

“TRAUMATIC MYTHS” IN JEWISH AND ISRAELI NATIONAL/ NATIONALISTIC DISCOURSE

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Summary

“Political myth”, despite the certain vagueness and ambiguity of the concept, is one of sufficiently popular areas of political research. According to common opinion, among “political myths” a special role is played by the so-called historical myths, national/nationalist myths, and finally traumatic myths, the role of which is poorly researched. So, the relevance of the research is due primarily to the fact that the role of “traumatic myths” in political discourse, and in particular in national/nationalist discourse, is an understudied topic.

Although a role of some “traumatic myths” in Jewish and Israeli national/nationalist discourse (for example, the Masada myth and the “Shoah” or “Holocaust”) has been relatively well-studied, in our opinion, most of these researches lack the attachment to general theoretical framework. So, the purpose of the study is to reveal the role of “traumatic myths” in Jewish and Israeli national/nationalistic discourse.

The research is based on systemic, interdisciplinary and discursive approaches. Also were applied general scientific methods: induction and deduction, analysis and synthesis, comparison and analogy, generalization and abstraction, as well as special scientific methods, including descriptive and problem-chronological methods, methods of deconstruction and reconstruction, etc.

Key words: “historical myth”, “national myth”, “political myth”, “memory politics”, identity, ideology.

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1. Introduction

According to the Italian researcher Ch. Bottici, through such speech constructions as the “myth of prosperity” and the “myth of progress”, common language hints at the falsity of “myths”, as if words are always aimed to describe facts or make claims to truth, but, in reality, this is not true (Bottici, 2011: 32–33).

The American researcher, one of the founders of the ethnosymbolic approach in the study of “nation” and “nationalism” J. A. Armstrong notes, that the definition of speech constructions as “mythical” does not necessarily mean their historical falsehood or theological unwarrantedness. The question of truthfulness is not important for mythical structures at all (Armstrong, 1982: 8–9).

According to the British political scientist Ch. Flood, for a story to function as a “myth,” it really doesn’t matter an objective truthfulness of the story, but the fact that a certain social group believes in it. A “myth” or its parts and details can be true, false, or both at once (Flood, 1996).

The Egyptian researcher R. Magdy notes, that myth does not speak about everyday life, but about existential issues in human’s life. Myth claims that its story is inspired by the

revelation of the Absolute, therefore it can be considered neither true, nor false. Myth's ability to judge give human existence sense and moral guidelines. Myth cannot be tested for truth, because myth itself forms these criteria (*Magdy, 2020: 157*).

In this sense, says the German researcher A. Assmann, "myth" is defined as a historical basis that cannot be refuted by scientific research. Mythologized history exists in social reality to the extent that the past and the present get into each other in a certain place and in a certain action. This is not about the distortion of some "historical fact" or "falsification of history", but about some kind of cultural construction that significantly affects the present and the future. Therefore, the most important thing in collective identification is not the ontological status, but the potential for social influence of historical experience, which is transmitted and enriched by new interpretations. The questions of the influence, interpretation and reproduction of history within the framework of the narrative, which forms social identity, are becoming increasingly important (*Assmann, 2006: 36–43*).

According to Ch. Bottici, "the recent rise of identity politics and the revival of nationalism have rendered manifest that myths are an important component of politics, even in contemporary modern societies" (*Bottici, 2011: 32*).

K. Flood notes, that "modern political myth", at least functionally (primarily in issues of distribution of power), as well as in form and content, is similar to "sacred myth". "Modern political myths", as well as "sacred myths", are ideologically marked stories about the past, present and predicted future. They tell about the activities of heroes, the origins and foundations of society, its revival and renewal, and, at the same time, they carry out eschatological prophecies. And although "modern political myths" in secular societies, as a rule, don't have a sacred status, at least a certain social group must believe in it, no matter how large and composed this group is. Like "sacred myths", "modern political myths" must have sufficient authority and paradigmatic value as a model of reality in believers eyes. "Modern political myths", especially those that have been formed over a long period of time, have many variations that more or less coincide in a significant number of aspects. We are talking about "political myth" when there are different stories about approximately the same events, with approximately the same actors, giving these events approximately the same interpretations and circulating in the same social group. Moreover, "modern political myths", as well as "sacred myths", have different forms, they could be told in different ways and could be expressed in different visual genres (painting, poster, monument, etc.), as well as in different collective ceremonies, rituals, memorable dates and places on the map, etc. (*Flood, 1996*).

A special form of "modern political myths" is "historical myths", which play an important role in nation-building process, creating a powerful illusion of involvement, even if the real or potential community is passive. At the same time, among "historical myths" an extremely important role is played by the so-called traumatic myths, which are usually used in constructing the national identity.

In 1882 at the Sorbonne University, in his famous lecture on the national question, the outstanding French philosopher, semitologist and historian of religion E. Renan noted, that it is much more important for a "nation" to share same glory and same sorrows in the past, to carry out the same program in the future, to suffer together, to rejoice, to hope – all that is more productive than common customs warehouses and borders, despite possible differences of race and language (*Renan, 1996: 52–53*). Moreover, according to E. Renan, "suffering in common unifies more than joy does. Where national memories are concerned, griefs are of more value than triumphs, for they impose duties, and require a common effort. A nation is therefore a

large-scale solidarity, constituted by the feeling of the sacrifices that one has made in the past and of those that one is prepared to make in the future” (*Renan, 1996: 53*).

The importance of shared “traumatic myths”, consciously or unconsciously, is also recognized by modern politicians. In particular, on February 14, 2026, at the Munich Security Conference, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio noted that: “For the United States and Europe, we belong together. ... We are bound to one another by the deepest bonds that nations could share, forged by centuries of shared history, Christian faith, culture, heritage, language, ancestry, and the sacrifices our forefathers made together for the common civilization to which we have fallen heir” (*Transcript: Marco Rubio, 2026*).

The awareness of the importance of “traumatic myths”, in our opinion, also is the basis of the versions of Jewish and Israeli identity that dominate today. The British scholar, one of the founders of the ethnosymbolic approach in the study of “nation” and “nationalism” E. Smith notes, that “history as martyrology became a common mode of presentation of the Jewish experience”, both in religious and national/nationalist discourses (*Smith, 1999: 217*). Every alarm (whether real or imagined) of Jewish persecution destroyed the initial optimism with which Jews, and primarily Jewish “enlighteners” (“maskilim”), greeted the assimilation (*Smith, 1999: 217*).

2. Hebrew Bible and Zionist Mythology

E. Smith notes, that the path of building the moral foundations and “maps” of the nation (its history, destiny and place among other nations) usually lies through the use of ethnic history, which could be set forth in the sacred books of the people. For “national revival” moral examples from an ethnic and at the same time mythical past are needed, capable to inspire and motivate the people. The “return” to the past is possible through the series of myths: of origin and birth, of liberation and migration, of golden age and its heroes, of sages and, perhaps, the chosen people, which had to wake up after a long sleep, decline and/or exile (*Smith, 1991: 62–70*). All this components, according to E. Smith, could be found and were found by the Jewish national movement (primarily Zionism) in the Jewish religion and, in particular, in Hebrew Bible. The Jewish nationalism, from the moment of its formation in the 19th century, relied on a huge reservoir of collective memory embedded in the corpus of religious documents – scriptures, commentaries, law codes, etc. (*Smith, 1999: 209*).

The Israeli researcher A. Ravitzki notes, that basic for the Zionist myths and ethics were materials, which for a long time have been being a part of the Jewish historical and collective memory: ancient landscapes, kings, heroes and prophets. Zionism, as a “renaissance movement”, has offered to restore the former Jewish “normality” by extraction the national symbols directly from the past, turning to ancient, primarily religious stories and images. In this sight, Zionism was not very different from some other nationalist movements, which actively used historical memory and traditional symbols. Even the utilization of religious symbols wasn’t exclusively Zionist idea: the image of similar policy could be found in most related national movements, including Polish, Irish, Czech, etc. (*Ravitzky, 1999: 83–86*).

According to the Israeli researcher Z. Tzahor, a long-time leader of the Jewish “yishuv”, the first Prime Minister of Israel David Ben-Gurion, understood the importance and the role of “national mythology” in the nation-building process. The first function of “national mythology” was to affect the views of the Diaspora Jews, whose consciousness was allegedly the result of “exile”, through an appeal to heroic (and very often tragic) figures and events in the past,

which would foster Jewish pride and would be a common basis for the Jewish people, scattered throughout the world. The second function of “national mythology’s” was to legitimate the Zionist encroachments on the Land of Israel (*Tzahor, 2013: 63*). According to D. Ben-Gurion, all this (and even more) could be found in Hebrew Bible – a book “which forged the image of the Jewish nation to a greater extent than did any book shape any other nation” (*Tzahor, 2013: 66*). After all, the Bible, according to D. Ben-Gurion, “is the single most trustworthy source of knowledge concerning Israel” (*Tzahor, 2013: 67*).

Already in an early pamphlet published by the Central Committee of “Poalei Zion” (the allegedly secular and socialist Zionist party), written, as is considered, by D. Ben-Gurion in his first years in Palestine, was a pathetic appeal to the younger generation of the Diaspora Jews to become “halutzim” (“pioneers”) in the “land of the ancestors”: “Where are you sons of the Maccabees, offsprings of Bar-Giora and Bar-Kochba. Come take the place of the fallen heroes, who fell in the struggle for their liberty and their people” (*Tzahor, 2013: 69*). Another illustration of the supposedly eternal Jewish longing for freedom and independence were the expressive parallels, drawn by the leaders of the Jewish “yishuv” and the State of Israel, between the biblical stories of the exodus of the Jews from Egypt and the return of the Jews from Babylon and the modern processes of mass Jewish resettlement to Palestine/Eretz-Israel, as it was claimed, the third mass return of the Jews to Zion (*Tzahor, 2013: 72*).

In justifying the right of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel, the Zionist movement, according to the observations of the Israeli researcher H. Fishman, actively turned to Hebrew Bible, and, in particular, to its selected and dissected themes, metaphors and images, which served to promote Zionism throughout the world. In the discourse of classical Zionism (or at least its mainstream), the Bible not only linked the national existence of the Jews with their “historical Homeland” – Eretz Israel, as well as its geographical and dreamed political borders, but also served as a “reminder” of the mythical and at the same time heroic and tragic past of the Jewish people (*Fishman, 1995: 49–52*).

Even such a supposedly secular document as Israel’s Declaration of Independence was full of numerous references to Hebrew Bible and Judaism: “The Land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spiritual, religious and political identity was shaped. Here they first attained to statehood, created cultural values of national and universal significance and gave to the world the eternal Book of Books.... The State of Israel ... will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel” (*Israel’s Declaration of Independence, 2018*).

3. The Masada myth: activist and tragic commemorative narratives

Another Jewish (and primarily Israeli) “national myth” was the modern myth of Masada, which, although was not directly based on the Bible, but appealed to the so-called biblical times, and above all to the events of the so-called First Jewish-Roman War / the Great Jewish Revolt (66–73 CE), described by its contemporary and direct participant Josephus Flavius. According to Josephus’ description, during the Great Jewish Revolt against the Romans, about a thousand Jewish men, women and children found Asylum in mountain-top fortress Masada. At critical moment of the siege, wishing to die free and not to be captured by the enemy, the Jewish men have killed the women and children, and then set fire to the fortress and killed themselves. The described event supposedly marked the end of the Jewish uprising (*Zerubavel, 2013: 111*).

The Israeli-American researcher Y. Zerubavel claims, that the historical works of Josephus Flavius, which were completely ignored by the Jews in the Middle Ages and Early modern period, took a new step in Jewish national/nationalistic discourse. Josephus' story about Masada was accepted by "national historians" and the Israeli mass culture as, for the most part, reliable story, because it renewed interest to the Jewish "golden age", reinforced the importance of Jewish liberties in the past and confirmed the right of the Jewish people to the Land to Israel (Zerubavel, 2013: 111–113).

The Zionist "mythohistorian" Yigael Yadin, who was the head of the archaeological mission on Mount Masada, especially large-scale in the mid-1960s, called the mission's goal as "to see what evidence we could find to support the Josephus record" and, in fact, the results of the excavations were publicly considered as the confirmation of the reliability of these testimonies (Zerubavel, 2013: 111–114). According to Y. Zerubavel's poetic description: "The combination of a highly dramatic story from Antiquity, a remote cliff that offers a spectacular view of the Judean Desert and the Dead Sea and a large area covered by interesting archaeological ruins has contributed to Masada's evolution from a neglected story in Jewish history to a major Israeli national myth" (Zerubavel, 2013: 110).

However, the Israeli sociologist N. Ben-Yehuda notes, that the modern Masada myth is based not on the true Josephus' story (which, by the way, is not confirmed by any other historical record), but on its whitewashed for the needs of Zionism version, constructed in the 1930s–1960s by Israeli archaeologists/politicians Shmaryahu Gutman and Yigael Yadin (Ben-Yehuda, 1995: 232–236).

Following the American historians S. Zeitlin and S. Hoenig, N. Ben-Yehuda and Y. Zerubavel argue that Israeli "mythohistorians", instead of identifying those, who accepted death on the top of Mount Masada, as "sicarii" ("daggermen") – the most often used term in the primary source, usually described them as "zealots", "defenders" or "rebels" – in any case in fairly neutral or even complimentary terms, that masked their violent and terrorist activities, against Jews as well (Ben-Yehuda, 1995: 232–236; Zerubavel, 2013: 114–115).

According to Y. Zerubavel, S. Zeitlin and S. Hoenig argued that "sicarii" and "zealots" were not interchangeable terms. They describe fundamentally different, in fact conflicting groups, that followed different tactics during the Great Jewish Revolt. Sicarii were members of an extremist sect that didn't recognize any authority except God's, and their discontent was directed not at the Romans as foreign invaders and oppressors, but at everyone, including Jews, who represented authority (Zerubavel, 2013: 115).

The Israeli-American researcher J. Magness notes, that the modern myth of Masada satisfied the needs of the Zionist movement, and Masada eventually became a powerful symbol of resolute devotion to national freedom, Jewish heroism and the State of Israel. The modern myth of Masada (and, in particular, the ritual of climbing the top of the mountain, adopted by many youth and (para)military Zionist and Israeli organizations), strengthened the connection between modern Jewish settlers and Palestine/Eretz Israel, as well as accentuated the Zionist encroachments on this land at the national and international levels (Magness, 2019: 197–200).

According to J. Zerubavel, the significance of Masada as a symbol of active (and almost hopeless) resistance to a powerful enemy intensified during World War II, when the image of those events became a historical counter-model to the Holocaust. The "activist" commemorative interpretation of Masada massacre emphasized the liberation struggle of the Jewish rebels against the Roman invaders and, at the same time, downplayed the negative meaning of suicide, which was fundamentally incompatible with Jewish tradition, defining it as a patriotic sacrifice in the struggle for national freedom and pride (Zerubavel, 2013: 111–112).

J. Magness notes, that the image of heroic fighters for Jewish national freedom, who held out (although did not survive) against the mighty Roman Empire (along with the image of heroic and tragic Jewish resistance during the Warsaw Ghetto uprising), contrasted with the traditional image of European Jewry – a passive and weak “victim people” (Magness, 2019: 197–200).

J. Magness and Y. Zerubavel notes, that the words from the popular poem by the Hebrew poet Yitzhak Lamdan “Never again shall Masada fall!” – became a national slogan and a patriotic vow, which was given by schoolchildren and soldiers during ceremonies held at this place. Masada was reinterpreted as a myth of national renewal, which guarantee the survival of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel. Ultimately, after 1948 Masada became a kind of metaphor for the State of Israel – isolated, surrounded by enemies, but, unlike biblical times, “Masada shall not fall again” (Magness, 2019: 197–200; Zerubavel, 2013: 112).

According to Y. Zerubavel, the change in Israeli political reality, as a result of the trauma of the Yom Kippur War, the beginning of Likud’s dominance in Israeli political life, the war in Lebanon and the Intifada, etc., intensified the internal split in Israeli society and deep disappointment in the national myths constructed in the previous years of national development. Ultimately, a fundamentally different, “tragic” commemorative interpretation of the national myth was established in Israeli society, which shifted the emphasis from Masada as an example of the active struggle for Jewish national freedom, to Masada as one of the most traumatic events in Jewish history. In this context, the example of Masada becomes not a historical counterweight, but an analogue of the Holocaust, and ceases to be a role model, becoming one more historical warning (Zerubavel, 2013: 112).

Ultimately, according to Y. Zerubavel, “both the activist and the tragic commemorative narratives of Masada coexist in contemporary Israeli culture, supporting its meaning as a myth of major national importance (Zerubavel, 2013: 112). Whether as a role model in the activist version or as a vociferous warning in the tragic version, Masada massacre should inspire modern Israelis to take a strong stand against their enemies and to be ready to sacrifice themselves for the State of Israel (Zerubavel, 2013: 112).

4. The role of “Pogroms” in Jewish public discourse

Jewish and Israeli “national mythology” has also incorporated other, completely non-biblical, traumatic plots, which have been creatively adapted to ideological needs.

From the perspective of the Zionist “mythology”, the trigger for the emergence of the Zionist movement was the wave of Jewish pogroms of 1881–1882. According to E. Smith, these events allegedly led to the foundation of the Jewish settlement movement “Hovevei Zion” (“Love of Zion”, “Palestinophiles”), which gave the start to well-organized mass Jewish settlement to Palestine/Eretz-Israel, and prompted the Odessa Jew Leon Pinsker to publish in 1882 his pamphlet “Auto-emancipation”, which became a kind of political manifesto/program of “Palestinophiles” (Smith, 1999: 217).

The American historian D. Engel notes, that there was (and still is) no fixed, generally accepted clear definition of the word “pogrom”. Often it meant fundamentally different things. However, for the purposes of our study, we will start from the definition proposed by the influential British member of parliament for Whitechapel, Sir Stuart Samuel, which, to a large extent, corresponded to the nature of public discussions of the early 20th century (Engel, 2011). Usually, “pogroms” were understood as “excesses organized by the Government against

a portion of the population, or when the authorities took no steps to restrain those perpetrating the excesses, or intervened at a period too late to be effective in preventing the loss of human life" (*Engel, 2011: 19*).

At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the so-called Jewish pogroms were organically chosen to play the role of national sorrow, which, in terms of E. Renan, was supposed to evoke great solidarity. As it was argued, at least in the Russian Empire (and on its ruins), the "Jewish pogroms" were not sudden and spontaneous, but well-prepared from above, according to a certain plan.

The Israeli historian I. Maor notes, that the "Chisinau pogrom" of 1903, which in the memoirs of contemporaries was often called a "slaughter", "massacre", "murder", etc. is illustrative in this sense. The "Chisinau pogrom" was allegedly accompanied by cruelty and abuse similar to the massacres occurred during Khmelnytsky and Haidamak uprisings. This parallel was also traced in Nachman Bialik's poem "In the City of Slaughter" (which, for censorship reasons, was first published under the title "The Vision of Nemirov"). Jewish "mythohistorians" argued that the "Chisinau pogrom" was the beginning of a new stage of the "Jewish pogroms" in Russia. Allegedly, this wave of the "Jewish pogroms" was qualitatively different, both in number of victims and in its immediate and delayed political consequences (*Maor, 1973*).

According to the American-British researcher E. Judge, there was almost no doubt in the Jewish, Western, and Russian opposition press that local and central authorities were the most active organizers of the systematic incitement of anti-Semitism in Russia (*Judge, 1992: 84–91*). The famous French researcher L. Poliakov in his classic work on the history of anti-Semitism noted that, using the "Jewish pogroms", the Russian authorities tried to gain their own goals, in particular, to discourage Jews from participating in the revolutionary movement, in which Jews, quite naturally, played an important, if not a prominent, role (*Poliakov, 2003: 100–101*).

The great impact on the Jewish identity and "national myth-making" had the so-called Jewish pogroms in Ukraine in 1917–1921, which in absolute terms were considered as the largest outbreak of anti-Jewish violence until World War II. These events significantly affected Jewry not so much directly, due to a large number of victims, but rather through mythologizing of these events in the Jewish, Soviet, and World press. This wave of the "Jewish pogroms" was accompanied by the speculation that the central and local authorities allegedly not only organized, but also actively carried out these violent measures. Moreover, the very nature and scale of these "pogroms" allegedly indicated that they were not so much about the neighbourhood violence against Jews, but about the mass extermination of the Jewish population of Ukraine (*Kenez, 1992; Shtif, 2019*).

Jewish "national mythology" in this context pointed primarily to the anti-Jewish actions of "Volunteer Army", "Petliurists" and various "gangs", although, the American historian P. Kenez states, that "all armies involved in the Civil War, including the Bolshevik, were responsible for some of the anti-Jewish violence. ... Ukrainians believed Jews to be pro-Russian; socialists saw them as capitalist exploiters; and conservatives blamed them for being socialists" (*Kenez, 1992: 294*).

5. The "Holocaust" and its impact on Jewish/Israeli "Memory Politics"

The mass persecution and extermination of Jews during World War II is known in Jewish and Israeli "national mythology" as the "Shoah" ("Catastrophe" of European Jewry) or in the English-speaking tradition as the "Holocaust" – a term that can also be used in a broader sense.

The Israeli-American historian O. Kenan notes, that in the post-war period, the “Holocaust” quite naturally has become the most powerful “traumatic myth” – political symbol, that formed the basis of the model of the Jewish national identity in the Diaspora (primarily in the United States and other “Western” countries). And only later, due to realization of the critical dependence of the State of Israel on external support from the “Western bloc”, and necessity of compatibility with historical narratives prevalent in the Diaspora, the “lacrymoze” image of the “Holocaust” has become a part of the Jewish-Israeli model of identity (Kenan, 2003).

The Israeli-American researcher I. Avisar notes, that after World War II radical changes occurred in Israel’s attitude towards the “Holocaust” – from complete rejection to drawing clear parallels between the current state of World/Israeli Jewry and the difficult situation in which European Jews found themselves on the eve and during World War II (Avisar, 1985: 31–32).

O. Kenan emphasizes that the basic principle of the Zionist ideology was the assumption that only after returning to the ancient Jewish homeland – Eretz Israel – the Jewish people could overcome the exhausting physical and spiritual limitations that, as believed, has accompanied their stay/existence in “exile”. The “Holocaust” was certainly viewed through this prism. Allegedly, without the existence of the Jewish state and living in it, Jews would always be vulnerable to this kind of “Catastrophe”, which found its extreme version in the anti-Jewish policy of Nazi Germany (Kenan, 2003: xv-xxvi, 3–17).

The Israeli researcher Y. Weitz notes, that the ideology of “mamlakhtiyut” (“statism”), which was actively developed and implemented in Israel in the late 1940s–1950s, followed the policy of denial of the Jewish Diaspora and, instead, tried to absorb the symbols and myths that appealed to previous, supposedly more heroic periods of Jewish history. The political architects of “mamlakhtiyut” tried to cultivate the “collective memory” not on national defeats, but on national victories, in accordance to the dominant ethos of the (re)created “Jewish state”. Thus, in the late 1940s–1950s, the “Holocaust” was not yet a key element of Israeli “memory politics” – it happened somewhat later (Weitz, 2013: 142–143).

According to Israeli researcher Z. Solomon: “[In the first years after the proclamation of the State of Israel] Holocaust victims were blamed both for surviving and for not surviving. They were accused of passivity, of going like sheep to the slaughter, and staying alive by ignominiously complying with Nazi decrees” (Solomon, 1995: 218). The image of the “Jew-victim”, who, as claimed, didn’t struggle, aroused deep contempt among Israeli “old-timers” and was associated with the Diaspora Jewry – “galut” (“exile”). On this background, a symbolic image of the “Jew-rebel”, who has fought against slavish submission, was, on the contrary, glorified in every possible way and implemented into the public consciousness. A special role in the formation of corresponding attitude played the Zionist ideology, which was centered on the heroic figure of the “new Jew”, which sharply contrasted with the figure of “galut Jew”. The Zionist ethos, as a rule, portrayed “galut Jews” as humiliated, weak and miserable creatures, whose personality was distorted by centuries of persecution, while the “new Jews” has to become free people in their own land – tall, proud, just and strong. Ultimately, the Zionist ideology, which declared a radical break with “galut”, gave rise to a contemptuous attitudes towards the majority of those, who survived in the “Holocaust” (and those who didn’t survive as well). The victims of the “Holocaust” became a kind of antipode of the ideal image of the “new Jew”, on the background of which the Zionist movement tried to build its own, alternative line of Jewish history (Solomon, 1995: 217–221).

O. Kenan notes, that this dichotomy was publicly presented on March 18, 1943, by the leader of the Jewish “yishuv”, the future Prime Minister of Israel, David Ben-Gurion, at a meeting dedicated to the memory of Yosef Trumpeldor, the hero of the Battle of Tel Hai and

one of the most prominent figures in the mythology of the Jewish “yishuv”. At this memorable event, D. Ben-Gurion drew a line between the majority of European Jews, who allegedly did not know how to live and die free, and those few brave men and women, who, according to D. Ben-Gurion, were not afraid to struggle and be killed like the defenders of Tel Hai. In a similar way, the Zionist ethos and the State of Israel also managed to appropriate the “heroism” of the Warsaw Ghetto’s fighters and the Jewish fighters of the “Resistance Movement”.

Despite the fact that anti-Semitism was the main argument in favor of the Zionist solution of the “Jewish question”, it was understood as a self-evident fact, which reflected a certain historical situation, namely the servitude of the Jews in “exile”. So, it was natural that the “Catastrophe” of European Jewry didn’t initially have a wide resonance in the Zionist “mytho-history”. The “Holocaust”, as a rule, was not a separate topic of scholarly explorations or reflections, it’s image was incorporated into numerous essays and articles on Jewish history, and at the same time was presented as indisputable proof of their authenticity.

The country’s political elite, represented by the leadership of the left-wing Zionist parties, emphasized the central role of “active heroism” in commemorating the victims and events of the “Holocaust”. The heroism of the Jewish fighters of the “Resistance Movement” had to become a new symbol, a manifestation of the strength of spirit of the “new Jew”. In commemorative events, organized by the “Labor Party”, there was little mention of the mass persecution and mass murder of the Jews during World War II; instead the emphasis was on the armed struggle against the oppressors, especially on the heroic uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto.

As a result of a compromise between the “left” and “religious” Zionists, on March 21, 1951, Israeli Knesset adopted a law on “Remembrance Day for the Holocaust and the Revolt in the Ghettos”, (in 1959 amended to “Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Day”). This law founded Israel’s “policy of remembrance” of the “Holocaust” at least for a decade. The basic idea of this policy was to emphasize the contrast between the passivity of the majority of Jews, who “went like sheep to the slaughter”, and the “active heroism” of those few brave men and women, who resisted with weapons in their hands. However, a law and amendments to it, that clearly established mourning commemorative ceremonies and permissible practices at this day, were adopted only in the late 1950s – early 1960s (Kenan, 2003: xv-xxvi, 3–17).

Later, in the 1960s and 1970s, a number of events took place in the country, that significantly changed the attitude of Israeli society towards the “Holocaust”.

Firstly, in April-August 1961 in Jerusalem the trial of Adolf Eichmann was held, which, as O. Kenan notes, “had a ‘deeply cathartic effect’ and served as a first opportunity for many Israelis to face the past” (Kenan, 2003: 78). The trial witnesses and, in general, all those who survived in the “Holocaust” were given the opportunity to speak publicly about their traumatic experience over and over again, and Israeli society, in general, was, for the first time, ready to hear that (Kenan, 2003: 78). According to Y. Weitz, “a new legitimacy was given to the story of the life and death of the simple Jew, one of the millions, who was neither a hero nor a traitor, neither a saint nor a collaborator” (Weitz, 2013: 141).

Secondly, the so-called Six-Day War in 1967, although was quick and successful for Israel, demonstrated the complete loneliness of the “Jewish state” in the Middle East. Ultimately, the Six-Day War strengthened the Israelis sense of unity and common destiny with the Diaspora, whose identity since World War II has been built on the fundament of the “Holocaust trauma”.

Thirdly, the so-called Yom Kippur War in 1973 replaced national pride by a sense of vulnerability and insecurity for the “Jewish state”. The Yom Kippur War demonstrated Israel’s dependence on “Western” (primarily US) military aid and confirmed the necessity to maintain

good relations with the Diaspora (primarily with the Jewish community of the United States and other “Western” countries).

Thus, in the 1960s and 1970s, the attitude towards the “Holocaust” in Israeli politics and society was replaced by a more realistic perception, which brought Israel closer to the Diaspora. The meaning of the term “Jewish Resistance”, which until then meant only conscious and organized Jewish military resistance to Nazism, was significantly expanded. The reaction of Jews to Nazism began to be portrayed as mainly active, not passive, as it has been portrayed before. Allegedly, collective and individual Jewish responses to the threats and challenges of World War II, were, to a large extent, manifestations of both physical and spiritual resistance (Kenan, 2003: 87–88).

Finally, in the late 1970s, a right-wing Zionist party “Likud” came to power in Israel. As Israeli researcher A. Naor notes, “Likud” quite actively (and in a fundamentally different way from Israeli Labours) has used the topic of the “Holocaust” for political and ideological purposes. At the same time, the topic of the “Holocaust” has also become popular among other right-wing movements and parties of Israel, which, as considered, were (and still are) the most consistent and irreconcilable opponents of the “territories for peace” doctrine. These forces quite often use the so-called lessons of the Holocaust to claim that any losses of the territory, controlled by Israel, leads, ultimately, to a second holocaust (Naor, 2003). According to A. Naor: “Their logic is policy-oriented and based on a historical analogy; and by claiming that a second holocaust is either a deterministic or a highly probable result of an Israeli territorial concession, they believe to have found the decisive evidence to silence their adversaries” (Naor, 2003: 131).

The Israeli researcher H. Halkin notes, that the “Holocaust” is often used to justify radical manifestations of Israeli power and strength. If the “Holocaust” was a cruel attempt by “absolute evil” – Hitler’s Nazism – to exterminate the Jewish people, and if the Arab (and other Muslim) states intend to complete this task, then the survival of the Jewish people become not only a necessity, but the highest national and universal value, not only for Israelis, but for the Diaspora as well (Halkin, 1999: 105–107).

Thus, in our case, it is absolutely true, that “the same myth can have very different meanings according to the particular circumstances in which it operates. Political myth, as myth in general, expresses itself through variants: properly speaking, we never see a political myth at work, but always variants of it. Furthermore, what is a political myth for a certain group of people may well not be so for another, and, even for the same group, the same narrative can work as a political myth in certain circumstances but not in others” (Bottici, 2011: 35).

6. Conclusions

A special form of “modern political myths” is “historical myths”, which play an important role in nation-building process, creating a powerful illusion of involvement, even if the real or potential community is passive.

Among “historical myths” an extremely important role is played by the so-called traumatic myths, which are usually used in constructing the national identity. Moreover, it is strongly believed that common patience and common griefs unite more than common joys and common triumphs.

The awareness of the importance of “traumatic myths” lies at the heart of today’s dominant versions of Jewish and Israeli identity. In particular, Jewish and Israeli “national

mythology” has incorporated biblical and completely non-biblical traumatic plots that over time have been creatively adapted to ideological needs.

In national/nationalistic discourse the image of Jewish history is formed primarily by anti-Jewish oppression and violence. Jewish history is usually represented by series of traumatic events that flow into one another.

Moreover, this “lachrymose” view on Jewish history is not always the way to understand the most important events that happened to the Jewish people in the past, this vision of Jewish history often serves much more practical political purposes.

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