

Ofer Feldman *Editor*

When Politicians Talk

The Cultural Dynamics of Public
Speaking

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To the Hatanis—Akifumi and Asaya

Preface

This volume has many voices. It reflects the collaboration efforts of researchers from a diverse background. The contributors, specializing in communication, rhetoric, discourse analysis, social psychology, political science, history, and international relations, bring multinational, multidisciplinary diversity, and a range of theoretical/conceptual approaches and research methods, to examine the relevance of culture to political discourse. Regardless of our different research areas and approaches, we share the central argument that culture matters. As the title suggests, we focus on culture as a powerful element to detail the interaction between culture and the language used by political figures—presidents, prime ministers, and other officials—in selected countries. Some, including Japan, China, and the Philippines, can be regarded as traditional societies, where behavior is governed more by custom, and where custom continues with little change from generation to generation. Others, including Israel, Germany, Spain, and Poland, can be regarded as societies in transition. Cultural elements embodied in each of these societies—whether idiosyncratic to a given society or more common to other societies—affect elite (and also popular) political discourse in ways that determine the nature and characteristics of public speaking, what can be said in the public sphere and how, and what are the taboos. By examining these aspects, our contributions to this volume pose issues and questions that we hope will stimulate further thought, discussion, and research in manifold directions.

As the editor of this volume, I would like to thank those who helped to bring this project to completion. First, I greatly appreciate each of the contributors for having undertaken their assignments with enthusiasm and for graciously considered suggestions and feedback and more than once, patiently and thoughtfully, revising and refining their contributions. They have summarized and presented an impressive collection of knowledge and perspectives, reflecting innovative and fascinating ideas related to their areas of research. I am also indebted to Sonja Zmerli, who as ever, was a source of support and encouragement during the various stages of this project, sharing her thoughts and opinions on a number of contributions and providing useful, intelligent advice. A special thank you also to Amos Kiewe, E. Hidalgo Tenorio, Anita Fetzer, Masamichi Iwasaka, and Taro Tsukimura, who offered their support and assistance at the earlier stage of this project, and to Masae Imai for her friendship and

exquisite *teryôri* during the editing of this volume. I am grateful to Richard Anderson, who, through keeping constant communication, offered valuable ideas during the progress of this project, and for sharing his wide knowledge and judgment regarding the content and substance of the submitted chapters. A special, sincere gratitude to Sam Lehman-Wilzig who agreed to serve as our copy editor, carefully checking each and every word in the submitted drafts, always going beyond this role to offer his constructive ideas in the review process regarding the improvement of the chapters' quality and coherence. Last, I would like to express my great personal regard to Juno Kawakami, our editor at *Springer*, who was constantly very responsive and helpful, offering excellent assistance over the duration of our collective efforts. Needless to say, none of the above mentioned individuals bear any responsibility for any mistake or shortcomings in this book—except perhaps my two grandsons Akifumi (22 months old) and Asaya (102 days old), to whom this book is dedicated.

Kyoto, Japan

Ofer Feldman

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Assessing Cultural Influences on Political Leaders' Discourse



Ofer Feldman

1.1 Introduction

This book focuses on the effect of culture on the verbal communication used by public figures—politicians, political candidates, government officials and other decision-makers—in a variety of countries, within the broad context of political behavior and communication. Each of the ensuing chapters details specifically the question of *how* culture shapes (determines, at various times) the content, nature, and characteristics of the language political figures use to appeal directly, or through media channels, to their respective national public. These include addresses that public figures deliver in national or local parliaments, their statements during parliamentary debates, speeches during National Days, in election campaigns, and in political party conventions; their lectures in front of supporters, briefings during the course of press conferences, their replies during televised or radio interviews, and in the social media. Case studies in this volume detail empirical material gathered from a wide range of countries including the U.S., Germany, Spain, Israel, Poland, Philippines, Turkey, Greece, Australia, Brazil, Iraq, Egypt, Tunisia, Japan, and China. The sample from such a variety of societies allows comparison of the different structures and contents of the political rhetoric used from West to East.

Taken together, the following chapters focus on the question of the effect of culture on *what* public figures say and *when* they deliver specific content to a particular audience. The chapters in this volume follow the widely accepted notion that culture is intrinsic to both verbal and non-verbal communication, i.e., culture guides and affects communication and language, giving rise to words, influencing words' use, their pronunciation and tone, and providing context. Sapir (1921, 1985), among others (e.g., Hadley, 2001; Hinkel, 1999; Trudgill, 2000), noted that language, as a social behavior, can be seen as a way to describe and represent human experience

The original version of this chapter was revised: A minor grammatical error in the text has been corrected. The correction to this chapter is available at https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-3579-3_17

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and understand the world; that is, as a way to reflect underlying cultural patterns. Language, Sapir (1921, p. 207) observed, “does not exist apart from culture, that is, from the socially inherited assemblage of practices and beliefs that determines the texture of our lives.”

Communication, in turn, supports culture: it promotes social bonds and connections among those who share a common background, and causes change by relating common experiences. As such, different cultures allocate importance to different modes and patterns of communication (e.g., verbal, non-verbal, written, visual), accept different styles of public speaking (e.g., usage of particular words, ideas, metaphors, or taboos), and different type of appeals (direct or indirect) that politicians and aspired politicians use to persuade specific audiences (e.g., political party members, government officials, voters, supporters), under given circumstances (e.g., parliamentary debates, media interviews, election campaigns), all of which form and shape the political culture of that society.

1.2 The Concept of Culture

Two aspects are at the core of each of the following chapters. The first is *culture*. In this book the term “culture” is purposefully vague, and contributors didn’t confine themselves to any particular definition. In fact, contributors were given a free hand in choosing their cultural perspective, as well as their theoretical, conceptual, methodological approaches, and analytical methods, through which they examine political rhetoric in their respective case studies. Indeed, some chapters use “culture” in a very “wide” and amorphous way. All the contributors see culture, however, as the system that encompasses the norms, values, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and artefacts that are shared, by learning, accepting, and use in daily life by groups of people, many of whom are strangers to one another. As such, culture embraces many areas of society such as symbols, practices, rituals, value orientations and worldviews, nationality, race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, educational systems and socialization processes, the role of the individual or of the family, and employment. It is related to, affected, and shaped by the shared historical experiences of individuals and groups, social structure, family structure and relationships, geography/climate/topography, religion, economic system, immigration patterns, and majority/minority relations.

Several chapters show how distinct, past cultural aspects, such as historical circumstances or economic events, idiosyncratic to a specific society or country, influenced modern rhetoric in that country. This includes chapters that detail the cases of countries such as Poland (Chap. 7), Australia (Chap. 9), Japan (Chap. 12), and China (Chap. 13). The case of Germany (Chap. 6) is noteworthy because a series of dramatic historical events and radical change that took place in a relatively very short period of time during the twentieth century, determined the political culture of this country, and also affected politicians’ discourse. As such, examining cultural factors that affect German leaders’ (e.g., chancellors’) political discourse dictates

first of all understanding the influence of historical events such as the Nazi regime (including the art of propaganda used during Nazi Germany for 12 years, from 1933 to 1945), World War II, the Holocaust, the Allied Occupation, the Cold War and the separation of East and West Germany, the unification of the two Germanies, and the federal political system.

In a very short span of time, all these historical events have influenced, shaped, indeed determined, Germany's political culture and political discourse.¹ As a result, the political language of contemporary Germany has not only "changed" but "turned around" (Lang-Pfaff, 1998). In foreign-policy speeches on multilateral cooperation and on German integration in multilateral institutions, there was a gradual yet substantial shift in the discourse of Federal Government representatives in the period before (1988 ~ 1989) and after (1998 ~ 99) the unification of East and West Germany. Analyzing speeches of politicians before and after the unification, Baumann (2002) noted that in the latter period, statements referring to German self-interest and to Germany's influence in international politics have dramatically increased in number. Furthermore, the shift in discourse was reflected in the frequent use of new terms such as "national interest" (*nationales Interesse*) and "self-interest" (*Eigeninteresse*) that were almost absent in 1988/89 speeches, and in the reinterpretation of established terms such as "responsibility" (*Verantwortung*) after the unification. In the speeches from the 1980s, "responsibility" was mostly used to denote a German responsibility for overcoming the divisions within Europe or more generally for peace and freedom. This responsibility was usually linked to the legacy of Germany's history, or referred to growing German responsibility in international relations. A decade later, in the 1990s, the call for greater German responsibility usually meant a greater say in international relations, and being ready to use military means. "Assuming responsibility" has become a synonym of "exerting influence" or of "participating in military operations;" thus, its meaning has become pretty close to "using power," that is, to legitimize a substantially different foreign policy. Further discussion related to Germany in this context is offered in Chap. 6.

In contrast to chapters that emphasize the idiosyncratic characteristics of a given society or country, other chapters, including those that examine Egypt, Iraq, and Tunisia (Chap. 3), and Turkey (Chap. 4), demonstrate how more universal cultural tropes that relate to religion such as Islam (for example), are used today in somewhat culturally specific ways. Specifically, in the Arab world, leaders profusely use Islam in matters of symbolism, historical precedent, and vocabulary, in order to survive domestically and further their foreign policy externally (Israeli, 1998). Most often they quote verses or phrases from the *Qur'an*, the Islamic Sacred Book, in their political speeches. These verses are part of a sacred religious text viewed by Muslims as divine. To illustrate: during his presidency in Egypt, President Anwar Al-Sadat often employed a number of linguistic signs from the semantic field of religious discourse,

¹ Whether or not certain elements in the current political culture serve as the catalyst for German right-wing groups to copy Nazi discourse by using such terms as *Lügenpresse* (lying press; a term that was invented and used by the Nazis), is beyond the boundary of this volume and should be examined elsewhere. In this sense, it should be noted that culture affects not only elite political speech (e.g., chancellors), but also of political groups and even the discourse of "regular" citizens.

repeating the Lord's name, using popular common religious expressions such as *insha'allah* (God willing) and *bimashi'atillah* (following God's will), and referring to textual addressees as religious Muslims. Religion was an important argumentative device in Sadat's texts. He frequently attributed actions and consequences to God, presenting God as always being on "our side" supporting what "we" are doing against the enemy who is usually referred to as "unbelievers." In Sadat's rhetoric there is also a lot of interrelationship between the genre of political speeches and religious sermons: starting with *bismillah irahman irahim* (in the name of God most gracious, most merciful), using opening salutations such as "brothers and sisters" and "my sons and daughters," and concluding with verses from the *Qur'an*, and supplications. The title of *al-ra'ies al-mu'min* (the believing leader) was used synonymously with "President Sadat" by the Egyptian media (Abdul-Latif, 2011). Chapter 3 provides more examples on the effect of the *Qur'an* on leaders in Iraq, Tunisia, and Egypt.

Distinct from the above examples is the case of the U.S. (Chap. 15), where President Donald Trump was able to create a powerful and effective rhetoric by blending traditional American cultural elements with new-cultural aspects, including blatant aggression, hyperbolic lying on a large scale, and calls to violence. It illustrates how a political leader's discourse reflects traditional culture in some ways, but can use those elements to undermine the culture of which they were a part.

Another aspect worth-mentioning in this context is that some chapters, including those about Israel (Chaps. 2 and 10), Arab countries (Chap. 3), Japan (Chap. 12), and China (Chap. 13), suggest how old elements of culture shape modern political discourse, indicating the transformation of old tropes into quasi-modern language. But that doesn't mean new elements don't affect language; political discourse itself is a continually new element that reshapes culture on a daily basis. As detailed in the case of the U.S. (Chap. 15), Reality TV is a cultural innovation in America, but it is one that has propagated very fast, and the point that Trump blended Reality TV with the white supremacy that has deep roots in European culture (acquired, incidentally, from European settler culture) is a good example of how culture shapes political discourse through value and linguistic innovation.

Last, and related to the above observation, is the notion that all the chapters in the book run a spectrum: from use of ancient cultural tropes, including those in Israel (Chaps. 2 and 10), Arab countries (Chap. 3), Turkey (Chap. 4), Brazil (Chap. 5), Greece (Chap. 8), Japan (Chap. 12), and China (Chap. 13); use of more modern (the last 200 years) tropes, such as in Australia (Chap. 9) and Philippines (Chap. 11); use of relatively recent (past 70 years) tropes, such as in Israel (Chaps. 2 and 10), Germany (Chap. 6), Poland (Chap. 7), Spain (Chap. 14); and finally, the use of very recent tropes (the last few years), such as the U.S. case (Chap. 15).

1.3 The Discourse of Public Figures

The second aspect at the heart of each of the chapters is the *discourse of public figures*, mostly presidents, prime ministers, and members of the government. On the

one hand, contemporary politics is mediated politics. Politicians and candidates for political office communicate with both voters and with each other especially through the news media, mostly television, websites, and social media. Hence the importance of politicians' media skills. On the other hand, modern politics is also direct communication through campaign rallies, debates, and political party gatherings, where politicians and aspiring leaders convey their ideas, plans, and interpretations of political developments, directly to voters, supporters, the general public, as well as to their political party colleagues.

In Japan, for example, high-echelon national level politicians regularly give lectures to various organizations in and outside their district—even three or more lectures in different locations in the course of a single day. On average, they may give two or three lectures a week, amounting to at least 100 lectures a year. In addition, they speak within their party at meetings organized for various purposes, and deliver campaign speeches and official greetings, often on behalf of friendly colleagues or candidates (Feldman, 2004). Ultimately, in addition to their leadership qualities, negotiation skills, and ability to keep effective working relationships with colleagues and officials, decision-makers and candidates for political positions have to demonstrate that they possess sufficient rhetorical skills to be able to communicate effectively. Indeed, very often the public sees rhetoric as the most important feature of its political leaders, and evaluates them more by their words than by their deeds (Feldman, 2020).

Whether through the news media and social media—or in front of voters, supporters, the general public, and even the international arena—savvy political communicators make conscious decisions about the content, timing, and the tone (e.g., emotional) of their speeches, appeals, inaugural addresses, U.N. declarations, and Facebook pages (Gayoso, 2020; Joathan & Marques, 2020; Johnson, 2020; Stein Teer, 2020; Tanke, 2019). They often focus their discourse on the issues that make them feel most comfortable and competent, and to avoid issues which they are unfamiliar with or that might adversely affect their political agenda or public image. Regardless of whether they face colleagues, supporters, or an interviewer on a televised program, politicians favor issues in which they have special interest, knowledge, commitment, or engagement, and that are likely to lead to success (Feldman & Kinoshita, 2019).

1.3.1 Informing the Public

When addressing their audience, public figures aim to inform, entertain and to persuade regarding political events and processes, the political agenda, public policy, and their positions and views.

First, they tell voters how they and other decision-makers view the significance of political issues, explain their objectives and motives vis-à-vis public opinion, and justify their activities and decisions in the public domain. They inform, explain, and interpret political developments and their objectives within it by using explicit

and direct appeals, often summarizing their promises or policies into short slogans or buzzwords. Examples include such catchphrases or words as “we will make America great again” of U.S. President Trump; “harness all our willpower,” “global changes,” and “open to dialogue,” of Russian President Vladimir Putin (Gayoso, 2020); “Let our ‘moments’ [one of the functions of WeChat, which is the most popular social application in China] grow bigger and bigger,” and “We are all dream catchers” (Wang, 2020) or “putting people first,” “serving the people,” and “our great nation” of China President Xi Jinping (Chap. 13); and “mending the state,” “opportunities for Poland,” “welfare and skillful management,” and others of Polish prime ministers (Chap. 7 in this book).

Political orators repeatedly fill their speeches with easily memorized and easily expressed clichés, or just recalling their own political party’s line. They regularly use implicit appeals in a form of figurative language, varying in content and intensity or strength. Figurative language, including metaphors, similes, and personification, referring to such attributes as art, disease, family, health, and war, are important component of politics that reflects and creates meaning for the audience (Feldman, 2004, pp. 111–151). Different cultures tend to use different metaphors; in Israel (Chap. 2), metaphors have more historical connotations, referring to “the long journey on the world stage of history over four thousand years among most of the world’s nations...our people continually encountered loathing and hatred,” and “destruction of the Third Temple.” Likewise, in Poland (Chap. 7) leaders rely on Polish history and mythology as sources of metaphors, referring to their country as “a building” or “common home,” and “an organism whose health and well-being need supporting.” In Germany (Chap. 6), chancellors used different metaphors to address a particular issue or the nature of the political process and mood that existed at a given time. They used such concepts as “steps” to take, to “progress” along a “road,” and to consider diverse “sides” with different “views”; they appealed for the need for “balance,” referring to “multiple levels” of policymaking, including “a long and stony road;” they underlined that “every step in a situation like this needs to be carefully considered,” and labelled the government’s policy as a “policy of balance.” In China (Chap. 13), President Xi declared, metaphorically speaking, his intention to conduct “the hard battle,” and to “laying a more solid foundation” to “win the battle” in order to eliminate poverty in his country (more examples of Xi’s use of figurative language can be found in Wang, 2020). Culture, and specifically political culture, determine which metaphors are acceptable or taboo, strong or weak. In turn, those metaphors themselves help mold other aspects of the culture and political culture.

1.3.2 Entertaining Audiences

In addition to informing their listeners or viewers, politicians and political candidates entertain their audiences. They do it by revealing piquant, at times even provocative or unexpected information, detailing the stories behind the stories of their daily activities and contacts with colleagues and government officials. Skilled public speakers

become likeable and trustable as they mix their rhetoric with funny episodes and experiences, even jokes. American Presidents as John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan used humor while campaigning, to defuse stressful situations and to control the immediate threatening situation. By telling jokes, Kennedy for example was able to dismiss as unimportant the accusations against him, re-establishing himself as a worthy leader among the media and the public (Krasner, 2019). In the Philippines (Chap. 11), President Rodrigo Duterte entertains his audience while intensifying, even more than previous presidents, toxic masculinity in his presidential discourse through “rape jokes,” jokes about his female cabinet members as potential sexual partners, and Filipina as tourist attractions. This seems to be acceptable and even appreciated by Filipinos as Duterte has consistently enjoyed high ratings of support. In Japan too (Chap. 12), politicians and candidates tell humoristic episodes and jokes (but not of the sexual nature as Duterte) to show familiarity with their audience and to attract voters’ attention and support (Feldman, 2004; Feldman & Bull, 2012). Yet, as detailed in Chap. 12, sharing what political orators perceive as jokes can at times backfire and invite criticism because it is regarded as abusive and insulting language toward a particular segment of society. Eventually, in the case of Japan, such politicians have to apologize for their gaffes.

1.3.3 *Persuading the Audience*

Lastly, political communicators try to *persuade their audience* to carry an idea forward in order to achieve a particular goal; attempt to shape voters’ attitudes toward themselves, their opponents, political institutions and parties, the political process, and also to affect public debate. Politicians, most notably populist leaders, including Trump in the U.S., Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, and Beppe Grillo in Italy, invite the audience to follow and support them as their champion against a corrupt system and corrupt elite that includes a corrupt media (Cremonesi, 2019; Hameleers, 2019; Krasner, 2020).

This volume, in addition to Trump, depicts five populist leaders who use their language to persuade viewers and listeners to endorse and follow their policies and agendas: (1) President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s of Turkey (Chap. 4), who actively employs religious idioms, hadiths and references to the *Our’an*, as well addressing principles of democracy and secularism along emotional requests for loyalty; (2) President Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil (Chap. 5), who emphasizes religious symbols, Christian appeals, messianic promises of salvation, order, and struggle against persecution, as he builds his sacred and mythic image of a Messiah that leads the people in this moral crusade against secular values threatening religious and conservative hegemony; (3) Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel (Chap. 10), whose discourse signifies the central socio-cultural building blocks of what Israel is about, one in which Jewish religion, heritage and history have a huge impact on contemporary Israel’s activities, a narration that is a mixture of past and present, religion and nationalism, dreams and reality, of Israel being part of the world and trusted by

others but simultaneously also suspicious of others, isolated, and standing alone; (4) President Duterte of the Philippines (Chap. 11), who recontextualizes and extends an enduring machismo discourse of the country leaders depicting men as the primary source of strength, the arbiter of good behavior in society, and the presidency as the domain of men, i.e., inherently masculine, and regards women as servants of men, political ornaments; and finally, (5) Pablo Iglesias, the Vice-Prime Minister of Spain (Chap. 14), who uses concepts and ideas of well-known Spanish rap groups and reemploys relevant, sometimes direct quotations from influential Spanish poets to reconnect his discourse with the values and feelings of the long Spanish Republican tradition.

Notably, although political speech is essentially monologic in form, it can also be understood as an interactive event in which political orators and their audiences coordinate their activities in the course of a speech. The construction of the speech itself, including the usage of formulaic rhetorical devices, may be used to invite audience displays of approval (e.g., by clapping, cheering, laughing) or disapproval (e.g., by booing, jeering, heckling), by indicating when and where it is appropriate; as a result, the audience's reactions are highly synchronized. Displays of collective approval or disapproval can be seen as a manifest expression of group solidarity connecting, on the horizontal level, those audience members who display the same activity and, on the vertical level, linking the speaker to the latter (Bull & Feldman, 2011; Feldman & Bull, 2012).

1.4 The Contributions

While examining public figures' discourse in both their public speaking and media appearances, the contributors to this volume agree on the basic premise that like any other social and political behavior and attitude, discourse is also affected by a wide range of components that exists in the immediate environment as well as individuals' personality traits. Yet, we all agree that culture matters and that cultural elements have direct effect on political orators' discourse in a variety of situations in different countries.

To examine and assess the effect of culture on political discourse, this book is divided into four parts, each of the first three focusing on different dimensions of cultural factors and the last part consists the conclusions of the book. The first part is entitled *Religion*. It includes chapters analyzing Judaism, Islam, and Christianity and their linkage with political language.

In Chap. 2, "Deep Culture: The Hebrew Bible and Israeli Political Speech," Sam Lehman-Wilzig examines how the Hebrew Bible (*Torah*), the foundation of the Jewish/Hebrew culture, continues to shape the current Zionist/Israeli political oratory even after more than 3,000 years. Lehman-Wilzig specifies a few main themes that constitute Jewish historic-cultural antecedents, and proceeds with a qualitative analysis highlighting certain tropes and expressions in light of ageless Jewish culture.

This includes quotes over the last 120 years from leading early Zionist and contemporary Israeli politicians to demonstrate how Israeli political speech continues to be influenced by the “deep culture” of the Jews’ most revered religio-national source from a long time ago. Lehman-Wilzig concludes the chapter with reflections on the politico-oratorical expression of these cultural influences in the Israeli context.

In Chap. 3, “Qur’anifying Public Political Discourse: Islamic Culture and Religious Rhetoric in Arabic Public Speaking,” Ali Badeen Mohammed Al-Rikaby, Thulfiqar Hussein Altahmazi, and Debbita Ai Lin Tan explore the extent to which Islamic values representing the core of Arab culture, and Qur’anic rhetoric, influence political discourse in the Arab world. They look at the influence of Qur’anic themes, stylistic techniques and discursive practices on public speaking of six heads of states in three Arab countries—Egypt, Iraq and Tunisia—during times of crisis across pre- and post-Arab Spring eras. Employing both analytical and stylistic frameworks to explain how public speaking in the Arab world is heavily influenced by Qur’anic elements, the authors identify remarkable similarities between the Qur’anic text and the political speeches analyzed.

In Chap. 4, “The Role of Culture in Turkish Political Discourse: President Erdoğan and the Justice and Development Party,” Ayşe Deniz Ünan Gökten pays special attention to how cultural elements influence President Erdoğan’s public speeches, as well as the discourse of the Justice and Development Party in Turkey. She identifies two diverse cultural roots that influence President Erdoğan’s public speeches. First, Sunni-Islamic sub-culture that shapes political Islam, i.e., for example, as expressed ideologically through the longing for power, and an urge to make regulations and foster social change based on Islamic principles. Second, that reflects more mainstream cultural themes and values related to both Islam and secularism, including patriarchy, loyalty, religiosity, democracy, and autonomy. On the public level, individuals perceive themselves living under such principles as democracy and secularism, thus influencing the leaders of the Justice and Development Party to develop a discourse embracing such mainstream cultural values in order to gain and maintain political power in Turkey.

In Chap. 5, “The Symbolic Construction of a Messiah: Jair Bolsonaro’s Public, Christian Discourse,” Eduardo Ryô Tamaki, Ricardo Fabrino Mendonça, and Matheus Gomes Mendonça Ferreira investigate the religious dimension of political discourse in contemporary Brazil. They indicate that Christianity is a central element of Brazilian culture, shaping practice, behavior, and the discourse of political candidates and representatives. Focusing in particular on the current Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, Tamaki and his colleagues reveal that his forms of expression in his weekly live appearances on YouTube are deeply and profusely marked by religious elements, including biblical references and religious symbols. Bolsonaro’s discourse touches on messianic promises of salvation, order and struggle against persecution, indicating the acceptance of majoritarian beliefs against constitutional secularism.

The second part of the volume, *History, Economy, Climate/Geography, and Majority/Minority Relations* gives particular consideration to the effect of historical experiences, economic crises, climate and geographical factors on the discourse of political leaders.

In Chap. 6, “Rationality and Moderation: German Chancellors’ Post-War Rhetoric,” Melani Schröter’s contribution draws attention to the parliamentary speeches and televised addresses of four post-WWII German chancellors in different times – Konrad Adenauer (the 1950s), Willy Brandt (the 1970s), Helmut Kohl (the 1990s), and Angela Merkel (the 2010s) to detail how culture affects their rhetoric. Schröter notes that whereas in some countries historical experiences that affect political culture mean maintaining traditions while adapting to new situations and conditions, in Germany political culture was shaped by discontinuity, starting from the nineteenth century and ending in German unification in 1990 with the establishment of 16 federal states. Rationality and moderation now appear as key elements of leading German politicians’ rhetoric. Through a qualitative, rhetorical, discourse analysis Schröter shows the effect over time of historical events following the devastating Nazi dictatorship, the division into two German states between 1949 and 1990, the unification following the collapse of the Berlin wall, and the processes such as secularization and individualism on German leaders’ rhetoric, have led to rationality and moderation becoming the applicable dominant norms of German political culture. At the same time, Schröter refers to the appearance of new groups and forces, including right-wing movements that promote an ethnically homogeneous population, campaigning against Muslim immigrants, and trying to stop the progress of gender diversity, re-evaluate post-war German history, and roll back the memorialization of the Holocaust—all threatening to undermine the stability of post-war German political culture.

In Chap. 7, “Talking Politics: Historical and Cultural Transformations and their Influence on Polish Political Rhetoric,” Katarzyna Molek-Kozakowska and Agnieszka Kampka elaborate on the effects of such factors as turbulent history, economic instability, national heritage, and recent social changes, on the content, the style and the rhetorical devices employed by selected presidents and prime ministers in Poland during, for example, their inaugurals and parliamentary debates, and populist party propaganda, since 2004 when Poland’s political system stabilized after the transformation from a communist to a democratic state. Their detailed qualitative study offers an interesting perspective on the rhetorical projection of cultural identity (Polishness, the Nation) through metaphors, tropes and populist, false dichotomies.

In Chap. 8, “A Tale of Two Prime Ministers: The Influence of Greek Culture in Post-Crisis Political Speech,” Christos Kostopoulos’s contribution examines how the political speeches of Greece’s two leaders—the current Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and the leader of the major conservative and liberal right-wing party of Greece, and previous Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, the leader of a coalition of radical left parties—have been impacted by cultural factors. Analyzing the discourse of these leaders from opposing political positions reveals that both used a number of similar cultural devices, especially those referring to Greece’s ancient past and revolutionary struggle, but at the same time these are connected to different values based on the political delineation of each leader. Through a qualitative frame analysis of public speeches given by the two leaders in the last five years, Kostopoulos provides the main cultural frames employed by the leaders, the cultural devices used in these

frames, and explains how these frames fit in the overall context of Greek political culture.

In Chap. 9, “Rhetoric, Culture, and Climate Wars: A Discursive Analysis of Australian Political Leaders’ Responses to the Black Summer Bushfire Crisis,” Nicholas Bromfield, Alexander Page and Kurt Sengul lay particular emphasis on the discourse of four Australian political party representatives, including the prime minister and the opposition leader, as they addressed the ecological and existential crisis involving the Black Summer Bushfires of 2019–2020. Using qualitative critical discourse analysis of addresses to the media and the federal parliament, Bromfield, Page and Sengul reveal how each leader’s rhetoric interacted with, and wove together, their discursive climate policy positions, while adopting Australian cultural signs, symbols, and practices relative to new circumstances. As each leader varied in expressing cultural tropes, the discussion points out how culture can be negotiated to align with partisan political agendas, even in moments of unprecedented climate destruction.

In Chap. 10, “Core Socio-Cultural Building Blocks Influencing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s Speeches to the U.N. General Assembly,” Yuval Benziman probes the extent to which such fundamental, socio-cultural building blocks as Jewish history, heritage and religion, the feeling of being an isolated minority, but also the ability to overcome all obstacles and prevail against all odds, affect Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addresses to the United Nations General Assembly over the past decade. Benziman notes that by using elements related to socio-cultural building blocks, the prime minister presented Israel as a country that sees itself in constant danger and suspicious of all others, a country that tells itself a story in which it wants peace but confronts antisemitism, a country that has a history of standing alone and overcoming huge obstacles and therefore believes it can make “the impossible possible.”

The third part in this volume, *Social Structure, Values, Popular and New-Culture Elements*, consists of five chapters.

In Chap. 11, “The President as Macho: Machismo, Misogyny, and the Language of Toxic Masculinity in Philippine Presidential Discourse,” Gene Segarra Navera examines the language style of President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippine, along with selected speeches or utterances by his predecessors, particularly those that touch on women’s role in society and women’s issues at large, as affected by such socio-cultural concepts as machismo, bossism, militarism, and strongmen. Relying on selected examples from Duterte’s speeches in which he regards women as objects of male lust and pleasure, where women are reduced to their faces or body parts that attract the male gaze, and primarily meant to serve men, Navera concludes that Duterte’s sexist, strongly prejudiced, anti-women rhetorical style should be seen not as a unique feature of the current president’s individual speech, but as an extension and recontextualization of macho rhetoric that had already been developed and perpetuated through the rhetorical history of the Philippine presidency, sustaining machismo through the language of toxic masculinity.

In Chap. 12, “Decoding Japanese Politicians’ Rhetoric: Socio-Cultural Features of Public Speaking,” Ofer Feldman is concerned with the dichotomous nature of

the rhetoric used by Japanese political leaders, reflecting the different attitudes of a speaker conversing on a particular issue and in a given social circumstance. Peculiar sets of historical and cultural antecedents and norms, developed for centuries in Japan, determine that unlike Western societies, Japan does not have a tradition of viewing eloquence as a virtue. Rather, the society as a whole favors indirect speech patterns that use ambiguous expressions and allow the speaker to avoid taking responsibility. Eventually, politicians and government officials are inclined as well to talk vaguely and avoid disclosing their true thoughts and feelings in public. Real feelings and opinions about politics and personnel are not supposed to intrude on the “front” side of politics, where things must be kept calm and controlled. Adhering to this rule, Japanese politicians create a political “equilibrium” in the public sphere through informal political honesty.

In Chap. 13, “Culture and Politics in Contemporary China: A Cultural-Rhetorical Analysis of President Xi Jinping’s Three Presidential Speeches in 2019,” Xing Lu analyses three speeches delivered by China’s President Xi Jinping. Lu draws the attention on how the classical and modern cultural and political elements have been adopted by Xi to appeal and boost the Chinese people’s self-confidence and build the nation’s trust in him and his party’s leadership. This study is of interest as Xi’s appeals took place at a critical season when China was increasingly perceived as an economic, technological, and military threat to the Western world and its neighboring countries. Lu suggests that even without explicitly mentioning the names and direct quotations from Confucius, Mencius, and Mao Zedong, Xi’s speeches have included Confucian values of putting people first as well as Mao’s rhetoric of nationalism characterized by victimization, nationalism, and the promise of a better life. The analysis of Xi’s speeches reveals a close link between culture and politics, demonstrating the power of political language to create identification, and the power of culture as premise for political persuasion.

In Chap. 14, “Popular Culture in the Service of Populist Politics in Spain: Pablo Iglesias’ Parliamentary Speech as a Leader of the Podemos Party,” Francisco José Sánchez-García focuses on Pablo Iglesias, the leader of the political party *Podemos*, and his speeches in the lower house of the Spain’s legislature, from 2016 through 2020. Analyzing the lexicon, metaphors, and conceptual frames Iglesias used in a selection of parliamentary presentations, Sánchez-García identified the influence of popular culture rhetoric (e.g., music, poetry, religion, cinema, and TV series) on Iglesias’ rhetoric, and a progressive transition from initial antagonism to a more pragmatic agonism from Iglesias’ arrival at the political scene in 2016 until his entry into the government as vice-prime minister in 2020.

In Chap. 15, “Donald Trump: Dividing America through New-Culture Speech,” Michael Alan Krasner focuses in particular on the way Donald Trump developed a powerful and effective political rhetoric that blended traditional American culture, e.g., individualism, materialism, and meritocracy, with new-culture elements drawn from Reality TV shows, e.g., blatant aggression (including bullying, especially of women), voluble, hyperbolic lying, and the call to violence. Krasner observes that this new cultural arrangement undermined democratic norms and nurtured autocratic tendencies. Eventually Trump, as president, took these elements to their extreme and

produced rhetoric that incited the violent storming of the United States Capitol in an attempt to overturn the 2020 election results, a development in a series of rhetorical events that might foretell the end of America's deeply fragile, social and political equality.

The fourth and final part of the book, *Cultural Convergence and Discourse Divergence*, consists of one chapter entitled "Commentary: Choice and Innovation in the Interaction of Political Discourse with Culture." In Chap. 16, Richard Anderson ties together the volume and examines two topics that are at the center of the chapters: the way contributors conceptualized the main dimensions of culture, and the commonality or diversity in the contributors' perceptions of how culture affects political discourse in different parts of the world. In its distinguished concluding style and with a perceptive, critical eye, Anderson analyzes the ways of cultural innovation in political discourse. He wraps up his analysis in a socio-politico-historical-linguistic package that must be taken into account in any future scholarly research examining the nexus between culture and political discourse in contemporary society.

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Part I
Religion

Chapter 2

Deep Culture: The Hebrew Bible and Israeli Political Speech



Sam Lehman-Wilzig

Every culture at any given specific historical period will be characterized by a limited repertoire of particularly central and salient themes... symbolically expressed through myth...

(Aronoff, 1989, p. xiii)

2.1 Introduction

As the chapters in this book attest, there are numerous aspects of culture in general, and political culture specifically, influencing political speech and rhetoric in any given nation and society. The present chapter will add to this list but with an emphasis on the “long-term.” Being a Jewish State, Israel has been heavily influenced by Jewish history—theological, social, political, and otherwise—over the past 3000 years (at least), given that traditional Jews believe that the Hebrew Bible was presented to Moses around 3200 years ago, and it is that biblical narrative that has shaped the general parameters of public and private behavior/speech for Jews ever since.¹ In short, the Jewish tradition has created a recognizable interface between culture and language, i.e., a distinct “linguaculture” (Risager, 2019).²

¹ Of course, this doesn’t deny the very large influence of the diaspora countries/empires where Jews lived over this huge historical span. Nevertheless, Judaism and the Jews in general had great facility (and experience) in adapting certain Gentile norms and behavioral patterns to Jewish culture. Many such examples are well known, e.g., the Passover eve “seder” is basically an adapted Greek Symposium with all the trappings: drinking cups of wine; reclining while eating; the give and take of storytelling and discussion, etc.

² There are two main bases of culture, as Risager (2006, p. 5) notes: “linguistically formed culture and non-linguistically formed culture.”

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Of course, Jewish culture has not remained stagnant; it has obviously undergone change in certain respects. From a political culture standpoint, one can point especially to the significant difference between the biblical “mindset” of warlike Israel over its first 1000+ years and the Jews’ more “passive/defensive” mentality in the past 2000 years of diaspora life. Yet even here a certain continuity (or renewal) can be perceived: in their writings, the early Zionists almost exclusively harked back to biblical figures and heroics; indeed, they considered Zionism to be the “negation of the Diaspora.” David Ben-Gurion (Israel’s “founding father” and first prime minister, 1948–1954; 1955–1963) stated: “Our father Abraham, his son and grandson; Moses and Aharon; King David and his progeny; the prophets of Israel, all that happened to them and everything they said—are closer to us than the words of [the medieval commentators] Rav Ashi, Alfasi, Maimonides...” (Shapira, 1997, p. 661). Thus, one can occasionally ascertain internal “contradictions” within Israeli political culture and speech—sometimes based on the Bible and on other occasions clearly influenced by the Diaspora experience. As former Israeli President Ezer Weizman opined: “The one thing that changes very radically in Israel is the past” (Aronoff, 1989, p. xvi).

This chapter commences with a survey of the major cultural influences on Jewish psychology and behavior. Judaism is a rare religion in that it is virtually impossible to separate ethnos/nationality from theology/religious practice. In the Jewish tradition, the Torah—loosely defined as the Book of Laws—was “given” at the exact same time that the Children of Israel became a unified nation during their desert sojourn after centuries of slavery in Egypt. Thus, simply put, Judaism has something to say (command) about every aspect of Jewish life, whether on the micro-personal plane or the macro-societal level.

This is true even when—as is the case in modern Israel—the majority of its citizenry are not “religious”, although around half of the country’s Jewish population (itself constituting 80% of all Israeli citizens) consider themselves to be “traditional” at the least. There are three/four reasons for this cultural continuity. First, as noted at the outset, culture can maintain its integrity over long periods of time, especially if connected to ethnicity and religion. Second, most Israelis today—even the secular sector—are but one or two generations removed from grand/parents who were traditional in their belief and religious practice. For instance, Shimon Peres (Prime Minister 1977; 1984–1986; 1995–1996) was a completely secular person. Yet, in his swearing-in speech as President of Israel (July 15, 2007) he noted: “My grandfather... taught me the daily Talmud page”³ (Shapira, 2008, p. 293). Third and fourth, the educational system teaches everyone the basics of Judaism and Jewish history (however “distorted”), and all the official holidays are either based on the Jewish religious calendar or “secular” (recent Israeli) commemorations that include heavy Jewish symbols (e.g., menorah) and historical associations (e.g., Holocaust Remembrance Day).

After presenting a few caveats and several preliminary points, the chapter will survey a few main themes that constitute Jewish historic-cultural antecedents, each accompanied by Israeli politicians’ speech quotations that exemplify those aspects

³ I have translated into English all the Hebrew texts quoted in this article.

of Jewish history and culture. This will not be a systematic, quantitative study, but rather a qualitative analysis highlighting certain tropes and expressions in light of ageless Jewish culture. The chapter's last section will then offer some conclusions regarding the politico-oratorical expression of these cultural influences in the Israeli context.

2.1.1 *What Is Not Included in This Study*

There are several elements that this chapter will not analyze. First, it will not survey or relate to political speech of Israel's Arab citizens. These include Moslem, Christian, Druze and Circassian Israelis—all of whom who have completely different historical pasts and respective cultures. They are deserving of separate treatment, but that is beyond this chapter's purview. (For a brief survey of Moslems, Christians, and Druze, in light of political rhetoric, see Krebs & Jackson, 2007, pp. 48–55).

Second, the focus will be on the verbal/textual language of Israeli political speech, and not aspects of “delivery” such as non-verbal (body) language, intonation, pauses, and the like. Of course, these are very important in their own right (Freeley & Steinberg, 2009, pp. 313–324), and also can be influenced by cultural speech patterns (e.g., hand movement and signing can be quite different between cultures), but that would make this study overly unwieldy. It does bear mentioning that Israeli speech in general is characterized by “[t]he absence of a sense of degree, of gradation. The absence of sub-tones... The listener is habituated to ear-splitting decibels and the reader to eye-dazzling colors” (Shavit, 2001).

Third, with a few exceptions, this study deals with Israeli political speech directed at the *domestic* audience.⁴ One might think that if the focus is on political culture's influence it should make no difference what language is used⁵ or who constitutes the audience. However, this is not true because each language has its own “sub-texts” and associations that do not necessarily work in another language; thus, the native speaker might alter speech, i.e., consciously eliminate culturally specific texts (especially when the speech is prepared ahead of time).

⁴ Three exceptions will be offered below, but in these cases one can argue that from these Israeli leaders' standpoint, the Israeli *home* front was their real target audience: PM Benjamin Netanyahu's speech at the U.N.; President Ezer Weizman's Bundestag speech; PM Ehud Olmert's address to the U.S. Congress.

⁵ Many Israeli politicians intersperse their speech with occasional Arabic words such as *inshallah* (“God willing”), similar to the absorption of English (British Mandate and contemporary American influence), and also the occasional Russian word (one million immigrants from the former Soviet Union). This could be considered linguistic “cultural influence”, but at this point it is still a very minor phenomenon. Nevertheless, just as foreign words have infiltrated Hebrew through the ages (e.g., from Persian, Aramaic, and especially German-Yiddish), so too one can expect linguistic Arabic influence to increase slowly but gradually in the future, given that Arabs constitute 20% of Israel's population, and also that a sizable proportion of Israeli Jewish families immigrated from Arab or Moslem countries in the 1940s and 1950s, their mother tongue being Arabic.

Fourth, to maintain clear focus, the examples provided will concentrate on rhetoric and not dialogue, i.e., only prepared speeches and not media interviews or types of debate.

Fifth and finally, there obviously are other—more “modern”—cultural precursors of Israeli speech that will not be dealt with here but certainly call for future research. Three examples will suffice. First, early Zionism’s main social philosophy (and institutional practice, e.g., kibbutz) was Socialism and even Marxist-Communism, with strong political residues at least until the late 1970s when the right-wing Likud took the reins of power; in reaction, the formerly dominant Labor Party began moving in an ideologically Social Democratic direction.⁶

A second historical-cultural thread from the modern period involved “Enlightenment pacifism,” à la Spinoza, Mendelsohn, and Buber—as a counterpoint to Zionism’s aggressive nationalism of Leon Pinsker and Theodore Herzl.⁷ A few politicians’ quotes will be offered below along these lines, within the context of the pursuit of peace.

A third cultural factor—real-world and ideological—is “ingathering of exiles”, i.e., the Zionist homeland/state as the answer to the persecution of world Jewry. The newly established State of Israel doubled its population from 1948–1952, and today immigrants constitute about one-third of Israel’s Jewish population and another third their children (Semyonov & Gorodzeisky, 2012, p. 3). Such a melting pot philosophy (or mosaic reality) was bound to have a profound influence on the country’s culture and concomitant political speech⁸; here too, a couple of relevant quotes within other categories will be offered below.

In short, the present study does *not claim* that the millennia-old, biblical tradition is the *only* cultural factor influencing modern Israeli political speech; rather, it uses biblical quotations in modern, Israeli political speech to show that cultural influence can extend over an extremely long historical time period.

⁶ Socialism was (perhaps heavily) influenced by biblical injunctions against worker exploitation. Indeed, despite his father’s conversion to Christianity, Karl Marx was descended from a long line of major rabbis on both his parents’ side. Moreover, it is hardly a coincidence that so many early and later Socialists were Jewish: Moses Hess, Rosa Luxembourg, Eduard Bernstein, Léon Blum, Leon Trotsky, Grigory Zinoviev, Bruno Kreisky, and so on.

⁷ Here too one can discern distinct Jewish antecedents of both streams of thought: the former a function of the Jewish People’s pacifist ethos due to their political weakness in Diaspora over many centuries; the latter (Zionism), harking back to the biblical period of national independence and sovereignty.

⁸ This does have one source in the Bible: the sixth century BCE Babylonian exile and later return to the Land of Israel. Centuries later, the Jews wandered from country to country through the long Diaspora era, but other than initiatives by individuals there was no systematic, collective attempt to return to the homeland—until modern Zionism.