were just as important to publish in *Haaretz* as one of the (if not the most) preeminent issue affecting Israel on a regular basis. As these figures show, the Holocaust has become a central symbol in Israeli Jewish culture, politics, and society.

Why Study Political Rhetoric?

Central to this thesis is the relationship between political rhetoric and a country's socio-political reality. Though studying the political rhetoric of any country's leaders over time is certainly interesting, this thesis aims to further contemplate how this political rhetoric reflects the conditions of Israeli politics and society at the time. By focusing primarily on the Holocaust and Israeli politicians' rhetoric on the subject on Holocaust Remembrance Day, I intend to shed light on changes and continuities in how the Holocaust has been used -- and currently is used -- in Israeli political rhetoric. By doing so, I hope to demonstrate the importance of this rhetoric shifts and continuities in reflecting the patterns of Israeli society over time. This section will primarily focus on the importance of studying political rhetoric in general, and conclude with an example of how Israelis choose to participate in their own national political conversation.

According to rhetoric specialist Theodore Windt, "political rhetoric creates the arena of political reality within which political thought and action take place" (Windt pg. 3). In this analysis, Windt points to a clear relationship between political rhetoric and political reality. There are instances where rhetoric closely resembles reality, and situations where it does not. Likewise, there are times where reality informs rhetoric, and instances where reality plays no role in shaping rhetoric.

The study of political rhetoric has a long history. Aristotle defined political speech as an "argument that is concerned with weighing up alternative future courses of action relating to finances, war and peace, national defense, trade, and legislation" (Condor et al. pg. 264). Traditionally, political speeches were formal endeavors that require a loud voice and gestures. Political rhetoric as an art flourished in ancient Rome and Greece, where specific rules that

harnessed “natural elegance” dictated the effectiveness of a speech (Richards pg. 3-4). Today, many speeches are given in a more informal manner and, due to technological innovation, the audience may not be directly in front of the speaker (Condor et al. pg. 264-65). Likewise, the notion of an audience has shifted as speeches are available to the direct audience and to the entire world through mass media. Because of this, there are two audiences for a speech: the particular audience to whom the speech is directed, and the universal audience, which includes anyone who may listen to the speech and react to it (Condor et al. pg. 264-65).

However, political rhetoric is not just about speeches; it includes the rhetoric of protest groups, parliamentary debates, political campaigns, and relevant political texts (Condor et al. pg. 266). Other scholars note that political rhetoric can be defined as “all speech acts-- whether oral or written” (Krebs and Jackson pg. 36). Rather than reflecting a mere desire to communicate, rhetorical psychologists argue that “the same principles underlie both public oratory and private deliberation” (Condor et al. pg. 268). Investigating rhetoric can be useful not only to understand how a leader chooses to speak to his/her audience, but also to understand the socio-political context of the time. Condor notes that “analysis of the fine detail of political rhetoric reveals social categories and stereotypes to be the objects of continual contestation, and draws our attention to the ways in which political actors may attend to multiple facets of their identity simultaneously” (Condor et al. pg. 287). Similarly, Condor argues that “consideration of the ways in which people structure and respond to political arguments shows that their actions are not solely determined by particular norms rendered salient by a specific social context, nor are they motivated simply by a need to reduce subjective uncertainty” (Condor et al. pg. 287). Both of these excerpts demonstrate the power of political rhetoric in revealing some truth or

observation about larger society. Even as political leaders do not necessarily fulfill all of the promises made in their political speeches and campaigns, through speech they hope to create a political environment that is conducive to their desired political activities.

Anthropologist Diane Riskedahl examined how historical memory and events in Lebanon are used by politicians and how the Lebanese respond to this political rhetoric. Riskedahl discusses that following the Lebanese Civil War and other political skirmishes with Syria and Israel, “there are a number of major public events which remain up for negotiation and which have been catalyzed into volatile national flashpoints for the Lebanese” (Riskedahl pg. 309). She further explains that “these flashpoints are contested historical events which are remembered and reauthored in a range of versions depending on one’s personal and political affiliations” (Riskedahl pg. 309). In a sectarian society like Lebanon, how the past is remembered is largely dependent on the experiences of the different ethnic groups at that time. Through this analysis, Riskedahl demonstrates how historical memory and events may shape the way that a Lebanese politician addresses his or her constituents. Additionally, how a politician chooses to describe these flashpoints can reflect how different members of society remember an event. It can also shape a past event’s importance and relevance to the contemporary political situation.

Some scholars are skeptical of the importance of rhetoric in shaping socio-political realities. They argue that wealth and power, not rhetoric, can better explain international politics. Jennifer Richards notes that “political journalists whose dismissive view of rhetoric as ‘spin’ [are] inattentive to the persuasive strategies that they also use casually every day” (Richards pg. 10). John Kane and Haig Patapan give some interesting insight into the issue: “...democratic citizens tend to be deeply suspicious of political rhetoric, regarding it as either the empty words

of deceitful politicians or powerful language that may be used to subvert legitimate democratic institutions and processes. Rhetoric is thus of paramount importance while appearing either useless or pernicious” (Kane and Patapan pg. 372). Though they concede that rhetoric is important, they argue that “...in everyday matters, the suspicion of leadership inevitably shapes and influences the style and nature of democratic speech, elevating the importance of public discussion and deliberation while placing constraints upon leaders with respect to what they can say and how they must say it” (Kane and Patapan pg. 372). However, other scholars note the importance of political rhetoric for a wide range of leaders, not just for those in weak positions (Krebs and Jackson pg. 37). According to Thomas Risse, there are occasions in which rhetoric is an important tool for powerful countries, such as at the United Nations Security Council. Being a powerful, permanent member of the Security Council allows a country to access and contribute to the international agenda more regularly. Additionally, being a powerful country in various deliberations at the United Nations often means that the weight of that country’s inputs is seen as more legitimate than those of other countries’ (Risse pg. 16-17).

In the Middle Eastern context, Madawi al-Rasheed examines political rhetoric in Saudi Arabia in the 1990s and finds that political rhetoric can have tangible political results, such as “creating legitimacy, subverting opposition and containing dissent” (al-Rasheed pg. 360). Al-Rasheed emphasizes the power of political rhetoric in creating legitimacy, arguing that “political speech is the arena that links the language of power 'words' with the 'deeds' of power” (al-Rasheed pg. 360). According to al-Rasheed, political rhetoric can be a powerful tool for leaders, creating a receptive environment for a leader to carry out his or her policies.

Leaders who do not fulfill their promises to the public may suffer political consequences for their lack of follow-through. Rob Kroes comments on this phenomena in relation to the Obama administration. President Obama, Kroes notes, was a master of rhetoric and used this to his advantage to paint himself as the anti-Bush candidate (Kroes pg. 6-7). His rhetoric was hopeful yet swiftly condemned the Bush administration: “This President (i.e. George W. Bush) may occupy the White House, but for the last six years the position of leader of the free world has remained open...And like generations before us, we will seize that moment, and begin the world anew” (Kroes pg. 10). In particular, critics of President Bush’s expanded executive powers were inspired by President Obama’s vote against the war in Iraq and apparent commitment to rolling back some more problematic overstepping of the executive office. However, in reality Obama struggles to uphold these commitments. For example, in his inaugural address, he declares: “My administration is committed to creating an unprecedented level of openness in government” (Kroes pg. 6). In reality, Obama’s administration continued many of Bush’s policies that Obama found abhorrent during his election. He received criticism for renegeing on his campaign promises to the American public (Kroes pg. 7-8).

In this episode, the power of political rhetoric becomes clear. Because of Obama’s masterful use of political rhetoric, he was able to paint himself as the anti-war, anti-executive overreach savior of the American people. But at the same time, his campaign commitments to scaling back Bush’s political mistakes proved impossible with the time that he had. As a result, Obama was not able to fulfill these promises and received public backlash for failing to follow through on his commitments to the American public.

Some scholars argue that when political leaders use material power, they generally have to explain their reason for doing so to their constituents. This means that political leaders often are required to explain the reasons behind their political choices, particularly if they do not line up with what had been formerly promised or what the public had desired (Krebs and Jackson pg. 38-39). Studies in political psychology have shown that “speakers who succeed in defining the relevant considerations can shape mass opinion and ultimately policy outcomes” (Krebs and Jackson pg. 38-39). In this sense, rhetoric plays a key role in how the public accepts policy decisions.

Additionally, persuasive political rhetoric has a particular power to resonate with people and create change. Krebs and Jackson note: “the targets of persuasive rhetorical moves do not grudgingly comply, but rather sincerely internalize new beliefs and consequently adopt new identities and preferences” (Krebs and Jackson pg. 39). Finnemore and Sikkink argue that “persuasion is the process by which agent action becomes social structure, ideas become norms, and the subjective becomes the intersubjective” (Baldwin pg. 166). This shows that not only are successful political leaders able to use persuasive rhetoric to gain lukewarm support for their policies, but that, if truly effective, these leaders can use their rhetorical skills to move people to change the way they feel about an issue entirely.

As in other developed countries, Israel has seen the proliferation of bumper stickers as a popular way for expressing political opinions. The first bumper stickers appeared in Israel in 1977, and they have remained a key part of political dialogue in Israel (Salamon pg. 278-280). These bumper stickers express political ideology regardless of whether or not it is an election year, and reflect the diversity and intensity of political opinions in Israel. These bumper stickers

do not usually subscribe to a particular candidate or political party, and are more representative of general political opinions and ideologies. Some of these bumper stickers are reactions to popular incidents and can often include a play on words to get the message across to the viewer (Bloch pg. 434-435).

Political bumper stickers reflect the various tensions and conflicts within Israeli society. Societal fragmentation exists in many different forms, including divisions along religious, ethnic, and political identities. In addition to military conflict, culture wars and the proliferation of issues of religion occupy the public space (Bloch pg. 438). Most notably, Israeli political bumper stickers address issues relating to a long term resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: issues of borders, peace negotiations, and ceding land are all explored through Israeli political bumper stickers (Bloch pg. 434-438).

Additionally, Israelis are typically politically active. Many Israelis enjoy discussing politics openly and Israel hosts many political talk shows (Bloch pg. 439). In the March 2020 election, voter turnout hovered around 70% (Jewish Virtual Library). Given the frequency of conflict in Israel, there is a more personal element to politics. In such a politically active society, finding creative ways to express political opinions is an effective way to further public political dialogue.

Culturally, Israelis are known to be direct and opinionated. By placing bumper stickers on their cars and sharing their political opinions with the public, Israelis are given yet another opportunity to participate in political debate in the public sphere (Bloch pg. 439-441). Additionally, political parties and political movements capitalize on the power of bumper stickers in popularizing a message or idea to try to gain momentum for their policies or ideas.

Phrases from politicians may be upheld or ridiculed by bumper stickers (Bloch pg. 434-441). This gives political leaders a reflection of public opinion and how their constituents view their policies or rhetoric. From this bumper sticker example, it is clear that Israeli society participates in and responds to political rhetoric that shapes how political events are received and remembered in Israel. Even more so, the reaction of ordinary Israelis to political rhetoric, through the use of bumper stickers, demonstrates the effect of political rhetoric on the ideas and opinions of everyday Israelis.

Israelis also tend to be politically active on Facebook. In a study of social media reactions to candidate's Facebook posting during the 2013 election Tal Samuel-Azran, Moran Yarchi, and Gadi Wolfsfeld found that right wing voters resonated with more personal and emotional posts (Samuel-Azran pg. 23-26). In contrast, Shelly Yachimovitz and her campaign managers found that to capture the interest of left wing voters, Yachimovitz had to appeal more to facts and rationality. Samuel-Azran and his fellow researchers found that not only did Israeli voters respond strongly to candidates' Facebook posts, but that candidates altered their posting and messaging to cater to their voters' preferences (Samuel-Azran pg. 23-26). This shows the power of rhetoric in appealing to and gaining support from an audience as well as the ability for the public to shape candidates' political rhetoric.

In conclusion, political leaders and their rhetoric often reflect the society in which they operate. From this analysis, it is clear that political rhetoric is reflective of society at the time. Likewise, society is shaped by the political rhetoric of its leaders. Throughout this thesis, I will examine this relationship to better understand Israeli politics and society. By focusing on

Holocaust rhetoric, I hope to shed light on how and to what degree Israeli political rhetoric utilized the nationalized theme of the Holocaust for political purposes.

Overview of Historical Time Periods

A key aspect of this project is understanding changes and continuities in Israeli political rhetoric over time. Israel and Israeli society have undergone various changes throughout the past seventy-two years. It is vital to understand these changes to gain a true sense of how rhetoric surrounding the Holocaust has shifted to meet changing circumstances in Israel. This section provides a succinct outline of key events in Israeli history. Though it is not exhaustive, this overview will prove useful in understanding the contexts in which political speeches are made.

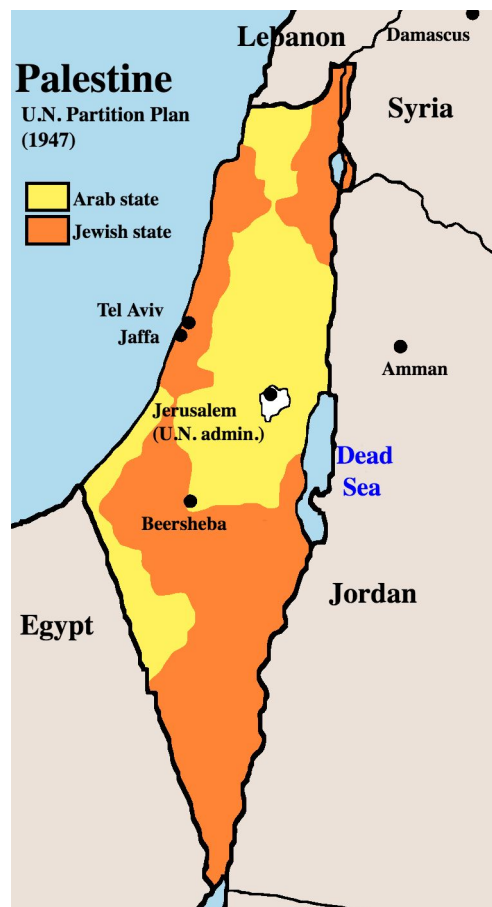


Figure 1

Source: The Learning Network, *The New York Times*, 2011

1948-1967

On November 29, 1947, the United Nations General Assembly passed the UNSCOP Partition Plan, which divided the British Mandate for Palestine into an Arab State and a Jewish State (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2011). The Zionist leadership in Palestine begrudgingly accepted the plan, and the Jews in Palestine celebrated international recognition of their nationalist aspirations. The Arab leadership of Palestine rejected the plan, declaring that all of Palestine should come under Arab rule (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2001). The area descended into armed conflict, as both Arab and Jewish forces sought to stake their claims in Palestine (Shapira pg. 155-162).

On May 14th, 1948, David Ben-Gurion, the Chairman of the Jewish Agency in Palestine, declared the State of Israel's independence. Though the magnitude of this event was cause for celebration for Jews in Palestine and around the world, the region quickly disintegrated into war as the Lebanese, Syrian, Jordanian, Egyptian, Iraqi, and Saudi armies invaded to protect the Arabs in Palestine from the Zionist threat (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs). The War of Independence, lasting from May 1948-March 1949, produced a wave of Palestinian refugees, many of whom left newly-created Israel for Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. At the end of the war, Israel retained control over its share of the mandate while also taking over some of the areas originally allocated to an Arab state. Neighboring states also controlled different areas of the former mandate: Egypt captured the Gaza Strip and Jordan gained control of the West Bank of the Jordan River. Ultimately, no Arab state was created in Palestine (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

Though the war solidified Israel's existence and, through armistice lines, gave the country somewhat-defined borders, the war had enacted a harsh toll on the Jews of Palestine. Of the 600,000 now-Israeli citizens, 6,000 were killed during the war (Shapira pg. 158; Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Communities on the West Bank of the Jordan River, such as Kfar Etzion, were destroyed and its inhabitants were massacred by the Jordanian army. Worst of all, though Zionist forces were able to keep the road to Jerusalem open, they had failed to gain control of the Old City of Jerusalem (Blumberg pg. 77-79). This high price made it clear to Israelis that they would not be able to stake a claim to the Middle East without significant sacrifice.



Figure 2

Source: Jewish Virtual Library

As part of Ben-Gurion's policies, he rescinded the 1939 White Paper, a British policy that restricted Jewish immigration to Palestine. Ben-Gurion read the Declaration of Independence on May 14th 1948 in Tel Aviv. He stated that Israel would be "open to Jewish immigration and the ingathering of the exiles" (Stein pg. 83-84). Soon afterwards, shiploads of refugees, approximately half of them Holocaust survivors, could now enter the new State of Israel. These immigrants, some of whom had been detained in Cyprus by the British for seeking to illegally immigrate to Palestine, were immediately absorbed by the State. Others had been in displaced persons camps since the end of World War II and were eagerly awaiting the opportunity for permanent resettlement (Stein pg. 83-84).

After the armistice lines had been drawn and the 1948 war was over, Israel's leadership turned to nation-building efforts. Israel was a relatively poor country that, within its first four years of existence, would double its population (Stein pg. 83-84). Zionist leadership scrambled to find ways to absorb these immigrants and refugees as quickly as possible, including building new housing developments to host these immigrants who often came with little resources. Soon, this flow of immigrants into Israel included Jews from the Muslim world, including Jews from Egypt, Yemen, Iraq, and Morocco. These Jews were motivated by religion convictions, Zionist aspirations, increased discrimination in their home countries, or a combination of the three (Segev 111-116; Stein 84-94).

Many Jews from the Middle East and North Africa (Mizrahi Jews) had a more traditional outlook than the secular Zionist leaders. Whereas secular Zionists vehemently rejected Jewish tradition, Jews from the Middle East were much more connected to their religious heritage and practice. In other words, religion played a larger role in shaping Middle Eastern and North

African Jews' lives and general mindset. Their lives revolved around "the elderly, the synagogue, and accepted customs" (Shapira pg. 239). Zionist leaders tended to be insensitive to cultural differences between themselves and the new immigrants, seeing themselves as culturally superior (Segev pg. 116). For example, Zionist leadership tended to look down on traditional Middle Eastern Jews and reprimanded them for their treatment of women. In general, immigrants to Israel during this period of mass immigration were referred to as "human dust" (Shapira pg. 230). Little effort was made to integrate these new immigrants into the structure of the state, and the cultural gap between the Israelis and the new immigrants seemed unbreachable in the eyes of the Zionist leadership (Segev pg. 151-171). For Middle Eastern and North African immigrants, "the immigration process disrupted the family and undermined the authority of the elders and the heads of families. Religion lost its dominant status, and the immigrants' entire way of life came under attack" (Shapira pg. 239).

As options for housing became increasingly scarce, Israel's leadership resorted to constructing temporary camps for immigrants until sufficient low-budget housing could be built. As a new country, Israel had limited financial resources and the task of absorbing immigrants proved to nearly overwhelm the nascent state (Stein pg. 99-100). By December 1949, there were forty transit camps of makeshift temporary housing. At its height, nearly 200,000 were housed in these temporary housing units. Though the government provided this temporary housing and food for free to immigrants, the conditions of these camps were subpar. In May 1950, immigrants were transferred to the maabara, which was another form of temporary housing. It featured tents or makeshift huts but did not have communal facilities for residents. These camps

were often in the periphery of Israel, creating a geographical divide between veteran Israelis and new immigrants (Shapira pg. 224-238; Stein pg. 99-100).

The physical conditions of the transit camps were undesirable for new immigrants, but they also faced social challenges in integrating into Israeli society. The camps often featured immigrants from various countries around the world, and the lack of a common language or culture made day-to-day interactions in the camp difficult (Stein pg. 101-106). Many older immigrants struggled to adapt to their new surroundings and their new social standing in Israel. These transit camps were often placed in nonideal locations, far from the cosmopolitan Tel Aviv or any other commercial areas (Shapira pg. 238; Stein pg. 101-106). Many immigrants felt discriminated against by the Israeli political establishment, which looked down on many of the new immigrants. Veteran Israelis deemed Jews from the Islamic world and Holocaust survivors to be inferior to the veteran Jews that had cultivated the land and built up state institutions before 1948 (Segev pg. 116-120).

The Israeli leadership saw these new immigrants as unsuitable for and not ideologically committed to the hard labor that agricultural work required in Israel (Stein pg. 102). Israeli leadership encouraged new immigrants to shed their former identities and move past previous traumas that they might have endured in the Diaspora. For Holocaust survivors, this meant that they were discouraged from sharing their experiences and hardships during the Holocaust, and were instead expected to adapt quickly to their new life in Israel (Shapira pg. 240).

The issue of where to settle new immigrants prevailed throughout Israel's first few years of existence. Most immigrants preferred to live in cities, where they were often crowded into new immigrant neighborhoods and segregated from the veteran Jewish population. Some of

these immigrants opted instead to live in development towns, which were often in the periphery of the state but provided more affordable housing and living options (Stein pg. 101-104).

Immigrants struggled to navigate Israel's complex bureaucratic system, and were met with discrimination by the Israeli system. The Israeli government struggled to bear the burden of the constant flow of refugees but insisted on maintaining its commitment to absorbing these refugees even if they could not guarantee them immediate housing and resources upon their arrival to Israel (Segev pg. 119-130).

Early Israel was marked by its citizens' austere lifestyle in which clothes were basic and luxuries were sparse. The ideals of the kibbutz, agricultural communes that helped build up the state, were celebrated in the new state (Stein pg. 106-107). Following the War of Independence (1948), Jews in the new state celebrated the astounding achievement of Israel's nascent armed forces in staving off the Arab offense. They were genuinely proud of their new country and felt tied to its success and wellbeing (Stein pg. 106-107).

Israel declared itself a democracy in 1948, and in 1949 the country held its first elections. All citizens of Israel were enfranchised, and David Ben-Gurion's Mapai party received the plurality of votes (Stein pg. 108-110). However, the state never solidified a constitution due to ideological rifts between secular and religious communities in Israel. Nevertheless, a democratic system prevailed and the state continued to absorb refugees and participate in other nation building activities such as self-defense, growing the economy, and creating new jobs. The state solidified the crucial role that the army played, and continues to play, in Israeli society (Stein pg. 106; 108-113).

Political disagreement predated the State of Israel, and the robust and progress-inhibiting nature of Israeli leaders' ideological disagreements persisted throughout the early years of the state. Many in Israel expressed their ideas through literature, and a huge production of newspapers and magazines on a regular basis was commonplace (Segev pg. 290). Additionally, events dedicated to literature and politics gave many people in Israel the space to voice and debate their opinions. Israel's thought leaders of the time had to contemplate the enormity of the Zionist project coming to fruition and explore what that meant to the veteran Sabra generation. Some of these writers and thinkers expressed nostalgia for the pioneering spirit and uncertainty of the past, unable to fully grasp the totality of the present and its meaning (Segev pg. 289-291).

Some Israelis returned from the war front profoundly traumatized from the high price that they paid for independence. They returned home to a new country, one that was tasked with absorbing immigrants and conducting the regular features of the state (Shapira pg. 254-257). Much of the idealism and romanticism that had characterized the early Zionist ideology had been shattered by the harsh reality of the violence that young soldiers had seen and endured.

Though the Holocaust was rarely talked about in early Israel, there were many key events in the 1950s and 1960s that forced Israel to encounter the Holocaust and its legacy in Israeli society. The debate over whether or not to accept German reparations in 1954 was particularly divisive, as Holocaust survivors took to the streets to protest the Israeli government's potential acceptance of German "blood money" (Shapira pg. 263-264). Other events, like the Eichmann Trial in 1961, allowed the country to unify and fully reflect on the horrors of the Holocaust. After 1961, many Holocaust survivors finally felt as if they could more openly talk about their experiences (Stein pg. 231-236).

1967-1985

In May 1967, the Middle East was once again on the brink of war. Following the Six Day War, tensions between Israel and its neighboring countries were present. However, false Russian intelligence provoked perceived escalation as the possibility of war between Israel and the Arab states became more and more likely. Israelis and their leadership were increasingly panicked as they assessed the viability of their military forces in defending the new country. As the possibility of war became more imminent, Israelis began digging mass graves and transforming shopping malls into makeshift hospitals (Stein pg. 270-285). Yitzhak Rabin, the head of the Israel Defense Forces at the time, had a panic attack at the thought of losing the war and, despite the looming threats at the time, had to take rest in the most intense weeks leading up to the war (Stein pg. 286-287).

On June 4th 1967, Israeli military planes took off on Israeli soil and headed for Egypt. Within six hours, Israel conducted a surprise attack on Egypt, flattening its air force and surprising the unprepared Egyptians. Israelis had calculated that a preemptive strike on Egypt was the best way to gain a military advantage as the inevitable war loomed (Stein pg. 291-292). Israel then attacked Syrian airfields, and proceeded to swiftly take control over the airspace in the region. Jordan subsequently joined the war, and Israel began to fight a three-front war against Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. The war only lasted six days, in which Israeli forces gained control of the Syrian Golan Heights, the Jordanian-controlled West Bank (including the Old City of Jerusalem), the Egyptian-controlled Gaza Strip, and the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula. In just six days, Israel tripled its size, which served as a moment of overwhelming humiliation for its Arab neighbors (Stein pg. 297-310).

In contrast, Israelis were overjoyed with their sudden understanding of their military superiority. Israelis flocked to the newly-conquered territories, exploring sites that just months earlier had been off-limits. They felt a newfound sense of confidence in Israel's ability to defend itself in the region and secure a long term place for the Jewish State in the region (Stein pg. 311-315). Just as the 1948 war was a moment of triumph and nationalism for Israelis, so too was the Six Day War a moment of pride for the new nation.

Many in Israel's political establishment hoped that with the weakened Arab position following the war, Israel's neighboring countries would be willing to accept Israel under peaceful terms in exchange for receiving the lands conquered by Israel back. However, a peaceful resolution was not achieved. (Stein pg. 321-323).

But for some in Israel, the conquests of the Six Day War symbolized more than just the result of the Israeli army's military strategy and arms. To them, the Jewish return to holy sites in the West Bank constituted nothing less than the first step to messianic redemption (Stein pg. 325-326). These more-religious Jews were not typically well-represented by the secular Zionist establishment under Ben Gurion and his Labor colleagues. With a surge of religious fervor, religious Zionists sought to create a pathway to retaining long term Jewish control of Biblical Judea and Samaria (the West Bank). In their eyes, the land had been liberated during the war, and had rightfully returned to Jewish control (Stein pg. 325-326).

These conflicting ideas among Israelis would set a precedent for the left/right divide in Israel in regards to issues of security and peace. While left-wingers in Israel at the time were not necessarily optimistic about the prospects of peace nor ready to make the sacrifices necessary to attain such a desired goal, some were also hesitant to allow Israelis to settle on the new territories

and establish Jewish communities there (Beaumont; Shapira pg. 342-343). In contrast, religious Zionists saw Jewish settlement in these areas, but particularly in the West Bank, and a religious and moral imperative to usher in the Messianic times and grant Jews access to their Biblical holy sites (Shapira pg. 342-344). Others on the Israeli right saw that the new territories could be used as a security buffer between Israeli civilian population centers and neighboring Arab armies. If Israel retained these territories, in a future war its neighbors would have to traverse wide swaths of land to reach Israel's main population centers (Beaumont).

From 1967, there were Israeli ideologues who sought to settle in Israel's newly-acquired territories. Some settlers received government permission to create Jewish communities in the new territories, such as the communities of Hebron and Kfar Etzion. However, the Israeli government initially limited Jewish settlement to these areas, which had housed Jewish communities before 1948 and were thus seen as having a separate status than the rest of the West Bank (Shapira pg. 159; 342-346). Passionate Israelis tried to settle the new territories, but the government was largely against Jewish settlement in these areas. Defense Minister Moshe Dayan carved out sparsely-populated areas in northern Sinai and the Jordan Valley. His plan was met with great opposition by settlement leaders, who dreamed of expanding Jewish settlement, particularly in the West Bank (Mezvinsky pg. 56). However, it was not until Shimon Peres became defense minister in 1974 that the settlers were able to shift government policy. Under Peres, Israel began allowing settlement in uninhabited areas of the West Bank and Gaza. Settlements continued to expand with government consent. Settler leadership, consolidated as Gush Emunim, continued to have significant influence on the government (Mezvinsky pg. 72; Shapira pg. 346).

Between 1967 and 1973, Israeli society celebrated the achievements of its army and heavily relied on the power of the Israel Defense Forces to defend the country. Israelis felt invincible, and for the first time the long term viability of the state was not in question (Gat pg. 186-189). However, after the surprise attack by Egyptian and Syrian forces in October 1973, Israel's military confidence was shattered. Many more soldiers were killed in the war than in the 1967 Six Day War, making the event even more devastating for Israeli families. Though Israeli forces were eventually able to gain ground and change the tide of the war, nothing could ease the fear and distress that many Israelis felt during the war. Their unshakable confidence in the Israel Defense Forces had been shattered, and many Israelis grew angry and frustrated with the government's lack of action in response to military intelligence suggesting that war was imminent (Gat pg. 186-189).

In 1978, a revolutionary election changed the course of Israeli politics. Menachem Begin, a right-wing political leader that had led the Irgun paramilitary group before the State of Israel was created, had gained significant popularity. Often kept to the political margins by his political opponents in the Labor party, he and his party received a huge boost in the 1978 election that resulted in him becoming Prime Minister (Weitz pg. 145-146). As Anita Shapira points out, "Begin is apparently the only leader in the history of democracies who lost eight elections and won the ninth" (Shapira pg. 357).

His ascent to the role of prime minister was not only seen as a political revolution, but also a cultural one. Menachem Begin was a Polish Jew who narrowly escaped the Holocaust. He felt the repercussions of the Holocaust in their entirety as someone who had lost his family and much of his community to Nazi horrors. Begin vocalized the trauma that many Holocaust

survivors in Israel felt but were unable to fully express in Israeli society. To him, the Holocaust was not a distant crisis that had adverse affects on Israel; it was a personal catastrophe that shaped his worldview (Shapira pg. 361).

Additionally, Begin was deeply connected to his Jewish identity, something that had been largely discounted by previous prime ministers in Israel. Coined the “first Jewish prime minister” of Israel, Begin conveyed an attachment to tradition and Jewish history that resonated with many Jews across Israel (Shilon pg. 249-253). In particular, the Jews from the Middle East, who had faced discrimination by the Labor government establishment, were enticed by his commitment to the traditional Jewish values that they cherished. His use of common Jewish narrative and experience, rather than distinctly European socialist ideals, made the country feel more accessible to Israel’s marginalized communities (Shapira pg. 361-364).

Under Menachem Begin’s leadership, another transformational event occurred that would shift the dynamics of the Arab-Israeli conflict. In 1977, President Anwar Sadat of Egypt became the first Arab leader to officially visit Israel. Sadat addressed Israel’s leadership in the Knesset (the Israeli parliament), professing a sincere desire to suspend hostilities and work towards a peaceful resolution to the conflict (Weitz pg. 149-151). This visit was followed by a series of difficult negotiations between Israeli and Egyptian leaders, both of which sought to meet their respective countries’ needs while achieving a suitable compromise that halted the state of war between these two countries. Under the auspices of the United States government, Israel and Egypt were finally able to come to an agreement and the Camp David Accords were signed (Shapira pg. 369-371).

The later Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty outlined Israel's withdrawal from the Sinai in return for Egypt's commitment to ending hostilities with Israel (Shapira pg. 369-370; Weitz pg. 149). Israelis and Egyptians who had mixed reactions to the peace treaty. The greater Arab world was outraged, and the Palestinian cause felt betrayed by Egypt's total abandonment of the pan-Arab commitment to liberating Palestine from the Zionists. Anwar Sadat would eventually pay for his peace overture; he was assassinated in 1981 by Muslim extremists in Cairo (Drozdiak).

1985-2000

In the mid-1980s, Israel was entrenched in Operation Peace for the Galilee. The Israel Defense Forces sought to invade Lebanon to fend off rocket attacks by Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) forces in southern Lebanon (Suomenlinna Seminar et al. pg. 79-81). Residents of northern Israel were the main victims of these rocket attacks, which had made life intolerable for many Israelis in the region. Though Israeli military leaders originally announced a brief invasion to satisfy Israel's security needs, Israeli forces remained in southern Lebanon until 2000 (Suomenlinna Seminar et al pg. 79-81.; Sela pg. 59). As the war dragged out, Israeli popular consensus in favor of the war began to erode. Many Israelis had seen war as an option to be used only when all other possibilities were exhausted (Sela pg. 61). As the war in Lebanon continued, it became increasingly clear to some Israelis that this was, at least in some part, a war by choice. Because this was a war in which Israel was overwhelmingly on the offense, it shattered the Israel Defense Forces' image as a military that primarily sought to defend its citizens. As Israeli casualties mounted and the continued cost of occupying southern Lebanon became known, Israeli civilian opposition to the war increased (Sela pg. 61).

Additionally, during the mid-1980s the Israel government conducted Operation Moses, which was a plan to airlift Ethiopian Jews to Israel in the midst of the Ethiopian Civil War. Over half of Ethiopia's Jews left Sudanese refugee camps for Israel. In 1975, Israeli religious authorities recognized the Jewish identity of the Ethiopian Jews and small numbers of the population began moving to Israel (Jewish Virtual Library). As the situation in Ethiopia became more dire amidst famine, drought, and political chaos, Ethiopian Jews fled their homes for Sudanese refugee camps, from which they hoped to reach Israel. By January 5 1985, 7,000 Ethiopian Jews had been airlifted to Israel (Jewish Virtual Library, Kaplan and Rosen pg. 63-64). In 1991, Operation Solomon was conducted, in which Israel airlifted Ethiopian Jews in coordination with the Ethiopian government for relocation in Israel. These ventures into Africa to retrieve Jews in need was a very emotional affair in Israel, and reminded Israelis as well as Jews around the world of the role that Israel played in safeguarding the continuation of the Jewish people (Jewish Virtual Library, Kaplan and Rosen pg. 66).

Culturally, Israel experienced a major shift as Mizrahi, or Middle Eastern, heritage and culture came to the fore of Israeli society. Long marginalized and seen as "beneath" European Jewish culture, the Mizrahi Jews became empowered in Israel and demanded to be represented in cultural spaces (Picard pg. 15-17; Shapira pg. 394). The political upheaval that removed the veteran Labor party from power was partially a result of the Mizrahi Jews voting en masse for Likud and Menachem Begin. Just as the larger Israeli population voted out many of the old ways of the Labor party in 1977-- the socialist ideals, the kibbutz as the epitome of Israel, the demand for a new secular Jewish identity -- the Mizrahi Jews were no longer willing to shed their heritage and identity to take on a separate Israeli one (Picard pg. 8-11; 15-18). Though many

Mizrahi Jews in Israel were passionate Zionists and ardent patriots, they wanted to express their heritage in Israel and proudly express their Middle Eastern Jewish customs in Israel (Weingrod pg. 59). They were less willing to give up their traditions for European socialist ideology than were the secular Ashkenazi (Jews of European descent) pioneers. Many Mizrahi Jews found both implicit and explicit discrimination as a norm in the Israeli melting pot (Picard pg. 15-18).

Whereas in previous decades Mizrahi Jews voiced a desire for equal treatment between Mizrahi and Ashkenazi Jews in Israel, in the 1970s and 1980s, these Mizrahi Jews were more concerned with the cultural dynamics in Israel and Mizrahi culture's standing in Israeli society (Picard pg. 15-17). In other words, they no longer sought to hide their identity to take on Ashkenazi cultural norms, and were instead demanding to be accepted and respected for their different cultural backgrounds and heritage.

In politics, this translated to the creation of the Shas party, an ultra-Orthodox Mizrahi political party that, in the 1980s and 1990s, demonstrated its ability to mobilize disenfranchised Mizrahi voters, regardless of religious affiliation (Picard pg. 14; Shapira pg. 394-397). By emphasizing its Middle Eastern essence, Shas was able to benefit from the resurgence of Mizrahi pride in Israel at the time and gained significant influence in the Knesset (Picard pg. 14; Leon pg. 379-380). In this time period, it became clear that the Ashkenazi establishment in Israel was eroding, and that Mizrahi pride would continue to play a role in shaping the identity and character of Israel.

The State of Israel also changed character due to a new immigration wave -- in the 1990s, nearly a million Russians from the Former Soviet Union moved to Israel. Israel's population increased by 13%, meaning that the Russian immigration had considerable influence on the

character of the State of Israel (Moshkova and Дмитриевна pg. 392; Shapira pg. 422). Russian immigrants tended to be highly educated and remain strongly tied to their Russian heritage and identity. The Russian language became commonplace in Israel and the number of researchers and scientists in Israel increased greatly after the Russian immigration (Moshkova and Дмитриевна pg. 392). However, many religious Jews contested the Jewish nature of some of the immigrants from the Former Soviet Union, causing some Jews to revisit the issue of what constitutes a Jew and how to identify Jews that qualify for automatic citizenship to Israel (Remennick pg. 518).

In this time, relations between Israelis and Palestinians began to shift. In 1967, Israelis and Palestinians remained territorially separated but became more socially integrated. Many Palestinians worked in Israel and had access to the Israeli market (Alimi pg. 437). They learned Hebrew and understood Israel's democratic institutions, even if most of them were unable to participate. The Israeli government permitted the establishment of institutions of higher learning, workers' unions, the media, and civil society organizations (Alimi pg. 437). At the same time, the Israeli government abolished the Gaza municipality and removed some West Bank government officials from office. The Israeli government supported Islamist groups to counter the PLO's influence in the territories and cultivated relationships with pro-Jordanian elites in the West Bank (Alimi pg. 437).

In the mid-1980s, Israel shifted towards a more hardline approach to the Palestinians. As mentioned earlier, the future status of the new territories was a matter of great debate in Israel and served as a significant point of tension within Israeli society (Alimi pg. 438). On the Palestinian side, there was no hope for a solution that would give them territorial sovereignty.

Even more so, the Israelis had participated in preliminary talks with the Jordanians over the status of the West Bank, making it clear that creating a Palestinian state was not a high priority for the Israelis or Jordanians at the time (Naser-Najjab and Khatib pg. 193). Additionally, in 1982 the PLO was expelled from Lebanon, making it more difficult for the organization to help Palestinians in the territories from abroad. It soon became clear to the Palestinians that to establish their own independent state, they could not rely on outside or regional players (Naser-Najjab and Khatib pg. 193).

On December 9, 1987, an Israeli truck driver killed four Palestinians in a traffic incident in Gaza. Palestinians believed that the act was intentional and began protesting in the streets. This eventually culminated in the mass popular uprising that defined the First Intifada (Naser-Najjab and Khatib pg. 194). The Palestinians protestors operated in the West Bank and Gaza and mostly threw stones and firebombs. Palestinian leaders limited firearm use and gained popular consensus for the uprising (Frisch pg. 179-180; Shapira pg. 415).

After the First Intifada, Israel ceased talks with Jordan about dividing the West Bank according to their interests (Frisch pg. 180; Shapira pg. 417-418). The Israelis and Palestinians underwent a series of talks that culminated with the 1993 Oslo Accords. This established the Palestinian Authority, a governing body in the West Bank and Gaza that had autonomy in the major Palestinian population centers in the West Bank. This was a groundbreaking moment for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, and many supported the idea of establishing a Palestinian state from the Oslo framework (Frisch pg. 177; 181).

The First Intifada made Israelis question the viability of long term control over the West Bank (Cleveland and Bunton pg. 467). Support for the Israeli peace movement increased during

the First Intifada, with around 200,000 people participating in vigils, conferences, and demonstrations (Simons). However, anti-peace activists also grew in prominence, who campaigned vigorously against the Oslo Accords and other negotiation efforts (Gabay pg. 353-357). Israeli and Palestinian radicals sought to interrupt the peace process throughout the 1990s-- most notably with Baruch Goldstein's assassination of Muslim worshippers at the Tomb of the Patriarch in Hebron and with Palestinian suicide bombings throughout Israel (Gabay pg. 356). The political environment in Israel grew more toxic as political discourse became increasingly polarized over the prospects of a long lasting peace with the Palestinians.

However, the Israeli government continued to pursue peace negotiations with the Palestinians despite opposition from right wing activists in Israel. But on November 4, 1995, a Jewish extremist murdered Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin at a peace rally in Tel Aviv (Shapira pg. 436). Rabin, who had been celebrated as a champion of the peace movement throughout the 1990s, had been murdered by a Jew. This shocked the Israeli public, and demonstrated how extreme the politics of the time had become (Gabay pg. 345).

Peace negotiations continued intermittently until 2000, when the Camp David and Taba talks fell apart between the Israelis and Palestinians. Both parties returned home to their politically divided constituents (Hallward pg. 185-187). In September 2000, the Second Intifada began, a violent uprising that ended much of the dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian leaders. For both Israelis and Palestinians, the hope for peace was tarnished by the bloody reality of the Second Intifada (Cohen pg. 95-96).

2000-2020

In the midst of the Second Intifada, Israeli and Palestinian leaders were unable to make any significant peace overtures. As Palestinian suicide bombings in Israeli public spaces terrorized the Israeli public, the Israel Defense Forces effectively re-occupied areas of the West Bank and Gaza under the Palestinian Authority and limited movement in the West Bank (Cleveland and Bunton pg. 479-480). In the mid-2000s, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon embarked on a new strategy to mitigate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Unlike previous efforts to achieve a negotiated solution between Israelis and Palestinians, Sharon instead decided to begin a unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. He claimed that due to the fractured nature of the Palestinian leadership at the time, he had no partner for negotiations and would therefore act without consulting with Palestinian leadership (Cleveland and Bunton pg. 480-481).

In 2005, Israel Defense Forces withdrew from the Gaza Strip unilaterally. The military evacuated all Israeli settlers from Gaza and four cities in the West Bank. Subsequently, Israel constructed a separation barrier between Israel and the West Bank (Cleveland and Bunton 481-482). According to Israeli officials, this controversial measure was aimed at protecting Israeli civilians from Palestinian suicide bombings. The initiative was criticized by Palestinians for incorporating some Israeli settlements and going over the 1949 ceasefire lines (Cleveland and Bunton pg. 481-482).

In 2006, Ehud Olmert was elected prime minister. He hoped to continue Ariel Sharon's disengagement plans. However, the Second Lebanon War in the summer of 2006 tainted his plans and any Israeli interest in further withdrawals (Cleveland and Bunton pg. 482).

Additionally, rocket fire from Gaza made many Israelis suspicious of the effectiveness of

disengagement. Unilateral withdrawal from disputed territory did not appear to mitigate Israel's security concerns, and continued rocket fire made the policy increasingly unpopular (Cleveland and Bunton pg. 482-483).

In 2006, a high-stakes Palestinian Authority election resulted in Hamas, an Islamist party that tended to be more extreme than Fatah (the more moderate veteran Palestinian party). Both Israel and the United States refused to recognize the new government and demanded that Hamas "honor previous Palestinian commitments, recognize Israel's right to exist, and renounce violence" (Cleveland and Bunton pg. 483). The power struggle between Hamas and Fatah continued, culminating in a bloody Hamas coup in Gaza in 2007. This fractured the Palestinian power structure. In return, Israel implemented a stronger blockade on Gaza to weaken Hamas and its resources in the area. However, Hamas oversaw an intricate smuggling network of tunnels into Egypt that helped the party sustain its power in Gaza (Cleveland and Bunton pg. 483-485). Additionally, the party began creating rockets that it fired at Israeli towns, which resulted in few Israeli casualties but caused significant distress to Israeli border towns. The Israeli government felt compelled to respond to these rocket attacks, which resulted in three wars between Israel and Hamas in Gaza: in 2008, 2012, and 2014 (Cleveland and Bunton 484).

In 2009, Benjamin Netanyahu was elected prime minister of Israel. Netanyahu was historically opposed to many of the peace overtures made by other Israeli governments (Benn pg. 14). However, pressured by the American government, Netanyahu delivered his famous "Bar Ilan Speech" that declared his commitment to a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Cleveland and Bunton pg. 482). But the peace process did not progress under Netanyahu's leadership. Instead, it became clear that one of Netanyahu's main objectives in

office was to raise awareness for Iran's nuclear program and curb its maligned activities in the Middle East. By shifting Israel's interests away from finding a final borders solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Netanyahu was able to maintain the status quo (Cleveland and Bunton pg. 482). Netanyahu continued to receive the plurality of votes in elections, and built a right-wing base composed of a wide array of Israelis, most notably religious and Mizrahi Jews.

In 2015, a rise of stabbing attacks by Palestinians in Israel was unlike previous waves of violence between Israelis and Palestinians. Most of these attacks were deemed "lone wolf attacks" and did not have the official backing of any Palestinian political party or terrorist group (Benn pg. 24). Palestinian attackers used knives to stab Israelis, predominantly at hot spots in the conflict in Jerusalem and the West Bank. This escalation in violence proved to be a difficult challenge for the Netanyahu administration, who claimed to be "tough on terror." Eventually, the violence largely subsided (Benn pg. 24; Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

Also in 2015, the United States Congress passed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) (Sherman 2018). This was devastating to Netanyahu's campaign against the plan, commonly known as "The Iran Deal" Negotiated between the United States, the United Kingdom, Russia, France, China, and Germany, this deal sought to curb Iran's nuclear activities in exchange for sanctions relief. Widely declared as a bad deal by Israelis, Netanyahu embarked on a campaign to delegitimize the deal and raise questions about its effectiveness in curbing Iran's nuclear activities (Rajiv pg. 49-51).

The election of President Donald Trump drastically changed Netanyahu's relationship with the White House. Whereas his relations with Obama became cool following their disagreement on the Iran Deal, President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu quickly found

common interests (Cohen 2020). President Trump removed the United States from the Iran Deal, which was met with praise by the Netanyahu administration (Sales 2018). In December 2017, President Trump officially recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital and expressed his desire to move the United States Embassy to Jerusalem (Jewish Telegraphic Agency 2019). The highly-controversial move was celebrated by Netanyahu, as was President Trump's subsequent recognition of Israeli sovereignty in the Golan Heights (disputed with Syria) (Laub 2019). Lastly, President Trump's "Deal of the Century," announced in February 2020, set the administration's recommendation for a two-state solution between Israelis and Palestinians (Miller 2020). The deal was seen by many to overwhelmingly favor Israel, and was celebrated by many on the Israeli right for not uprooting any settlements or demanding any right of return for Palestinian refugees (Bowen 2020). Palestinian leaders were outraged by the deal, and continued their policy on non-engagement with the Trump administration. The deal solidified the notion that the Trump administration, unlike previous United States presidential administrations, would openly favor Israel's interests over those of the Palestinians (Miller 2020).

In April 2019, Israel held another election. Benny Gantz, the creator of the Blue and White party, posed a serious challenge to Netanyahu's hegemony. The election results showed that both Benny Gantz and Benjamin Netanyahu's parties received 35 seats in the parliament (Hincks 2020). After weeks of negotiations, Benjamin Netanyahu was unsuccessful in forming a majority government and chose to dissolve the current government. In September 2019, an unprecedented second round of elections were called. Similarly, neither Benny Gantz nor Benjamin Netanyahu were able to form a government (Hincks 2020). In a third round of elections in March 2020, the governing parties appeared to be at a stalemate once again (Holmes

and Kierszenbaum 2020). At the time of writing this paper, a government in Israel has not been formed. However, this dysfunctional system created panic in Israel as scholars and politicians alike questioned Israel's democratic institutions for failing to produce a government repeatedly (Rettig Gur 2020).

Speech Analysis

This section is dedicated to investigating Israeli prime minister's speeches and how their rhetoric around the Holocaust has changed over time. Overall, it appears that external socio-political circumstances, and not the time period, are more of a useful indicator in understanding how the Holocaust was portrayed through speech in any given time period. Throughout these speeches that follow, the Holocaust has been evoked to create support for foreign policy decisions, including dismissing international recommendations, the invasion of Lebanon, the general concept of peace, and battling The Iran Deal on the global stage. Some additional themes appear to be pervasive over time, including suffering, abandonment, resilience, and gratitude.

Speech Analysis: 1948-1967

In this first crucial phase of Israel's history, David Ben-Gurion was primarily responsible for running Israel's political affairs. As the head of the Jewish Agency before the establishment of Israel in 1948, Ben-Gurion carried the weight and the legitimacy of the Jewish establishment. His tenure was known for its austere governance and dedication to the ingathering of the Jews of the Diaspora. His speeches show that he holds a strong distrust for foreign countries and organizations and an expectation that the Jewish people will be abandoned in their time of need. He strengthens his arguments in both speeches by evoking the Holocaust and showing that as in World War II, the international community will not come the Jews' rescue if disaster occurs.

By using Ben-Gurion's Speech addressing the United Nations General Assembly's deliberation on Jerusalem (1949) and his speech to the Knesset regarding controversy with the

United Nations and the United States on Peace Terms (1957), I hope to uncover the role of the Holocaust in Ben-Gurion's political rhetoric.¹ In one speech, he is speaking to the United Nations and to the world. In the other, he is speaking to the Knesset (Israeli parliament) and the Israeli people. By using speeches intended for two different audiences, I argue that Ben-Gurion evoked Holocaust rhetoric during his career as prime minister. Though these speeches are not from events directly related to the Holocaust, it is clear that the post-Holocaust mentality is omnipresent throughout these decisive moments in Israeli history.

In 1949, the United Nations was deliberating on the internationalization of Jerusalem that had been recommended by the United Nations General Assembly Partition Plan in 1947 (Jewish Virtual Library). However, following the 1948 war, Israel was in control of western Jerusalem and Jordan controlled the rest of the city. Israeli and Jordanian claims to Jerusalem complicated the United Nations' ability to carry out its plan for Jerusalem. In response to the United Nations' renewed interest in the status of Jerusalem, David Ben-Gurion's government proclaimed Jerusalem to be "an inseparable and organic part of the State of Israel." However, the United Nations voted to internationalize Jerusalem. In response, Ben-Gurion moved the Knesset meetings to Jerusalem and, eventually, many of the Israeli government's administrative buildings in defiance of the United Nations efforts.

Ben-Gurion's speech is relatively short and seeks to justify challenging the United Nations on the status of Jerusalem. In keeping with this message, the speech primarily reflects on the Israeli government's disagreement with the United Nations on the status of Jerusalem.

¹ Originally, this paper called for Ben-Gurion's Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day) speech in 1951. This speech was selected by a random generator, as described in the methodology section of this thesis. However, due to research delays and restrictions as a result of the COVID-19 epidemic, I was unable to uncover the speech.

However, he also harkens back to Jewish history to craft an argument supporting Israeli control of western Jerusalem. He notes a clear tie between ancient Jewish warriors and sages that heroically tried to defend Jerusalem from outside invaders and the events of the 1948 war: “Our valiant youngsters risked their lives for our sacred capital no less than our forefathers did in the time of the First and Second Temples.” He continues with this line of thought, insisting that “Jewish Jerusalem will never accept alien rule after thousands of its youngsters liberated their historic homeland for the third time, redeeming Jerusalem from destruction and vandalism.” Unlike countries in the United Nations that may see Jewish control of Jerusalem to be foreign occupation, Ben-Gurion declares the centrality of Jerusalem in the Jewish narrative. He categorizes the United Nations’ plan to internationalize Jerusalem as abhorrent and akin to foreign rule.

This is all necessary to understand the next phase of Ben-Gurion’s speech. He describes the abandonment of the United Nations during the 1948 war, even as the imminent threat of annihilation loomed over the Jews of Israel. Though this does not directly mention the Holocaust, it is clear that Ben-Gurion is evoking the fear of annihilation and sense of abandonment that defined the Jewish experience of the Holocaust: “We do not judge the U.N., which did nothing when nations, which were members of the U.N...tr[ied] to prevent the establishment of Israel by force, to annihilate the Jewish population in the Holy Land.” He reiterates the theme of international abandonment, and then describes that the Jews had to act on their own to protect themselves: “Had we not been able to withstand the aggressors who rebelled against the U.N., Jewish Jerusalem would have been wiped off the face of the earth, the Jewish population would have been eradicated and the State of Israel would not have arisen.” In the

second part of the speech, there is an undertone that just as the international community failed to intervene during the Holocaust, they failed to intervene in a second attempt to wipe the Jewish people off the map.

In 1949, just one year after Israel's establishment as an independent state, Ben-Gurion presented his case like a statesman. He evoked the Holocaust only subtly in his speech, but it conveyed a powerful message: though the world may have moved past World War II, the Jews had learned that when the world abandons them, as they perceived that it had in the Holocaust and in 1948, they would be left to their own devices and would act accordingly.

In 1957, just one year after the Suez Crisis, Ben-Gurion addressed the Knesset regarding the United Nations and the United States. In this speech, like in his speech in 1949, he criticizes the United Nations as an imperfect organization. He recognizes a historical struggle between the United Nations and Israel that existed before 1957 (Jewish Virtual Library). He relays the history of the relationship between the State of Israel and various political entities, including the United Nations, the United States, Great Britain, and the Arab countries. Ben-Gurion reiterates throughout the second half of the speech that Israel does not want to occupy the straits, but rather wants international assurance that its access to the straits for shipping and trade will be guaranteed. In contrast, Ben-Gurion asserts that Gaza (under Egyptian control at the time) should not be separated from Israel, however he is willing to withdraw troops from the area.

In the speech, Ben-Gurion briefly brings up the Holocaust. He does so to condemn British actions during the Holocaust that curbed Jewish immigration to Palestine: "We already have had one such tragic dispute with the Government of another great nation, the British Government, which since 1939 had openly disregarded its obligations and promises to the Jewish

people.” He later declares that it was Jewish violation of British law that allowed Zionists in Palestine to rescue vulnerable Jews in Europe. This sense of abandonment that Ben-Gurion expressed in his 1949 speech is also mentioned here. Ben-Gurion highlights a contrast between the despair of the Jews of Europe during the Holocaust and the bravery of the Jews of Palestine for defying British orders “with the intention of saving the maximum number of Jews from the Nazi sword and of building the ancient homeland of a nation.” He upholds Jewish defiance of the British as not only heroic, but necessary to rescue the Jewish people from the Nazis.

From these two instances, it is possible to see that in international forums or when dealing with international issues, Ben-Gurion chose to bring up the Holocaust when it was necessary to justify Israeli actions, especially those that defied the international community. Though the details of the Holocaust were not explicitly expressed in either of these examples, associations with the Holocaust were present. Ben-Gurion evokes the fears cultivated during the Holocaust to reiterate Israel’s need to defend itself. This creates a link between the despair of the Jewish of Europe during the Holocaust and the strength and resilience that Israel must have today to combat similar threats to the Jewish people in the future.

In both of these speeches, Ben-Gurion infers a level of incompetence in how the world sees Israel and the Jews. He notes that “the United Nations is certainly still far from perfection. We have bitter and strong objections against it and not only during recent times.” Additionally he declares that during the 1948 war, “neither the UN General Assembly nor the Security Council demanded that the invaders withdraw and only the self-sacrifice of our sons and daughters enabled us to expel the enemies from our country.” Similarly, in 1957, he says “we do not judge the U.N., which did nothing when nations, which were members of the U.N., declared war... to

annihilate the Jewish population in the Holy Land and destroy Jerusalem, the holy city of the Jewish people.” In both cases he shows a disdain for the United Nations in their failure to protect the Jewish people, and shows the Israeli military action as necessary to defend the Jews. This evocation of abandonment reminds Israelis of the abandonment that they experienced during World War II and reinforces that in Ben-Gurion’s eyes, Israel must act to defend the Jewish people or no one else will. In this section, the Holocaust was primarily evoked to justify Ben-Gurion’s condemnation and defiance of the United Nations to protect Israelis from threat.

Speech Analysis: 1967-1985

In this phase of Israeli history, Menachem Begin’s ascent to power symbolized a shift in Israeli politics and society. Begin, a traditional Polish Jew that had barely escaped the Nazi onslaught, was deeply attached to the Jewish heritage and trauma that his predecessors had openly rejected. However, as mentioned in earlier sections, the early Labor leaders of Israel were not eager to explore the trauma of the Diaspora and the Holocaust, but they were willing to evoke those tragedies on the international stage.

These two speeches reflect critical moments in Begin’s tenure as prime minister.² The first speech is his address at the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony in Oslo, Norway in 1978 following the historic Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty. The second speech is an address to the Knesset in 1982 at the beginning of the First Lebanon War. In the first speech, Begin is addressing an international audience, whereas in the second speech, Begin is once again addressing his political contemporaries in the Knesset. Begin evokes the Holocaust to remind his audience of the recent

² I was unable to find one of Menachem Begin’s speeches on Yom HaShoah as prime minister.

losses of the Jewish people, justify the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, and to highlight the international community's constant abandonment of the Jewish people.

In his speech in Oslo, Begin displays honor and gratitude to be receiving the Nobel prize. Within the opening lines of the speech, he states: "I have come from the Land of Israel, the land of Zion and Jerusalem, and here I stand in humility and with pride as a son of the Jewish people, as one of the generation of the Holocaust and Redemption" (Economic Cooperation Foundation)³. His mention of the Holocaust does not seem to be reprimanding the international community, but rather it appears to be an appreciation of how far the Jewish people have come in recent memory. He is careful to pay tribute to important figures in Israel and even harkens back to biblical times. He reflects on the universal vision of peace, which is rooted in the Jewish tradition through prophetic messages. Begin notes that this yearning for peace has yet to be realized, but we should nevertheless continue to pursue it.

He then mentions the Holocaust once more, highlighting its tragic nature: "But in my generation...there was a time indescribable. Six million Jews - men, women and children...were dragged to a wanton death and slaughtered methodically in the heart of the civilized continent." In this section, he makes the general obstacles to peace more specific by sharing an example to which he has personal connections. His account of the Holocaust feels much more personal and detailed than Ben-Gurion's references to the Holocaust. He notes that this horror he describes happened not in some distant or "undeveloped" area, but in the heart of "the civilized continent" of Europe. Yet though he directly mentions Europe as the epicenter of the Holocaust, it is not in a manner that is provocative or accusatory. If anything, it seems appropriate that receiving a

³ Speeches will be cited once at the beginning of the discussion, and any discussion of the speech comes from that single citation.

prestigious award in Europe requires some acknowledgement of the Jewish people's tragic history on the continent just over thirty years earlier.

He continues to expand upon the Holocaust, highlighting the depravity of the tragedy and that it "unfolded before the eyes of the whole world for more than six years." Begin sees the Holocaust as a uniquely devastating event, but one that can be used to understand the barbarity, and ambivalence, of mankind in the face of human suffering. He further reiterates the neutrality of the world during the Holocaust, proclaiming that "those who were doomed, deprived of their human dignity, starved, humiliated, led away and ultimately turned into ashes, cried out for rescue - but in vain." At this point, he places responsibility for the horrors of the Holocaust not only on the perpetrators themselves, but also on those who were silent in the face of such atrocities.

Begin then shifts back to the idea of peace and gives the audience a timeline of the peace process between Egypt and Israel. From this shift, it is clear that he sees a connection between the horrors that the Jewish people have suffered and the Israeli pursuit for peace with the Egyptians. While he describes the Holocaust as a dark and terrible time for the Jewish people, he shows that from this despair came a desire to make the world a better place: "You rise, you struggle, you make sacrifices to achieve and guarantee the prospect and hope of living in peace - for you and your people, for your children and their children." From this speech, we see that Begin sees his pursuit of peace with Egyptian President Anwar Sadat was not only rooted in Jewish values, but also was a result of seeking to enhance the world after the Jewish people understood the very worst that mankind can do to one another.

Throughout this speech, Begin reflects on the Holocaust as a touchpoint that his audience knows and understands well. Though he does mention the atrocities of the Holocaust and the role of perpetrators and bystanders in committing the crime, Begin's speech is not centered on calling out European countries for their abandonment during the Holocaust. If anything, his mention of the Holocaust serves to inspire his audience, arguing that it is possible to rise above one's unfortunate circumstances and pursue peace. His discussion of the Holocaust does not appear to be motivated in appealing to his people or the international community for support or aid. However, it is important to note that in both speeches by Ben-Gurion, he was speaking from the vantage point of a leader who felt hindered or threatened by international organizations and initiatives. In this speech, Begin is speaking at the Nobel Peace Prize Ceremony honoring the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. Rather than feeling threatened, Begin has the confidence of a leader who has made peace with his most formidable enemy. He is able to be less threatening and direct because he is not seeking to gain anything from the international community other than recognition for his involvement in the peace process between Egypt and Israel.

Begin's next speech took place on June 8, 1982. This was two days after Operation Peace for the Galilee, or the First Lebanon War, began (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Forces inside and outside of the Middle East feared an escalation of violence between Israeli and Syrian troops in Lebanon (Syria was occupying parts of Lebanon at the time). After the Israel Communist Party presented a vote of no confidence in the Knesset, Begin addressed the Knesset to explain the reasons for the invasion and rally Israeli support for the war.

Begin began the speech mourning the casualties that had already occurred due to the war in Lebanon. He pays these soldiers respect and proclaims that all of Israel mourns these losses.

He describes the political unity at the time behind the war and thanks his political contemporaries for their support. Conversely, he notes that the United States and other Western countries have encouraged Begin to withdraw Israeli troops from southern Lebanon. Begin then describes the threat of terror to the West, capitalizing on the shared experiences of terror between Israel and some European nations. He insists that this terror must be stamped out and the war would continue until the residents of northern Israel (the Galilee region) would be safe from rocketfire from PLO militias in Southern Lebanon.

Begin continues to describe the unity of Israelis behind this war, and expands his list to include people from all over the world who have communicated their support to him. He addresses the unfortunate nature of sending young men into battle, and insists that he did so only as a measure of last resort to protect Israeli citizens. He demonstrates the fear of terrorist attacks against Jewish civilians abroad and vows to protect Jewish life. In particular, he mourns the murder of Israeli Ambassador Shlomo Argav by PLO militants abroad. He powerfully asks his audience: “In this generation, shall we abandon Jewish blood?” This powerful rhetorical question reminds his audience that Israel holds responsibility for protecting Jewish lives. Furthermore, it appears to create a contrast between “this generation” and previous generations, possibly alluding to the world’s abandonment of the Jews during the Holocaust.

He continues with his universalist language, proclaiming that “The children of Israel will happily go to school and joyfully return home, just like the children in Washington, in Moscow and in Peking; in Paris and in Rome; in Oslo, in Stockholm and in Copenhagen.” By doing this, he is suggesting that his reasons for invading Lebanon are to restore normalcy to the lives of Israelis and are not belligerent in nature. Begin becomes more direct in his comparisons, stating

that “The fate of a million and half a million Jewish children has been different from all the children of the world throughout the generations. No more. We will defend our children.” His mention of a million and a half Jewish children is a direct reference to the Holocaust. He is echoing the idea of Jewish helplessness and vulnerability, which he seeks to reject in the present time. This creates a more powerful statement: by referencing the Holocaust, he is not making general comments about the safety of Israeli children. In contrast, he sees the fate of Israeli children inextricably tied to the fate of the Jewish children during the Holocaust. Without sincere protection, and in the shadows of the Holocaust, he fears for the lives of Israeli children.

Begin goes on to describe the PLO militants in southern Lebanon and their attacks in northern Israel. He mentions their targeting of civilians, commenting that “there has been none so despicable since the days of the S.A. the S.S. and the Gestapo.” This is once again a direct reference to the Holocaust, comparing the threat of Palestinian militants to that of the Nazis during World War II. This stark comparison is used to garner sympathy, and possibly support, from both his direct audience (the Knesset) and the wider international community. By mentioning the Holocaust in this matter, Begin challenges any rhetoric indicating that this war is unnecessary for the Israelis. By using these Holocaust motifs, Begin makes it clear that just as there was a serious threat to Jewish life and survival during the Nazi era, so to is there a similar threat today from Palestinian militants in southern Lebanon.

Whether or not this comparison is factually accurate, it serves as a touchpoint for his Israeli audience and the international community. Both are able to internalize the horror of a threat akin to the Nazis against the Jewish people just over thirty years after the Holocaust. If anything, Begin’s evocation of the Holocaust is used as a battle cry to rally those seeking to

protect the Jewish community from further annihilation and to push them to support Begin's invasion of Lebanon for humanitarian reasons. Interestingly, Begin does not qualify his comparison whatsoever, leaving the audience to interpret that in his mind, the PLO threat is the next iteration of the Nazi threat. In this section, Begin evokes the Holocaust in two different ways: in his Nobel Peace Prize speech, he mentions the Holocaust to remind his audience of his people's recent dark history. In his speech during the Lebanon invasion, he evokes the Holocaust to justify the internationally-condemned incursion into Lebanon and gain support for his stance in the Knesset.

Speech Analysis: 1985-2000

In this time, Israel was developing into a flourishing and sophisticated nation. At the same time, Israel and its leaders are forced to confront the issues surrounding the final status of the West Bank and Gaza. As the peace process began between Israel and the Palestinians, tensions rose in both societies between those who support a peace process and those who are fundamentally opposed to it (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, an esteemed war hero, becomes heavily invested in the peace process. His Yom HaShoah speech at Yad Vashem (The main Holocaust museum and research center in Israel) in 1995 was just months before he is assassinated by Jewish extremist Yigal Amir. This speech occurred two years into the Oslo Accords and in the midst of a growing desire for peace among both Israelis and Palestinians.

Though Rabin was not a religious man, he begins his speech describing the importance of key phrases of the *mourner's kaddish*, the traditional Jewish prayer for mourning and commemorating someone who has passed away. He describes sorrow as an integral part of the

Jewish experience. Rabin elaborates on several key (and sometimes seeming happy) moments in which the Jewish tradition encourages observers to internalize past tragedy and grieving. Rabin lists the tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people, and includes the Holocaust in that list. Unlike previous prime ministers, Rabin is not evoking the Holocaust to rebuke the international community. In contrast, he takes time to thank those in the international community who helped save Jewish lives during the Holocaust. Rabin acknowledges the depth of the trauma inflicted on the Jewish people, but he does so in a way that celebrates the peace, strength, and resilience that the Jewish people had coming out of the dark tragedy.

Next, Rabin expresses the power of faith in getting the Jewish people through dark times. He preaches resilience throughout his message, and proclaims that “through this strength, we have built the Jewish people's home and laid the foundation for generations to come.” From this excerpt, it is clear that he sees a connection between tragedy, resilience, and being able to build up a Jewish homeland. Rabin continues to connect these three ideas in his speech, noting that “Holocaust survivors, snatched from the inferno, living here in Israel and scattered across the world these are the people on whom our eyes are focused today. The spark in their eyes that was not extinguished by the rifle barrels of death, the faith that kept them human.” Yet again he reflects on faith and resilience rather than the traumas that the survivors faced.

Rabin does later go into details about the horrors that the Jews faced during the Holocaust, but it does not seem to be the focal point of his speech. Similar to Begin's speech in Oslo, Rabin does not seek to accuse or condemn in his speech. He is in sincere mourning for the losses in the Holocaust but seems to emphasize the resilience of the Jewish people more than his

predecessors. Rabin's speech is rather statesmanlike; he seems more detached from the events of the Holocaust than his predecessors.

Rabin shifts gears, and opens up his speech to the wider world. He explains the horrors of the Holocaust in further detail, but ends this segment with gratitude to the Allied forces for liberating the Nazi concentration camps and saving the Jewish people from further destruction. This sentiment of gratitude has been echoed occasionally in other speeches examined in this paper, however it is often used to incriminate another party or to draw attention to those nations that stood idly by during the Holocaust. In contrast, Rabin's statement seems to be a gesture of gratitude to the Allied forces.

In some sense, Rabin's speech appears to be universalizing the Jewish trauma of the Holocaust. Though he does touch on some key tenets of Jewish tradition and thought on the issue, most of his speech appeals to universal emotions and understandings about trauma, including that of the Holocaust. This sentiment is continued in the next line of the speech, where Rabin proclaims that "today, together with the entire free world, we mark VE-Day and we are not joyful." By expressing this sentiment in this manner, it appears that he does not want to mourn the tragedy of the Holocaust just with the people of Israel and the Diaspora Jews. He seeks to create a universal touchpoint from which other nations can mourn together with the Jews for the losses of the Holocaust.

This is quite a departure from other political speeches examined in this paper. Both Ben-Gurion and Begin both emphasized the particularist nature of the Jewish experience to the Holocaust, even when using it to show understanding of other disasters and traumas. In contrast, Rabin appears to be more interested in celebrating the universal lessons of the Holocaust. That is

not to say that Rabin doesn't recognize the impact of the Holocaust on the Jewish people; he shows commitment to Jewish tradition and understanding of grief. He highlights this sentiment by stating: "The Holocaust which befell the Jewish people was greater than we could bear. The glint of joy in our eyes may have dimmed somewhat, but it has not extinguished the spark of life and faith." He appears to be making a point to open the tent of grief to include those who wish to mourn with him, citizens of Israel, and Diaspora Jews.

Another interesting note about this speech is how Rabin ends it. He appeals again to the resilience of the Jewish people in dark times and looks positively to the future for better days ahead: "And this, faith, leads us to the coming days, the days of remembrance and grace, and the days of peace." In a sense, he links the resilience of the Jewish people to their ability to pursue a better future. Perhaps even a future that includes peace. This is an intriguing way to end the speech because many on the Israeli right felt that Rabin's peace process would endanger Jewish lives. In the eyes of the Israeli right, Rabin campaigning to return Israel's borders to what they deemed as "Auschwitz borders"⁴ was ultimate treason. These borders were indefensible and would lead to catastrophic (and possibly genocidal) results if Israel faced another Arab invasion. Yet in this speech, Rabin envisions peace as a measure that can be achieved because of resilience. Perhaps peace is a result of the Jewish people's strength, and the obstacles to peace can be overcome. However, it is also possible that Rabin mentioned peace in an abstract sense, wholly disconnected from the events of the era. But nonetheless, his decision to end his speech with a hope for peace is understandable given his role in the peace process at the time.

⁴ The 1949 armistice borders

Overall, this speech marks a shift in how the Holocaust is mentioned by the prime minister. Though all three prime ministers that have been examined in this paper demonstrate a sincere connection to the traumatic events of the Holocaust and the specific impact that this trauma had on the Jewish people, they utilize the Holocaust for different means. For both Ben-Gurion and Begin, the Holocaust is an “othering” technique that creates a stark contrast between the Israelis and other countries in the world. In contrast, Rabin seeks to find common ground with other nations and peoples in his speech. Rabin is less concerned about emphasizing the specificity of the Jewish Holocaust and instead prefers to find a way to both legitimately connect to the trauma in a Jewish way while reaching out those who wish to join the mourning.

Rabin is able to mention the Holocaust in a manner that is dignified, genuine, but not overly emotional or hysterical. He does not seek justice for the Holocaust. Rather, he hopes to commemorate the event and use its lessons as a catalyst to propel the world into a better future. This may be attributed to the sheer amount of time that had passed since the Holocaust in 1995. Alternatively, perhaps Israeli prosperity and the prospect of peace has allowed Israelis to dwell not only on the horrors that the Jewish people endured during the Holocaust, but also on the lessons that can be learned from the atrocity. In contrast, both Ben-Gurion and Begin were operating with the knowledge that many of their colleagues and audience members were alive, or even suffered, during the Holocaust. However, all three prime ministers mentioned the Holocaust to describe the resilience and progress of the Israel and Jewish people since the Holocaust. In this speech, Rabin evoked the Holocaust as a universal touchpoint to which his audience, domestic or abroad, could connect.

Speech Analysis: 2000-2020

In this era, Israel suffered a massive shock with the collapse of the Oslo peace process and the escalation of violence during the second intifada. Throughout this time period, Israeli politics gradually shifted more right. The election of current Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, an opponent of the Oslo Accords, signaled a shift away from the urgent desire to negotiate a two-state solution between the Israelis and Palestinians.

Netanyahu's Yom HaShoah speech in 2016 is twenty-one years after Rabin's speech that was examined earlier in this paper. He made this speech just months after the culmination of his intense campaign against the Iran Deal. While his efforts ultimately failed, Netanyahu maintained that Iran's maligned activity in the region would be detrimental to Israel's safety and security. His speech, like Rabin's speech earlier, seeks to commemorate the Holocaust and pay tribute to the Jews who lost their lives during the tragedy. However, Netanyahu reflects further on threats to the Jews around the world, condemns critics of Israel, and emphasizes the importance of continuing to build a safe and prosperous country. Netanyahu's speech follows that of President Rivlin, and some of his remarks build off of President Rivlin's statements.

Netanyahu begins his speech speaking directly to the Holocaust survivors themselves. He expresses his admiration for overcoming the horrors that they faced during the Holocaust, and for "and how [they] created a new life here in Israel" (Jewishpress.com 2016). He, like Rabin, draws a connection between the horrors that the Jews faced in Europe and their safety and prosperity in Israel. This is in line with the traditional Zionist narrative that in Israel, Holocaust survivors no longer had to fear for their lives and could help contribute to building the new

Hebrew society. The trauma that they faced in Europe is contrasted with their success and livelihood in the State of Israel.

Netanyahu then responds to Rivlin's remarks, agreeing that not enough had been done in Israel to help Holocaust survivors in need. He declares that more has been done in recent years to address this issue, and notes that his committing to helping Holocaust survivors in need "... is a debt owed to you by the State of Israel, and we will pay this debt." Netanyahu addresses a more contemporary issue of the Holocaust's legacy, which was not seen in the other speeches. This appears to be a sincere gesture of appreciation and commitment to bettering the circumstances of Holocaust survivors, and has no obvious political appeal or benefit to Netanyahu or his policies.

Netanyahu declares his commitment to ensuring that the Holocaust will not happen again. He then transitions into discussing the reasons for the Holocaust happening in the first place. To him, the potent and toxic nature of antisemitism in Europe motivated the Nazis and other Europeans to commit acts of mass genocide. But in his eyes, this threat has not been extinguished. He articulates that "the Nazi regime in Germany was defeated 71 years ago, yet anti-Semitism and the lies did not die along with Hitler in his bunker." He describes the rise of antisemitism in the world, specifically in the Arab and Muslim world and in the West. In particular, he calls out European officials for their improper conduct regarding antisemitism.

Netanyahu continues to discuss the issue of modern-day antisemitism, arguing that "anti-Semitism today is a peculiar matchmaker –the elites who supposedly represent human progress have joined forces with the most sinister, barbaric fanatics on earth who behead people, oppress women, persecute LGBTs, destroy cultural treasures." He sees antisemitism as the

meeting place for progressives and reactionaries, both of which see the Jews as the underlying cause for their problems. Netanyahu is not alone in this characterization of modern Antisemitism. In 2015, Jeffrey Goldberg characterized the severity of the threat to the Jews of Europe in his piece “Is it Time for the Jews to Leave Europe?”. Goldberg notes that in France in 2014,

“51 percent of all racist attacks targeted Jews. The statistics in other countries, including Great Britain, are similarly dismal. In 2014, Jews in Europe were murdered, raped, beaten, stalked, chased, harassed, spat on, and insulted for being Jewish. *Salé Juif*—“dirty Jew”—rang in the streets, as did “Death to the Jews,” and “Jews to the gas” (Goldberg).

From this alarming information, it is clear that Netanyahu’s emphasis on the condition of modern Antisemitism is not only appropriate, but necessary to address on the somber day.

Netanyahu continues to address this issue and the connection between modern antisemitism and the State of Israel. Like other observers of modern antisemitism, Netanyahu sees some criticism of Israel as masked antisemitism. Netanyahu takes this a step further in his speech, arguing that “[antisemites’] hostility towards Israel has long exceeded legitimate criticism, if that ever existed.” In this section, he appears to tinker with the notion of what is considered legitimate criticism of Israel and what should be labeled as antisemitism. It is a difficult and controversial topic of conversation, but Netanyahu seems to hint that perhaps more criticism of Israel should be characterized as antisemitism than originally thought.

Netanyahu continues to make connections between modern antisemitism and the antisemitism of other eras. He heavily criticizes UNESCO’s handling of the controversy surrounding “ownership” of the Temple Mount. In a rather aggressive manner, Netanyahu

proclaims that ignorant steps like this “is an addiction to a lie and its dissemination around the world until it is accepted as fact. This is precisely how Jew haters have acted throughout the ages.” In this part of the speech, Netanyahu has invoked antisemitism throughout the ages to explain UNESCO’s problematic policy. By doing so, he changes the discourse on the issue. Rather than this being a disagreement between the Israeli prime minister and international organizations, Netanyahu turns this into an issue of antisemitism. Past Israeli leaders have had many issues with various international bodies, including Ben-Gurion and Begin. Like Netanyahu, they have invoked the Holocaust to accuse the international community of neglect, ignorance, or prejudice.

Netanyahu shifts his rhetoric to talk about fighting antisemitism. He suggests that “building up Israel” and making the country more successful will help fight back against antisemitism and anti-Israel activity. In particular, he articulates the need to build up Israel’s defenses; he argues that even if Israel cannot adequately defend all Jews from antisemitism, building up the army will allow Israel to respond when necessary to antisemitic attacks. The need for Israel to be stronger is an urgent matter that carries historical weight. Netanyahu proclaims that “For many generations we were like a driven leaf, powerless, defenseless, but that is no longer the case.” Following this line of logic, building up Israel is a responsibility to protect Jews against Antisemitism as was impossible before Israel’s creation.

Netanyahu continues his description of various events and influences that are affecting Israel and the Jewish people. He finally turns his attention to Iran: “We have learned the lesson. We do not ignore those who call for our destruction and we are not deterred by them.” He later calls Iran out by name, condemning its Holocaust denial and murderous intentions in the Middle

East. He responds to the Iranian threat by insisting once again that Israel needs to become stronger. Because he can no longer campaign against the Iran Deal, he chooses to speak about the Iranian threat in generalities. He insinuates that Israel will rely on its military if necessary to defend itself from Iranian encroachment in the Middle East.

Netanyahu finishes his speech by once again celebrating the achievements of the State of Israel and of Holocaust survivors. He praises them and their strength, and argues that it is their resilience that helped Israel become the flourishing nation that it is today. He ends his speech reiterating the connection between the vitality of the Holocaust survivors and Israel: “the flourishing State of Israel signifies the triumph of light over darkness.” By stating this, Netanyahu infers that the ideals of strength and resilience that are often used around the world to characterize Holocaust survivors should also be applied to the development and success of the state of Israel.

Overall, this speech reflects various uses of the Holocaust. At the beginning, Netanyahu is specifically addressing the Holocaust survivors and their experience. Throughout the speech, he invokes the Holocaust to condemn modern-day antisemitism, anti-Israel activity, UNESCO, and Iran. Some of his comparisons are more sound, whereas others appear to be less about the validity of the comparison and more about criticizing policies with which he disagrees vehemently. His more pointed accusations are reminiscent of Begin’s speech 1982, where both prime ministers invoke the Holocaust to push back against criticism of Israel. In this speech, Netanyahu evokes the Holocaust to reiterate the need to support Israel as well as fight back against antisemitism and threats to the Jewish people.

Overall Analysis

The speeches analyzed cover the history of the State of Israel. Israelis celebrate the achievements of their country, which has developed from a highly under-resourced and underdeveloped country of immigrants into a flourishing and highly successful nation. Yet the legacy of the Holocaust remains ever-present. As this section of speech analysis has shown, in times of threat, Israeli leaders tend to revert to national sentiments about the Holocaust. These touchpoints include as the silence and apathy of the international community during the Holocaust, the helplessness of the Jews during the Holocaust, the resilience of the survivors and their ability to overcome their victimhood, and the need for Israel to protect Jewish lives from positions of vulnerability again. Each of these speeches touched on at least one of these themes, signaling the importance of these messages to all Israelis of every generation. These leaders were also careful to never weaken the significance of the Holocaust or to trivialize its trauma on the Jewish people.

However, it is also important to note how the message changed depending on Israel's socio-political circumstances. With the exception of Rabin's speech, each prime minister made speeches at a time where they saw a real threat to Israel and the Jewish people. Their invocation of the Holocaust at times could have been meant to intensify the fear that Israelis have of annihilation, but leaders mostly referenced the Holocaust in an appeal to international audiences. In particular, Ben-Gurion's speeches stood out in their ability to justify Israeli action, including recognizing Jerusalem as its own capital and safeguarding the Straits of Tiran for Israeli trade, that did not seem to have direct impact on Israel's direct safety or security. Of course, an argument can be made for why both Jerusalem and the Straits of Tiran were important to Israel,

but neither were an immediate challenge to the country's existence. Yet Ben-Gurion evoked the Holocaust by focusing on Jewish feelings of abandonment by the international community and shows the deep distrust that he has for the United Nations and other international bodies, despite the fact that their requests do not immediately place Israeli citizens in danger or in the line of fire. One explanation of this is that it is possible that in the early phase of Israel's history, these issues felt much more urgent for Israel's safety and security than they do in retrospect. Any request by the United Nations or international powers to refrain from action that could disturb the balance of power in the region may have felt like a violation of Israel's sovereignty, and the leaders may have feared that if they continued to follow the instructions of the international community, they could very well end up abandoned and vulnerable to outside threats.

Perhaps Netanyahu's speech, which discussed more broadly the issues affecting the Jewish people in modern times, stood out in its simultaneous appeal to both Jewish and Israeli audiences that fear for the situation of their people and to the international community that does not want to allow another genocide of the Jewish people to happen. Ben-Gurion and Begin largely addressed the Knesset to frame their actions in the international community to other Israeli politicians and to express their disappointment with international actors and bodies. Ben-Gurion, Begin, and Netanyahu all justified their uneasiness about the international community by reminding their audiences of the negligence and inaction that the Jews experienced during the Holocaust at the hands of the international community. Rabin stood out for its lack of accusatory rhetoric or mention of international abandonment and misunderstanding of Israel and its needs.

Overall, it appears that external socio-political circumstances, and not the time period, are more of a useful indicator in understanding how the Holocaust was portrayed through speech in any given time period. But with Ben-Gurion's speeches, which seem to evoke Holocaust themes without any tangible fear of annihilation, he markets his issues with the international community as a danger because he does not trust the international community to genuinely support his country if he aligns his interests with theirs. This means that throughout Israeli history, the Holocaust has remained an important reference point for Israeli leaders seeking to protect their citizens from what they see as a disaster that could result in trauma similar to the Holocaust. Whether or not they genuinely see the threats as akin to the Holocaust are unknown, but when Israeli leaders evoke the Holocaust when describing other threats to Israel's livelihood, this creates a powerful mental image that is likely to resonate with both Israeli citizens and the international community.

Begin and Netanyahu invoked the Holocaust to describe imminent threats to the Jewish people, however in some parts of their speeches it seems that they utilized Holocaust imagery to describe events that were highly controversial within the international community. For example, Begin's discussion of the first Israeli invasion in Lebanon characterizes the PLO as akin to Nazis, and leaves no room to question or reevaluate Israel's actions during this highly controversial war. Of course, it is important to remember that there were proponents of the war who saw PLO militias on Israel's northern border as a genuine existential threat to Israel's security. Also, it is Begin's responsibility to justify Israel's actions and he would therefore seek to defend Israel as strongly as possible. By equating PLO militias to Nazis, Begin removes any room for critique of Israel's actions in Lebanon. Similarly, Netanyahu responds to Israel critics,

but does not stop at just those who do not recognize Israel's right to exist. He doubts if there is any genuine criticism of Israel, lending itself to the idea that perhaps all criticism of Israel is problematic.

Through these insights, I hope to shed light on the significance of various parts of these political speeches. By using the historical context of these speeches in addition to the speeches' contents themselves, I found meaningful patterns, both changes and continuities, that inform how we can view the role of the Holocaust in Israel until today. These observations demonstrate the power of genocide in shaping a nation's conception of the world, even years and generations after the trauma.

Conclusion

From these investigations, I was able to gain insight into how the Holocaust has influenced Israeli political rhetoric over time. In some ways, references to the Holocaust remained continuous. Each leader demonstrated their understanding of the severity of the Holocaust and its impact on the Jewish people through their speech. These prime ministers saw the events mentioned in their speeches as important, and worthy of relating to the Holocaust. From these speeches, it is clear that the memory of the Holocaust remains present in Israeli political rhetoric and has been used as a powerful tool to create a national understanding of various events and circumstances. Images of the Holocaust remain firmly ingrained in younger generations of Israelis. The fears that were very present in the aftermath of the Holocaust are still relevant to the current generations of Israelis, despite having no direct link to the trauma itself.

This demonstrates the power of the Holocaust in shaping how Israelis conceive of threat generations after it occurred.

I saw that the context of the speech, whether or not Israel was facing any external threats, played a large role in determining how the Holocaust was mentioned in political speeches. In the speeches of three of the four time periods, the Holocaust was referenced to condemn outside or international bodies for misunderstanding Israel and its security needs. This demonstrates the strained relationship between Israel and the international community in times where Israel feels threatened. However, as Begin's Nobel Prize speech and Rabin's speech indicate, when Israel felt connected to the international community, Holocaust references were still present but were less accusatory or directly antagonistic to the international community.

It is clear that the Holocaust remains a powerful memory in the eyes of the Israeli people, and likely Jews around the world as well. It is also clear that Israel feels the most threatened when it feels alienated from the international community; this distancing reiterates Israel's fear of once again being abandoned by international powers when it needs the most help. In the future, I hope to better understand this relationship between Israel and the Holocaust, and the roles of modern-day traumas (particularly the Second Intifada) on Israeli society. Additionally, I would like to examine how neighboring Arab countries experienced trauma from their perspectives, and the role of the Holocaust rhetoric in the American Jewish community.

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Biography

Rachel C. Mitchell graduated Phi Beta Kappa from UT in 2020 with a Bachelor of Arts in Plan II Honors and International Relations and Global Studies. She was a student in the Arabic Flagship Program and studied abroad in Australia and Jordan. In college, Rachel was extremely involved in Texas Hillel, serving as the President of Texans for Israel for a year. She served as a Peer Academic Coach at the Sanger Learning Center and as the Plan II Education intern at the Blanton Museum of Art. In her free time, Rachel enjoys traveling, reading, and writing.