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CLAREMONT MCKENNA COLLEGE

**MARGARET THATCHER, GOLDA MEIR, AND INDIRA GANDHI'S ACTIONS
AND RHETORIC REGARDING FEMINISM AND GENDER DURING THEIR
ASCENT TO POWER**

SUBMITTED TO

PROFESSOR HILARY APPEL

AND

DEAN GREGORY HESS

BY

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Introduction

From 1966-1979 three remarkable leaders broke an important glass ceiling in the political world when they became the first female heads of government in the countries of India, Israel, and the United Kingdom. Indira Gandhi, Golda Meir, and Margaret Thatcher's ascent to political office occurred at the same time as the rise of feminism globally.¹

Margaret Thatcher, Golda Meir, and Indira Gandhi all served as the first, and thus far only, female prime ministers of their respective parliamentary democracies. Thus, historians and political scientists have researched various facets of each woman's relation to her gender. Was each woman a feminist? How did each woman fare on women's issues during her time in office? Most of the research concludes that each woman fared poorly on promoting women's issues. Additionally, each woman separated herself from her gender. Yet these women related to their gender and feminism in much more complicated ways than research might suggest.

While Thatcher, Meir and Gandhi did not self-identify as feminists and even disassociated themselves with feminism explicitly, their records are much more nuanced on several core values of the rising feminist movements of their time. Thatcher, particularly in the crucial period in which she rose to power, explicitly encouraged women to mobilize as voters and pursue work outside the home in her formal speeches, public statements, letters and interviews. Through their organized activities before they

¹ The second wave of feminism emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Arian, Asher, and Michal Shamir, eds. *The Elections in Israel 2009*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2011. Print. 186.

obtained office, Meir and Gandhi worked to mobilize women politically, although their rhetoric did not explicitly encourage women over men to participate politically.

Methodology

The Margaret Thatcher Foundation² includes all of Thatcher's statements from 1945-1990, and thus this paper meticulously evaluates Thatcher's rhetoric regarding women and feminism from 1949-1979, using the database as an effective way to gather research. No databases in English exist for Golda Meir or Indira Gandhi. Thus, in order to accurately and thoroughly assess their rhetoric during their ascent to power, I had to supplement whatever specific speeches I found with books and other secondary sources. My research on Meir and Gandhi's rhetoric relating to gender is broader, and heavily infused with looking at their actions at the time as well. I use them as minor cases in this paper compared to Thatcher, my main case study.

These women are giants among political leaders, both because they were the first female prime ministers of their countries and because of their respective policies. Consequently, historians studied them thoroughly; one book even explicitly compares their leadership styles.³ Each woman's rhetoric, specifically before she attained political office, remains a relatively underexplored area compared to the policies each leader pursued. Yet speeches, statements, and letters provide a window into how these leaders wanted to present themselves. When Thatcher responded to interview questions, she answered as she saw fit. When Meir wrote articles for Zionist magazines, she spoke from

² Website margaretthatcher.org

³ Steinberg, Blema S. *Women in Power: The Personalities and Leadership Styles of Indira Gandhi, Golda Meir, and Margaret Thatcher*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2008. Print.

her heart. And when Gandhi composed letters to her American friend, she wrote openly and honestly. Exploring these women's rhetoric allows for a comparison as to how these women saw themselves and the need they saw in women's advocacy. It also enables one to contrast their views on feminism with their rhetoric about women.

I chose these three women to study because of the similarities in the time period they governed (roughly the 1960s and 1970s), the types of countries (parliamentary democracy), and the fact that each woman served as the first and only female prime minister of these countries. Additionally, each woman has a reputation as being tough and generally anti-feminist.

Aside from these similarities, each woman's policies and outlook on the role of government greatly differed. Thatcher touted individualism above all else, while Meir advocated for socialist policies. Like Meir, Gandhi's policies were far more left-leaning than Thatcher's, and she supported more government programs.⁴ Each woman's policy outlook shaped her sentiments regarding the mobilization of women. This paper analyzes the speeches, interviews, and letters of each woman through the lens of their respective policies.

⁴ Genovese, Michael A., ed. *Women As National Leaders*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1993. Print. 115.

Chapter 1: Feminism

1.1 Definition of Feminism

This paper first needs to establish a definition of feminism in order to both determine whether historians would consider each leader a feminist and whether each leader would consider herself a feminist. Merriam-Webster online defines feminism first as: “the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes.” The second definition refers to feminism as: “organized activity on behalf of women's rights and interests.” Presumably all of the studied leaders can be considered feminists using the first definition. Many historians would argue they did not organize activities on behalf of women’s rights while they were prime minister, and thus these leaders would not be included using the second definition. However, the use of feminism rarely refers merely to the definitions listed above; several experts have studied feminism and written books on the changing definitions over time.

While feminism may at a base level mean women’s rights equal to those of men, feminism often refers to the “rights of women.”⁵ Thus, the first definition cannot be taken at face value. Additionally, during the time that these three leaders were prime ministers, feminism experienced a rebirth.⁶ Although the word did not possess exclusive positive or negative connotations, the idea of an “ism” made it sound “dogmatic and doctrinaire.”⁷

⁵ Offen, Karen. "Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach." *Signs* 14.1 (1988): 128. *JSTOR*. Web. 20 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174664?seq=10&>>.

⁶ The 1970s is often dubbed the “second wave of feminism,” as opposed to the first wave which refers to the suffrage movement. Asher and Shamir 186.

⁷ Jacobson, Marsha B. "A Rose By Any Other Name: Attitudes toward Feminism as a Function of Its Label." *Sex Roles* 5.3 (1979): Web. 20 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.springerlink.com/content/up1508un6013mj06/fulltext.pdf?MUD=MP>>.

Women around the world did not want to associate with the feminist label, even if they supported feminist ideas.

Articles defining feminism tend to exclude Thatcher from the list. The collective nature of feminism naturally excludes Thatcher, who held contempt for collective action.⁸ The myriad interpretations of feminism make it hard to conclusively categorize these leaders. However, based on the general view of the movement as the collective advancement for women's rights, none of the three leaders was a feminist, nor did they consider themselves feminists. While each leader had nuanced ways of viewing herself in relation to her gender, none of the leaders saw herself or acknowledged herself as a leading force for the greater collective women's movement. Aside from each woman's view that she herself was not a feminist, under these definitions, many historians would tend to exclude these leaders as feminists.

1.2 Each leader's association with feminism

Each woman in at least one point during her career explicitly stated she was not a feminist. In 1952 in a letter to her American friend Dorothy Norman, Gandhi wrote: "I am in no sense a feminist, but I believe in women being able to do everything... Given the opportunity to develop, capable Indian women have come to the top at once."⁹ While this statement appears paradoxical, it reflects Gandhi's complex feelings toward her gender and feminism. Her egalitarian upbringing with her cousins helped contribute to her sense

⁸ Bashevkin, Sylvia. "From Tough Times to Better Times: Feminism, Public Policy, and New Labour Politics in Britain." *International Political Science Review* 21.4 (2000): 408. *JSTOR*. Web. 20 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1601596?seq=2>>.

⁹ Norman, Dorothy. *Indira Gandhi, Letters to an American Friend*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985. Print. 20.

of natural equality. “Flying kites, climbing trees, playing marbles with her boy cousins, Indira said she hardly knew the difference between a boy and a girl until the age of twelve.”¹⁰ Gandhi’s upbringing as the only child of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, was certainly unique and undoubtedly contributed to her views on feminism. Nehru treated his daughter extremely well, and having no siblings to compare her treatment to, Nehru spoiled his daughter and encouraged her to pursue her passions.

This letter also reflects Gandhi’s optimism and her equation of her own experiences to that of female leaders in general. In 1952, India had only been a country for five years. Indian women did not overpower India’s parliament and “rise to the top” in drastic numbers. Yet Gandhi’s rhetoric implies that women had experienced a dramatic increase in participation. “*Given the opportunity to develop, capable Indian women have come to the top at once.*” Either Gandhi implies here that there are not many capable Indian women, or she equates her rise to the top with that of other women. Gandhi most likely equated her success with the success of Indian women. She, a capable Indian woman, was rising to the top, and so too should other women. This perspective pervades most of her speeches and sentiments throughout her ascent to the post of prime minister.

The political context of India at the time most likely also shaped her views. Women received the right to vote in conjunction with Indian independence in 1947. Thus, India did not have the same need for women’s mobilization in the form of the suffrage movement as other countries around the world. Additionally, the fight for

¹⁰ Jayakar, Pupil. *Indira Gandhi: An Intimate Biography*. New York: Pantheon, 1992. Print. 64.

independence of a country probably took precedence over a collective women's movement.

Gandhi maintained these views toward feminism throughout her life. In 1980, she reflected on her mother as a "convinced feminist, a position which I didn't understand then because I felt that I could do what I liked and that it didn't make any difference whether I was a boy or a girl."¹¹ This statement remains consistent with earlier comments. Again, she did not understand because "I could do what I liked." Since feminism did not play a role in her life, she did not understand the need for it in other women's lives. While she remained anti the feminist label throughout her political career, in the period before she was elected prime minister, she worked for the advancement of women's rights.

For similar reasons as Gandhi, Meir strayed away from aligning herself with feminists. As an active participant in helping establish the state of Israel on May 14, 1948, Meir focused on the fight for Jewish equality in the form of a Jewish state. In her autobiography, Meir stated her views on feminism, noting she did not like the aggressive aspects of the movement. "I am not a great admirer of the kind of feminism that gives rise to bra burning, hatred of men or a campaign against motherhood..."¹² When an interviewer brought up the Women's Liberation movement to Meir, she reacted with similar disdain:

Do you mean those crazy women who burn their bras and go around all disheveled and hate men? They're crazy. Crazy. But how can one accept such crazy women who think it's a misfortune to get pregnant and a disaster to bring children into the world? And when it's the greatest

¹¹ Genovese 107.

¹² Meir, Golda. *My Life*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1975. Print. 114.

privilege we women have over men! Feminism...listen, I got into politics at the time of the First World War, when I was sixteen or seventeen, and I've never belonged to a women's organization...the fact of being a woman has never, never, I say, been an obstacle.¹³

Like Gandhi, Meir noted that being a woman “has never been an obstacle.” She used her personal experiences to refute the need for feminism in women's lives. Interestingly, Meir started her career active in women's organizations, working initially for the Women's Labor Council where she helped train new laborers.¹⁴ Although this does not constitute belonging to a women's organization, she involved herself in mobilizing women more than her comment makes it seem. Additionally, she wrote several articles during her rise to power focusing on the struggles a mother faces while pursuing a career. Her statement that she did not experience obstacles contradicts with her statements on the hardships of the dual role of women. However, Meir did not make a point loudly complaining about being a woman. She overcame these obstacles, and perhaps her general tendency to overlook them caused her to make this statement here.

Meir saw gender equality synonymous to religious equality: “Naturally women should be treated as the equals of men in all respects, but, as is true also of the Jewish people, they shouldn't have to be better than anyone else...or feel that they must accomplish wonders all the time to be accepted by all...”¹⁵ More than anything, Meir stressed that feminism overreached its bounds.

The depth of English language research on Thatcher provides many opportunities to study her views on feminism during her rise to power. Surveying all of her

¹³ Fallaci, Oriana. "Golda Meir." *Interview with History*. New York: Liveright, 1976. 88-123. Open Library. Web. 20 Nov. 2012.

<<http://archive.org/stream/interviewwithhis00fall#page/n0/mode/2up>>.

¹⁴ Genovese 140.

¹⁵ Ibid 156.

statements¹⁶ related to feminism or feminists from 1949 until she was elected, Thatcher remained anti-feminist. Thatcher mostly referred to feminists or feminism in the 1970s during her political ascent. In 1978, in responding to an interview question, Thatcher declared: “No, I’m not a feminist.” She went on to reprimand feminists, particularly militant ones:

I think they’ve become too strident. I think they have done great damage to the cause of women by making us out to be something we are not. Each person is different. Each has their own talents and abilities, and these are the things you want to draw and bring out. You don’t say: “I must get on because I’m a woman, or that I must get on because I’m a man.” You should say that you should get on because you have the combination of talents which are right for the job. The moment you exaggerate the question, you defeat your case.¹⁷

Like Gandhi and Meir, Thatcher disassociated with feminism because she believed in individualism. While Gandhi and Meir saw feminism as unnecessary in part because of their own personal successes, Thatcher saw the movement as obsolete because individuals all had the opportunity to succeed. For Gandhi and Meir, their own individual accomplishments rendered radical feminism pointless, whereas Thatcher’s love for individualism in general rendered the movement unnecessary. Thatcher agreed with Meir that feminism overstepped its bounds. She said: “the moment you exaggerate the question, you defeat your case,” which shows similar undertones to Meir’s comments on the pointlessness of the elevation of women just for the sake of their elevation.

Later, Thatcher mentioned she disproved of people who played the feminist card too hard. “I don’t like strident females. I like people who have the ability, who don’t run

¹⁶ Margaretthatcher.org contains all of Thatcher’s statements, interviews, or articles from 1949 – 1990.

¹⁷ Eddison, Robert, and Barrt St John Nevill. "Interview for Hornsey Journal." *Hornsey Journal* 21 Apr. 1978: *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*. Web. 20 Nov. 2012. <<http://margareththatcher.org/document/103662>>.

the feminist ticket too hard, after all I reckon if you get anywhere it's because of your ability as a person. It's not because of your sex."¹⁸ Thatcher's view toward feminists reflected her political attitudes in general. Most of Thatcher's statements in this time period reflected this sentiment, although she did promote women's advancements more than her pronouncements on feminism would make it seem.

¹⁸ Thatcher, Margaret. "General Election Press Conference." Speech. Scottish Press Conference. Glasgow Airport. 26 Apr. 1979. *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*. Web. 20 Nov. 2012. <<http://margaretthatcher.org/document/104045>>.

Chapter 2: Actions of leaders in office

While in office, none of the leaders actively pursued feminist agendas, which contributes to the literature that each woman was not a feminist. Thatcher, in particular, notoriously did not advocate for women's issues and cracked down on welfare programs and education.¹⁹ She earned the infamous nickname "Thatcher the milk snatcher" for her cuts in the early 1970s to free milk programs in public schools.²⁰ Thatcher continued her cuts on social programs during her term in office. As one biographer notes, "Thatcher opposed increases in welfare, hoping instead to shrink the welfare state, reduce its costs, and break the chain of dependency that she felt it created."²¹

Aside from the cuts she established to social programs while in office, Thatcher did not increase the number of women in the prime minister's cabinet. "The Prime Minister, not an enthusiastic promoter of women, appointed three women to her government, but none to her cabinet. By the first cabinet reshuffle of her second term, Mrs. Thatcher's cabinet of twenty-two members contained no women apart from herself."²² Not surprisingly, her actions in office do not lead people to view her as a supporter of women's rights.

Meir did not set out to slash government spending and programs the way Thatcher did, and thus her actions while in office did not explicitly work against women's rights. Meir's left-leaning policies were markedly different from Thatcher's liberal ones. Yet her

¹⁹ Genovese 193.

²⁰ Smith, Rebecca. "How Margaret Thatcher Became Known as 'Milk Snatcher'" *The Telegraph*. Telegraph Media Group Limited, 8 Aug. 2010. Web. 20 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/7932963/How-Margaret-Thatcher-became-known-as-Milk-Snatcher.html>>.

²¹ Genovese 193.

²² Lovenduski 214.

track record on domestic policies remained bleak, and she remains known for her aptitude in foreign policy and handling of the 1973 Yom Kippur war.²³ During her five years in office, the economy did not improve, inflation soared, and tensions between religious and secular Jews grew.²⁴ Although less explicit than Thatcher, Meir's poor domestic record allows historians to rightfully view her as a foreign policy guru rather than someone who advocated for women's rights.

Gandhi's controversial 15 year tenure in office did little to improve the conditions of Indian women. "During her tenure in office the conditions of the majority of Indian women worsened, as reflected in literacy and employment rates and the declining sex ratio."²⁵ Like Meir, historians remember Gandhi for her ability to effectively promote Indian foreign policy measures.²⁶ Her domestic initiatives did not necessarily reflect favorably on Indian women.

Like Thatcher, Gandhi did not make a special effort to appoint women to cabinet positions. She did not appoint any women to full cabinet rank during her terms in office.²⁷ Yet despite this, many women saw Gandhi as a symbol for feminism and an image of women's power.²⁸ Gandhi did not have the same negative characteristics assigned to her that Thatcher did, and while she certainly did not go out of her way to improve specific women's issues while in office, women did not see her as actively working against these issues the same way that they saw Thatcher.

²³ Pogrebin, Letty Cottin. "Golda Meir." *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*. 20 March 2009. Jewish Women's Archive. Web. 21 Nov. 2012. <<http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/meir-golda>>.

²⁴ Genovese 149.

²⁵ Ibid 126.

²⁶ Ibid 129.

²⁷ Ibid 126.

²⁸ Ibid 128.

Ultimately, each woman's actions lends credence to the view that these women were not feminists and sometimes actually worsened the status of women in their country. Yet exploring each woman's actions and statements before she became prime minister offers insight into the complex relation each woman felt to her gender and to advancing women in society.

Chapter 3: Rhetoric, letters, and actions

3.1 Margaret Thatcher

Thatcher, the last of the three women to become prime minister, served as the UK's Prime Minister from 1979-1990. Over the course of a 30 year time span before she obtained office, Thatcher's speeches to women or about women remained pretty consistent in tone and message. From 1949-1979, Thatcher encouraged women to vote and to assemble politically. She did so within the context of professing the importance of individualism. The political context of the United Kingdom at the time undoubtedly influenced Thatcher's emphasis on individualism.

Historians have described the UK as a consensus democracy from the period after the Second World War until Thatcher's rise to power in 1979. A more statist approach to governments pervaded many European countries in this time period. "Socialism in 20th-century liberal democracies was thus an administrative expedient, an ethical commitment, an attitude of mind, and also a solution to what seemed to be the main problem of political life."²⁹ This political mindset remained the status quo for a couple of decades. This view was not challenged until the oil crisis of the 1970s and the "inflationary consequences" of Keynesian economics took effect.³⁰

Faced with an unstable economy amid the backdrop of a long series of Labour candidates in office in the UK, the 1979 candidacy was the Conservatives to win. At the time, one study suggested that it was the Labour party that lost the race, rather than Thatcher's merits that won her the race. "As the Nuffield study of the election concluded,

²⁹ Minogue, Kenneth R., and Michael Denis. Biddiss. *Thatcherism: Personality and Politics*. New York: St. Martin's, 1987. Print. xii.

³⁰ Ibid xiii.

it was lost by the outgoing government rather than won by the incoming opposition: ‘The Conservatives were well placed to catch the plum that fell into their laps. But it was the Labour movement that shook it off the tree.’”³¹ Like most political successes, circumstance played a large role in Thatcher’s election in 1979.

Although Thatcher’s political views – coveting individual rights generally above all else – stemmed from this time period, her early rhetoric about women did not necessarily reflect this view. Yet most of her speeches had individual undertones interwoven with her encouragement for women to pursue careers. In 1949, Thatcher was selected as the Conservative candidate for Dartford.³² She started making political speeches during this earlier point in her career.

At one of her first speeches in 1949, she praised women for their sensitive demeanor: "Women have a special bent as technicians in human relationships, and we have come to understand the human aspect of our problems. The problems we face to-day are not only ones of raw materials and money, but problems concerning human beings in our factories—problems of how to fit people in the jobs they want to do, so they can give their best."³³ Thatcher addressed a women’s association here, so naturally she praised women as a whole. Interestingly though, Thatcher ends her speech with promoting specific workers and focusing on each person rather than the group. Yet she did play upon the gender stereotypes of women to elevate her status with this particular women’s association in Erith.

³¹ Ibid 7.

³² Thatcher, Margaret. *Margaretthatcher.org*. Margaret Thatcher Foundation, Web. <<http://margaretthatcher.org>>

³³ "Dartford's Woman Candidate Meets the Ladies." *Erith Observer* 17 June 1949: *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*. Web. 20 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/100828>>.

Additionally, later that year she coined the phrase “Up housewives, and at ‘em,” encouraging women to vote.³⁴ A few years later, Thatcher encouraged women to run for political office, writing in an article called *Wake up, Women*: “And, above all, *I should like to see* more and more women at Westminster, and in the highest place, too.”³⁵

Interestingly, in the 1970s Thatcher continually stated she would not see a female prime minister in her lifetime. Yet in this article she wrote in 1952, she says she would like to see women “in the highest place,” presumably referring to the prime minister position.

While Thatcher did not explicitly say she wanted to see a female prime minister, this statement heavily implies it, more so than any of her speeches or statements before she accepted the Conservative Party leadership in 1975. One explanation for this is that her article catered to women, and so she used more overt tones when talking to the feminist movement. Although Thatcher continually denied she would ever see a female prime minister, this statement perhaps offers a glimpse into how she really felt.

Overall, the tone throughout these years encouraged women to vote or run for office. Thatcher delivered most of her speeches throughout this time period to a women’s faction of the Conservative Party in Dartford, and her tone emphasized mobilizing political participation among women.

In 1959 the people of Finchley elected Thatcher as their member of parliament, and thus she delivered most of her speeches in the late 1950s to the people of Finchley.³⁶

³⁴ Roberts Revives Another Slogan." *Dartford Chronicle* 26 Aug. 1949: *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*. Web. 20 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/100832>>.

³⁵ "Wake Up, Women." *Sunday Graphic* 17 Feb. 1952: *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*. Web. 20 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/100936>>.

³⁶ Between 1952 and 1958, Thatcher removed herself from politics. In 1953 she gave birth to twins Mark and Carol, and it wasn’t until 1958 that she rejoined politics running as the Conservative candidate for Finchley. Thus, there is a lull in her public statements from 1952-1958.

Yet between 1958-1960, Thatcher delivered only two speeches exclusively to women's groups.³⁷ Thatcher delivered two speeches to Finchley Conservative Women, one in 1958 and one in 1959. In both, she discussed the pitfalls of socialism and focused on industry, nationalism, and taxation.³⁸ These speeches lack the mobilization undertones present in Thatcher's earlier speeches to women. When Thatcher stepped back into the political sphere, she likely wanted to focus on policy issues, and thus she shifted slightly from her explicit emboldening of women.

Thatcher also wrote a letter in this time period for the *Daily Express* called *What my daughter must learn in the next nine years*. Thatcher highlighted the importance of education, domestic arts (being a good housewife) and a stable career. Thatcher noted that she hoped her daughter, Carol, would place an important emphasis on her occupation: "I hope my daughter will not marry too young, but that she will have the experience of earning her own living and spending her own income before marriage."³⁹ Thatcher also noted that if she had to choose between educating her two children – Carol and Mark – she would choose whoever was more intelligent. Thatcher's attitude toward her own daughter appears extremely liberal for the time period. To say she wanted her daughter to earn her own income, and especially to say she would educate her daughter over her son if Carol proved more intelligent, was pretty radical. While radical, this view reflects her consistent emphasis on the importance of individuals.

³⁷ Margaretthatcher.org lists only two women's organizations/groups that Thatcher spoke to during this time period.

³⁸ "Mrs. Thatcher Meets Advisory Committee." *Finchley Press* 16 Oct. 1958: *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*. Web. 20 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/100998>>.

³⁹ Thatcher, Margaret. "What My Daughter Must Learn in the next Nine Years." *Daily Express* 4 Mar. 1960: n. pag. *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*. Web. 21 Nov. 2012. <<http://margaretthatcher.org/document/100948>>.

Thatcher's speeches used a similar rhetoric from 1960 to 1970. As a Member of Parliament during this time period, she continued to deliver speeches to her district and to women's groups. An article she wrote for the *Finchley Press* in 1962 follows the same tones Thatcher wrote three years earlier in her article *What my daughter must learn in the next nine years*. Yet she made sure to emphasize the importance of women's domestic responsibility. "Mrs. Thatcher believes in educating girls on the same level as boys in maths, science, languages, and all the subjects that train the mind to think. She would add domestic science as essential to girls—but she does not under-rate (and how right she is) the valuable lessons every girl can learn in Mum's kitchen."⁴⁰ The author's side comment underscores the importance of domestic work and reflects society's views on women at the time. Thatcher appeals to both the domestic and career oriented facets of women's work; to focus solely on career would have been politically reckless. Her tone throughout this time period did stress the importance of housewives more than she had earlier,⁴¹ perhaps partly because reporters asked her about it more. "I've got a housekeeper but I still do the cooking myself ... rush in, peel the vegetables, put the roast in ... all before I take off my hat. There are all sorts of minor emergencies to cope with, things women at home all day build up into mountains. But a job, outside interests, keep these emergencies firmly in proportion," Thatcher said in an interview for the *Daily Telegraph*

⁴⁰ "The Busy MP Wife and Mother Keeps Time in Hand for Those Emergencies."

Interview by Mrs. R.E. Pollard. *Finchley Press* 26 Oct. 1962: *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*. Web. 20 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/101158>>.

⁴¹ In her speeches browsed from 1960-1970 with the keyword "women" or "woman," almost all the results related to her touting the importance of domestic work or being asked about her role as a housewife.

in 1966.⁴² She addressed the prevailing reality in the 1960s in the United Kingdom that many women's primary role was as a housewife.⁴³

About six months later, Thatcher continued with similar rhetoric during a speech to the Golders Green league of Jewish Women. "When I visit a girls' school I am always anxious that they should be taught about household management and how to budget. Many girls never learn this and when they marry are always in money troubles. Young people should be taught to solve their own problems and this should be done at school."⁴⁴ Even with the clear emphasis Thatcher placed on domesticity, she valued women pursuing careers. She stressed the importance of education again in a speech in Israel, noting that girls in Israel deserved the same education opportunities as boys did.⁴⁵

In another interview in the same time period, Thatcher harkened back to her earlier statements calling for women to run for political office. "I think the answer is we have to do everything the men do—and a good deal more besides. Everything the men do because the great issues such as defence, Rhodesia and Europe affect us all, the women just as much as the men—the children and the whole family... Generally I think we have a wider understanding of problems affecting the family, and of matters such as health and welfare. The position is quite well illustrated by the special interests taken by women in

⁴² Tweedie, Jill. "Interview for Daily Telegraph." *Daily Telegraph* 18 Mar. 1966: *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*. Web. 20 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/101465>>.

⁴³ In the late 1960s, only 5 percent of women in the UK earned more than their husbands. Wallop, Harry. "Breadwinner Wives' Now Number 2.7m." *The Telegraph*. Telegraph Media Group Limited, 31 Jan. 2010. Web. 20 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/7120411/Breadwinner-wives-now-number-2.7m.html>>.

⁴⁴ "Speech to Golders Green League of Jewish Women." *Finchley Times* 16 Sept. 1966: *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*. Web. 20 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/101295>>.

⁴⁵ "Speech to Friends of Hebrew University." *Finchley Press* [Marsh Lane, Mill Hill, North London] 28 June 1967: *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*. Web. 20 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/101574>>.

politics now.”⁴⁶ Thatcher associates herself with women here (“we have to do everything that men do”) which has communal undertones, binding her with the women she serves. Interestingly, the interviewer here referred to Thatcher as “an ardent, but a qualified feminist.” Currently, few people would call Thatcher a feminist. Yet while she was running, many women saw her as the epitome of feminism.⁴⁷ It was only once Thatcher obtained political office that people started to see her as pursuing policies that did not align with feminism.

Thatcher delivered a speech with perhaps the most feminist undertones in 1969 at the Conservative Party Conference. Here, she noted that equal pay between a man and a woman was not enough, and that women needed equal opportunity as well, “including, of course, more women Members of Parliament.” Interestingly, in the same speech Thatcher recognized the importance of housewives:

We must make provision for all of these circumstances, but let us recognise that perhaps the most important job of all is the creation of family and family life. Home is where the individual matters, and, as we move into an economy where size seems to dwarf the individual, the home and the atmosphere there becomes more and more important, not less. Although more married women are going out to work, no one is pushing them outside the home. We wish to recognise the very valuable contribution which they already make.⁴⁸

From a political standpoint, Thatcher had to praise housewives, since most of the women in Britain at the time fulfilled this role. Thatcher spoke diplomatically here, able to merge the growing importance of women in the workforce while still acknowledging the significance of domestic work.

⁴⁶ MacPhee, Alasdair. "‘IF I BECOME CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER ...’." *Finchley Times* 16 Dec. 1966: *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*. Web. 20 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/101297>>.

⁴⁷ In many interviews and newspaper articles from the 1960s, reporters referred to Thatcher as a feminist.

⁴⁸ "Speech to Conservative Party Conference." *Conference Report 1969*. Brighton. 117-19. *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*. Web. 20 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/101687>>.

Up until her appointment as head of the Conservative Party in 1975, Thatcher continually repeated that she would not see a female prime minister in her lifetime.⁴⁹ On October 26, 1969 after becoming the Tory education spokeswoman Thatcher was asked about her prime minister ambitions to which she responded: “No woman in my time will be Prime Minister or Chancellor or Foreign Secretary – not the top jobs. Anyway I wouldn't want to be Prime Minister. You have to give yourself 100 per cent.”⁵⁰ A year later, she echoed her thoughts, but noted prejudice as her reasoning that she would not see a woman prime minister: “There won't be a woman Prime Minister of Britain in my lifetime, because the inbuilt prejudices are too entrenched.”⁵¹ And on May 16, 1971 Thatcher replied: “No, I don't think that in my lifetime there will be a woman prime minister. I'm always a realist. I don't think there will be. I agree that women are especially interested in education and the welfare subjects. This is probably the center of their life, it is not the boundary of our abilities.”⁵² In this statement Thatcher agrees with the notion that women focused on education and welfare, and seems to suggest that they should be focusing on these areas. She also notes that these fields are “the center of their life...not the boundary of *our* abilities.” Thatcher distances herself from her gender by referring to these areas as focuses of “their life” but then reestablishes herself with her gender when discussing the “boundary of our abilities.” While at first glance this

⁴⁹ Mayer, Allan J. *Madam Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Her Rise to Power*. New York: Newsweek, 1979. Print. 117.

⁵⁰ “Memorable Thatcherisms.” *The Independent*. 23 Mar. 2002. Web. 20 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/memorable-thatcherisms-655102.html>>.

⁵¹ Barnett, Mary. “Mrs Thatcher Stays Serene in Spite of Schools Rumpus.” *Finchley Press* 7 Aug. 1970: *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*. Web. 20 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/101777>>.

⁵² “The World This Weekend: Women in the Conservative Party.” Interview by Margaret Howard. *BBC Archives*. 2012. Web. 20 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/thatcher/6306.shtml>>.

statement seems fairly similar to the assertion she made in 1969 that women would not be prime minister, Thatcher subtly distances herself from her gender and by doing so perhaps elevates herself in the positions she can potentially attain in the future.

Of course, Thatcher's statements were also political. To say she would see a female head of state in her lifetime would have led reporters to question Thatcher about her own political ambitions, something she was not ready to discuss yet.

Even with her view that she would not see a female prime minister of the UK, her overall tone in the early 1970s still called for more women to receive education and join politics.⁵³ Granted, a lot of these speeches catered to certain crowds, specifically women's groups. In a speech to the Electrical Association for Women, Thatcher discussed the importance of women pursuing more advanced degrees.⁵⁴ During this time period, she also focused more heavily on getting more women into the political realm, coinciding with her ascent to power. In an interview in 1974, she stressed the need for more women:

I think we've got to encourage more women to stand, because there ought to be more. There aren't more women in Parliament now than there were in the thirties. And yet when you think, we've had generation after generation of women graduates, but not many more have come forward. Of course, it is the thing which we mentioned earlier—having young families—but I think we have to keep them in touch enough, while they've got young families, to enable them to think of coming on immediately their families are getting towards independence, or can take a certain amount of responsibility. Because we just must somehow have more.⁵⁵

⁵³ In her speeches and interviews perused on Margaretthatcher.org from 1970-1975, the vast majority of her rhetoric still focused on educating women and encouraging women to run for office.

⁵⁴ "Speech to Electrical Association for Women." *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*. 5 May 1971. Web. 20 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/102110>>.

⁵⁵ Forgan, Liz, and Sue Thomas. "TV Interview for Tyne Tees Television." *Evening Standard* [Westminster] 28 Nov. 1974: *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*. Web. 20 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/102439>>.

Like her earlier messages, Thatcher continued to emphasize the importance of the dual roles women played as housewives and workers. Yet she does seem to more aggressively encourage women to run for office, noting that women perhaps had to sacrifice some aspect of domestic work in order to join political life. She also linked education to a political career, something she had not done in earlier speeches. While she encouraged women to pursue education commensurate to men in addition to partaking in politics, it is not until this speech that she admonished the fact that educated women were not pursuing political careers.

Even with her alleged desire to see more women in politics, Thatcher did not say she would help women get there. Upon obtaining the position of Conservative Party leader in 1975, several reporters asked Thatcher if she would provide more roles for women in her cabinet, to which she replied: "The first thing we have to do is to get more women into Parliament, and then we shall be less conspicuous."⁵⁶ Through artfully dodging the question, Thatcher emphasized her desire to see qualified people in her cabinet, which may or may not include women. The word conspicuous takes on two meanings here (although Thatcher may have only intended one): once more women became MPs, their gender would be less noticeable, and once more women became MPs, it would not be necessary to need to blatantly and intentionally include women in a cabinet, since they would naturally be included. Either way, Thatcher made it clear she would not concern herself with appointing women to her cabinet just for the sake of

⁵⁶Wood, David. "Press Conference After Winning Conservative Leadership." *The Times* 12 Feb. 1975: *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*. Web. 20 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/102452>>.

doing so. Sure enough, once she achieved the role of Prime Minister Thatcher did not appoint a single female to her cabinet.⁵⁷

Thatcher's rhetoric throughout the early 1970s maintained a similar message that she would not see a woman prime minister in her lifetime. However, her tone shifted from the general idea that a woman would not be prime minister to the idea that an under qualified person could not achieve this position. As a general group, women's lack of experience made them unqualified for higher positions. As an individual, anyone qualified – no matter his or her gender – could run for office. "I think it depends on who the person is. I don't think there will be a woman Prime Minister in my lifetime. And I don't think it depends so much on whether it's a man Prime Minister or a woman Prime Minister as whether that person is the right person for the job at that time. And it's very difficult to foresee what may happen many, many years ahead."⁵⁸

In the immediate two years before she became the first female head of government of the UK, Thatcher continued to stress the need for more female politicians.⁵⁹ In these later statements, however, she told reporters she would like to see more female politicians rather than explicitly encouraging women to run for office like she had done earlier. Most likely, her audience at the time influenced her statements. As she became more prominent, she talked to more reporters and made more public speeches, unlike her explicit speeches to women's groups earlier. These speeches were often campaign speeches, and thus included more pithy lines about female politicians

⁵⁷ Lovenduski, Joni. *Women and European Politics: Contemporary Feminism and Public Policy*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1986. Print. 214.

⁵⁸ Thatcher, Margaret. *Margaret Thatcher: In Her Own Words*. Ed. Iain Dale. London: Biteback, 2010. Print. 50-51.

⁵⁹ Between 1975-1977, Thatcher's speeches focused almost exclusively on policy issues, and therefore she did not discuss the roles of women too often in this time period. (margaretthatcher.org)

than her earlier speeches might have. In 1977, she mentioned that in China, it was unadvisable to marry politicians, but “Over here it seems women stand a better chance as politicians themselves.”⁶⁰ This phrase serves as a political comment, intended to elevate her personal status as a politician.

Yet Thatcher’s speeches in this time period did not exclusively shift away from mobilizing women to run for office. During an interview a few months later, she stressed the need for more women politicians: “No, it [the number of female politicians] hasn't changed since the thirties. It's absurd, when you think the number of women who have a really good training, so many more of them ought to come forward to offer themselves as candidates.”⁶¹ This continued with her messages in the late 1960s, where she encouraged exclusively educated women to pursue careers. During an interview a year later, she snapped at a reporter who implied that good-looking women were not necessarily intelligent. Thatcher retorted: "Most women are far more intelligent than people give them credit for."⁶² While the few speeches she gave in this time period did continue with her earlier message, the number of speeches where she encouraged women to seek political office decreased.

Thatcher’s encouragement of women to pursue politics was not the focus during her political rise as a MP, and later Conservative leader in the shadow cabinet. She focused, as most politicians do, on policy issues and the challenges facing Great Britain at the time. When she did tout the advancement of women in education and political

⁶⁰ "Mrs Thatcher Has It Taped!" *Finchley Times* [Borehamwood] 17 Nov. 1977: *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*. Web. 20 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103450>>.

⁶¹ Plomley, Roy. "Radio Interview for BBC Radio 4 Desert Island Discs." *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*. 1 Feb. 1978. Web. 20 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103509>>.

⁶² Hadley, Katherine. "My Face, My Figure, My Diet." *The Sun* 16 Mar. 1979: *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*. Web. 20 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103811>>.

fields, she generally did so while also promoting individual rights. Yet perhaps because her policies tended to be unfavorable toward women, researchers on Thatcher tend to exclude her as a proponent of women's mobilization. One biographer wrote: "In 1952 she preached a liberal feminist message, but by 1960 she had repudiated feminism, and begun to support a view which became characteristic of all her pronouncements on gender – the idea that other women should not be like her."⁶³ Thatcher's statements during the 1960s and 1970s do not outwardly reflect the idea that "other women should not be like her." They do, however, reflect the idea that other women should not be like other women. Each women should act as an individual and rise to success based on her own merit.

While Thatcher clearly opposed feminism as a label, her rhetoric during her ascent to power did not reflect this aversion. She did encourage women to remain housewives, but this was not unusual, and certainly not against women pursuing careers as well. The general societal view that women should remain housewives pervaded society; thus Thatcher's pronouncements on women at the time were in fact more progressive than many people in society.

3.2 Golda Meir

Serving as Prime Minister of Israel from 1969-1974, Golda Meir served the least number of years out of all three women. She had an abrupt and not entirely planned ascent to power. She went into retirement many times before becoming prime minister, notably after merging Mapai with the Labor Party (her future party), a few years before

⁶³ Webster, Wendy. *Not a Man to Match Her* London: The Women's Press Limited, 1990. 30.

obtaining the prime minister position.⁶⁴ Meir's pathway to head of state was markedly different than Thatcher's, who advanced more naturally into the position by slowly climbing up the ranks. Israel and the United Kingdom are very different countries, and were at different places during these women's rise to power.

The bulk of Meir's career focused on working to establish a homeland in Israel for the Jewish people. Born in Kiev in 1898, Meir immigrated with her family to Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1906 in search for economic opportunity.⁶⁵ It was in the United States that Meir became active in Zionism, and later decided to move to Israel and work on a kibbutz. Unlike Thatcher, who worked against the UK's statist approach in the post-World War II era, Meir had no society with which to work against. She worked for a Jewish homeland, and worked closely with the United States to establish a Jewish state. As a fundraiser, Meir's profession consisted of public speaking, and she was very good at her job. She raised 50 million dollars in funds from the U.S. for Israel, and as David Ben-Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israel remarked: "Someday when history will be written, it will be said that there was a Jewish woman who got the money which made the state possible."⁶⁶

In tandem with her job as a fundraiser, Meir worked for the Women's Labor Council and the Pioneer Women, where she worked with women laborers in Israel and spoke to people around the world about their importance.⁶⁷ These were the only women's groups Meir worked for throughout her career in politics, and she noted "I was attracted

⁶⁴ Steinberg 123.

⁶⁵ "Golda Meir." *Jewish Virtual Library*. The American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, 2012. Web. 20 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/biography/meir.html>>.

⁶⁶ Steinberg 124.

⁶⁷ Genovese 141.

to them not so much because they concerned women as such, but because I was very interested in the work they were doing, particularly in the agricultural training farms they set up for immigrant girls.”⁶⁸ This statement slightly contradicts itself, since Meir said that working with “immigrant girls” attracted her to the position, yet the fact that it was a women’s organization did not matter to her. This follows a pattern with most of Meir’s views on feminism: she was not a feminist for the sake of promoting women’s rights, but she promoted women’s rights inadvertently and sometimes explicitly because she believed in her cause. After she went on to say that she did not like radical feminists, she noted:

I have had very great regard for those energetic hardworking women within the ranks of the labor movement...who succeeded in equipping dozens of city-bred girls with the sort of theoretical knowledge and a sound practical training that made it possible for them to do their share (and often much more than their share) of the work going on in agricultural settlements throughout Palestine. That kind of constructive feminism really does women credit and matters much more than who sweeps the house or who sets the table.⁶⁹

Her aversion to radical feminism probably had to do with her view of it as unnecessary. She naturally worked to obtain equal rights for men and women, but she did not see the need to create any particular fuss around the issue. She noted several times that she never experienced any obstacles as a woman.

Yet, these statements also contrast with her many declarations that the working women had a huge burden that men simply did not feel. In her autobiography, she wrote that “...women who want and need a life outside as well as inside the home have a much, much harder time than men...the life of a working mother who lives without the constant

⁶⁸ Meir 113.

⁶⁹ Ibid 114.

presence and support of the father of her children is three times harder than that of any man I have ever met.”⁷⁰ And in a series of articles she wrote in 1930 called *The Ploughwoman*, she wrote about the struggle mothers’ face when choosing to work. “But there is a type of woman who cannot remain home for other reasons. In spite of the place which her children and her family take up in her life, her nature and being demand something more; she cannot divorce herself from a larger social life. She cannot let her children narrow her horizon. And for such a woman, there is no rest.”⁷¹ In a similar article published at the same time, Meir wrote: “This internal division, this double pull, this alternating feeling of unfulfilled duty – today toward her family, the next day toward her work – this is the burden of the working mother.”⁷² Meir wrote these article decades before Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*, which became groundbreaking for the feminist movement.⁷³ Meir’s views were very ahead of her time, and clearly resonated with feminist ideas. Yet she was not willing to embrace the label and had no tolerance for what she saw as radical feminism.

Internally, Meir identified the struggle women felt in their dual roles. Yet she did not preach about these divisions, nor did she acknowledge them, claiming often that she never faced any obstacles as a woman. And she also abhorred preferential treatment on the basis of her gender. Upon the establishment of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948,

⁷⁰ Ibid 115.

⁷¹ Ibid 116.

⁷² Meir, Golda, and Marie Syrkin. *Golda Meir Speaks Out*; London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973. Print. 45.

⁷³ The *Feminine Mystique* was published in 1963 based on research Friedan conducted after attending a class reunion at Smith College. She found most of her contemporaries were dissatisfied with their role as housewives. "American Writers: The Feminine Mystique." *C-Span American Writers*. National Cable Satellite Corporation, 2012. Web. 20 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.americanwriters.org/works/feminine.asp>>.

Ben-Gurion said that he wanted at least one woman in his cabinet, so Israel could serve as a beacon of democracy and equality throughout the Middle East. “It is necessary to have at least one woman in the provisional government...I say a woman in a Jewish government is a flag for the entire east...a woman in a Jewish government is a political flag for the entire Arab world.”⁷⁴ Yet Meir disliked this treatment,⁷⁵ and aside from personally writing about the burdens of motherhood and pursuing a career, never addressed this publicly.

Interestingly, Meir did face discrimination based on her gender. Under pressure from Ben-Gurion, she ran for mayor in Israel, “but failed to be elected; two representatives of religious parties on the town council voted against her because of her gender.”⁷⁶ Alternatively, kibbutzim sprung up around Israel at the time, and these egalitarian communities emphasized the importance of women’s as well as men’s labor. Meir loved kibbutz life and would have settled on a kibbutz if she did not feel compelled to involve herself politically.⁷⁷ Meir’s preoccupation with helping to establish the State of Israel fueled her aversion to feminism and her unwillingness to admit she had experienced setbacks because of her gender. Her speeches at this time focused on mobilizing workers for Israel and gaining support for a Jewish state. This took precedence over the sole advancement of women’s issues. In addition, advancing a socialist state inextricably advanced a woman’s career.

Meir’s speeches at the time thus focused on promoting the labor movement and Zionism. She believed firmly in the ideals of kibbutzim and spoke of the need for

⁷⁴ Steinberg 126.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid 128.

⁷⁷ Ibid 120.

equality in a Jewish state. In a speech on March 25, 1946 she spoke about her goal for Jewish workers: "...we can go on building upon the foundation laid by the labor movement and create a few Jewish societies built on the basis of cooperation, equality, and mutual aid."⁷⁸ Meir's speeches throughout this time period focused on egalitarianism among all Jews. In a similarly themed speech in 1950, she stressed the need for a homeland for all Jews: "I need a Jewish state for one thing only: that the gates of this state should be open without restriction to all Jews who understand what this state means for them and will want to come here in the wake of such understanding."⁷⁹

After her work as a fundraiser, Meir served as Minister of Labor and National Insurance in the Israeli government from 1949 – 1956. From 1956 – 1966, she served as the Foreign Minister in Israel. And from 1966 – 1968, she held the position of Secretary General for Mapai and then Labor Party, which she helped form.⁸⁰ She became the interim Prime Minister after Levi Eshkol passed away from poor health, and later assumed the full position.⁸¹ Unlike Thatcher, she did not have a period of time where she was essentially campaigning for the post of prime minister. But similar to Thatcher, her becoming prime minister was extremely circumstantial, based on the previous prime minister's poor health. The part of her rhetoric accessible in English reflects her true devotion to the cause of Zionism. Even with all the work she put into Zionism, and with all the sacrifices her and her peers made to the cause of establishing a Jewish state, she never saw herself as a martyr. In a speech in 1967, she spoke of the intense dedication Jews showed in their commitment to the State of Israel: "In my forty-six years in Israel I

⁷⁸ Meir and Syrkin 53.

⁷⁹ Ibid 82.

⁸⁰ Jewish Virtual Library

⁸¹ Steinberg 133.

have not known a man or woman in this group who thought of himself as a “giver” to the country or to the people or who felt that he had sacrificed himself.”⁸²

Meir’s views toward her work in establishing the State of Israel reflect her views toward women’s rights. No one should view him or herself as a martyr. In addition, someone who works hard will succeed. This proved true in Meir’s experiences. While she did encourage women to pursue careers, specifically to join the labor community in Israel, she did so within the context of encouraging every Jew to join the labor force. Unlike Thatcher, Meir’s rhetoric toward women was less explicit, yet still just as encouraging. However, she involved herself more directly in specifically advancing women’s groups. Political differences account for the different ways Meir and Thatcher advocated for women’s rights. Thatcher’s emphasis on individualism and promoting a liberal society differed greatly from Meir’s focus on an egalitarian, communal society. Thatcher subsequently did not promote women’s groups, while Meir more actively worked with promoting kibbutz life.

Yet Meir’s aversion to radical feminism came from her own triumphs in a male dominated world. Her assertions that she never faced any obstacles as a woman were simply not true, but she did not let these obstacles stop her from succeeding. So, too, other women would be able to overcome these obstacles if they tried hard enough. Meir drew on personal experience far more than Thatcher.

⁸² Meir and Syrkin 165.

3.3 Indira Gandhi

Serving as the Prime Minister of India from 1966-1977 and 1980-1984, Gandhi was the first of the three women to become prime minister, and the only one who served nonconsecutive terms. Gandhi's status as the daughter of Nehru complicates her relationship with her gender. Not only did she have to overcome negative characteristics associated with her gender, but she dealt with living in the shadow of her father. Of course, being Nehru's daughter had its many advantages. She most likely would have come nowhere near obtaining the status of prime minister if she had been born into a different family. Like Thatcher and Meir, circumstantial factors contributed to Gandhi's rise to power.

Gandhi did not often discuss her gender, but she did involve herself in women's issues before becoming prime minister. Before her election as Prime Minister, she became active in the organizational wing of the Congress party, working in part in the Women's Department.⁸³ In 1956, Gandhi had an active role in setting up the Congress Party's Women's Section.⁸⁴ Unsurprisingly, a lot of her involvement stemmed from her father. As an only child, Gandhi naturally stepped into the political light. And, as a female, Gandhi naturally helped head the Women's section of the Congress Party. She often tried to organize women to involve themselves in politics.⁸⁵ Although rhetorically Gandhi may have attempted to separate her political success from her gender, Gandhi did involve herself in women's organizations.

⁸³ Genovese 109.

⁸⁴ Norman 30.

⁸⁵ Ibid 57.

Unlike in the case of Meir, the political parties in India paid substantial attention to Gandhi's gender before she became prime minister, hoping to use her for political gain. Because she was a female, other political leaders in India saw Gandhi as weak and hoped to use her as a puppet once elected. "Congress President Kamaraj orchestrated Mrs. Gandhi's selection as prime minister because he perceived her to be weak enough that he and the other regional party bosses could control her, and yet strong enough to beat Desai [her political opponent] in a party election because of the high regard for her father...a woman would be an ideal tool for the Syndicate..."⁸⁶ External factors – her upbringing as the daughter of Nehru, politicians' desires to control her – thus shaped Gandhi's perception of her gender more than it did for Meir or Thatcher.

Even though men surrounded Gandhi during her upbringing, she still had a female role model as a child. Several books on Gandhi mention her interest in Joan of Arc. In her own accounts through her letters she wrote to her friend Dorothy Norman, in 1952 she wrote: "At about eight or nine I was taken to France; Jeanne d'Arc became a great heroine of mine. She was one of the first people I read about with enthusiasm."⁸⁷ Another historian recounts India's comparison of herself to Joan of Arc: "Indira developed a fascination for Joan of Arc, telling her aunt, "Some day I am going to lead my people to freedom just as Joan of Arc did!"⁸⁸ Gandhi's linking of herself to Joan of Arc presents a nice model for historians to assess Gandhi. As one writer said: "The Indian people were her children; members of her family were the only people capable of leading them."⁸⁹ Certainly, Gandhi's actions as prime minister allow for this type of interpretation; after

⁸⁶ Genovese 110.

⁸⁷ Norman 12.

⁸⁸ Genovese 107.

⁸⁹ Ibid 131.

all, she declared a state of emergency in 1975,⁹⁰ effectively bolstering herself up to divine status.

Perhaps this transcendental attitude caused Gandhi to remove herself from the collective feminist cause. More likely, though, like Meir, her preoccupation with establishing an Indian state took precedence over her fight for women's rights. Gandhi's father became prime minister when India gained independence from Great Britain in 1947.⁹¹ At this time, Gandhi had been swept up in the call for Indian independence since she was born in 1917.⁹² In 1942, the British imprisoned her for 8 months on grounds of treason.⁹³ Thus by 1947 she was already well immersed in politics, and by 1966, when she first assumed the position of prime minister, she had held several cabinet positions in her father's office. On February 2, 1959 Gandhi was elected President of the Indian National Congress.⁹⁴

Gandhi's advocacy for women's rights began with her help in establishing the Congress Party's Women's Section. In 1956, she wrote in a letter: "It is because of this that I am taking a much more active part in politics. I have to do a great deal of touring in order to set up the Congress Party Women's Section, and am on numerous important committees."⁹⁵ Gandhi spent a great deal of time throughout the 1950s helping organize women. She wrote to Norman in 1959, irritable that women had organized around the communist cause but had not mobilized for the Indian cause: "The women, whom I have

⁹⁰ USA. Library of Congress. *India: The Rise of Indira Gandhi*. 1995. Web. 20 Nov. 2012. <[http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+in0029\)>](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+in0029)>).

⁹¹ Jayakar 99.

⁹² "Indira Gandhi." *About Indira Gandhi*. Web. 20 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.indiragandhi.com/aboutindiragandhi.htm>>.

⁹³ Jayakar 90.

⁹⁴ *Ibid* 111.

⁹⁵ Norman 30.

been trying to organize for years, had always refused to come into politics. Now they are out in the field.”⁹⁶ During this time period, Gandhi working extensively with Muslims in refugee camps. She devoted her days to improving conditions, noting: “I used to go at 5:00 in the morning and come back long after dark.”⁹⁷ Once appointed president in 1959, she “traveled relentlessly, visiting remote parts of the country that had never before received a VIP...she talked to women, asked about child health and welfare, inquired after the crafts of the region...”⁹⁸

Gandhi’s actions throughout her ascent to power clearly reflect a desire to mobilize women. She involved herself in more women’s mobilization groups than Thatcher or Meir, yet avoided calling herself a feminist to the same extent. Gandhi, like Meir, did not see the purpose of feminism. Gandhi saw her own success as a woman, and also noted that “Given the opportunity to develop, capable Indian women have come to the top at once.”⁹⁹ Interestingly, Gandhi did not see a link between feminism and the mobilization of women. Perhaps like Meir, she tended to associate feminism with radicalism, and therefore separated the label from whatever women’s advocacy she became involved in.

Like Meir, Gandhi felt guilty about her inability to fully devote her time to her children. She noted that her main problem in office was how to balance her political duties with tending to her children, and “stressed that motherhood was the most important part of her life.”¹⁰⁰ At another point, she went into more detail: “To a woman,

⁹⁶ Ibid 57.

⁹⁷ Jayakar 101.

⁹⁸ Ibid 112.

⁹⁹ Norman 20.

¹⁰⁰ Genovese 127.

motherhood is the highest fulfillment...To bring a new being into this world, to see its perfection and to dream of its future greatness is the most moving of all experiences and fills one with wonder and exaltation.”¹⁰¹ All three females recognized the importance of housewives, Gandhi from a deeply personal place.

Gandhi’s letters to Norman before she became prime minister reflect her desire to see more women involved in politics, and her grassroots efforts show her personal investment in mobilizing women to participate. She did not speak about women’s mobilization to the same extent Thatcher did, nor did she discuss the obstacles women faced to the extent Meir did. Yet Gandhi actively worked more than the other leaders for women’s organizations.

¹⁰¹ Malhotra, Inder. *Indira Gandhi: A Personal and Political Biography*. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1989. Print. 55.

Chapter 4: Comparative study

4.1 Thatcher's view of Meir and Gandhi

Although Thatcher's policies sharply contrasted with the policies of Meir and Gandhi, she showed great admiration when asked about both leaders. She noted her admiration came both from her personal affinity for both women and also based on the fact they were women. She saw Meir as paving the way for female prime ministers. In a 1978 interview, she said: "She was a tremendous Prime Minister, at a time when her country was in great trouble...It was nothing after that for a woman to become Prime Minister."¹⁰² She even noted that if she was born in the same time period as Meir (Meir was born in 1898), she might have been a non-militant suffragette.¹⁰³

She also used Meir as an example of a successful female politician. When asked in an interview in 1979, just days before the election, how her gender would factor into her chances of winning, she used Meir as a positive example: "And then of course if you look at other countries, well, my goodness me, Golda Meir saw Israel through one of the most difficult periods in her history. She didn't falter, she was marvellous."¹⁰⁴ Thatcher's rhetoric regarding Meir extends beyond admiring her as a person, and draws on their shared experiences as females.

Gandhi's controversial declaration of a state of emergency colored Thatcher's view of her. Yet, Thatcher still referenced Gandhi as a positive female politician,

¹⁰² Rowe, Margaret. "Interview for Barnet Press." *Barnet Press* [Finchley] 15 Sept. 1978: *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*. Web. 21 Nov. 2012. <<http://margaretthatcher.org/document/103755>>.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Murphy, Peter. "Radio Interview for London Broadcasting." *London Broadcasting Company* 28 Apr. 1979: *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*. Web. 21 Nov. 2012. <<http://margaretthatcher.org/document/104051>>.

probably due to her gender. In 1975, she used Gandhi as an example to show that aversion to women prime ministers was fading around the world. “You couldn’t have had a country less likely to have a woman Prime Minister than India and yet they have had a most successful one for a long time - [Indira Gandhi] she is a delightful person.”¹⁰⁵ A few weeks later, she used Gandhi as an example to refute claims that Thatcher’s gender would disable her from winning the election: “It seems to me that Mrs. Gandhi 's election in India ensured the election of her party for a very long period in office.”¹⁰⁶

She later mentioned Gandhi in her autobiography *The Path to Power*. While she condemned Gandhi’s use of the state of emergency, she praised her as an individual. “But in spite of everything I found myself liking Mrs. Gandhi herself. Perhaps I naturally sympathised with a woman politician faced with the huge strains and difficulties of governing a country as vast as India.”¹⁰⁷ Thatcher bases her sympathy for Gandhi off the hardships Gandhi faces as a woman. This strays from Thatcher’s rhetoric during the time, but perhaps Thatcher felt more comfortable making this statement in her book rather than publicly.

Aside from Thatcher’s references to Meir and Gandhi, reporters compared Thatcher to the two women. The comparisons were generally based off of nothing more than the fact that these women had all attained the highest position in their respective governments. Shortly after Thatcher referred to Gandhi in her speech in 1975, a reporter

¹⁰⁵ Haviland, Julian. "TV Interview for ITN First Report." *First Report* 28 Jan. 1975: *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*. Web. 21 Nov. 2012. <<http://margaretthatcher.org/document/102597>>.

¹⁰⁶ Thatcher, Margaret. *Margaret Thatcher: In Her Own Words*. Ed. Iain Dale. London: Biteback, 2010. Print. 58.

¹⁰⁷ Thatcher, Margaret. *The Path to Power*. 385-86. *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*. Web. 21 Nov. 2012. <<http://margaretthatcher.org/document/110923>>.

asked her: “Mrs. Thatcher do you regard yourself as a, as a Mrs. Gandhi?” To which Thatcher retorted: “No. I regard myself as Margaret Thatcher.”¹⁰⁸ Despite Thatcher’s occasional praising of the two women, she never explicitly compared herself to them, or allowed others to make explicit comparisons of her and the other women.

4.2 Comparison of the leaders’ rhetoric and actions

Thatcher, Meir, and Gandhi all identified with their gender in different ways and had different ways in which they asked women to mobilize. Their statements did not necessarily align with their policies, although their political outlook certainly shaped their rhetoric, as did their personality and leadership styles. Blema Steinberg in her comparison of the three leaders’ personality and leadership style found that “Indira Gandhi was motivated primarily by power and pragmatism, Golda Meir by ideology and pragmatism, and Margaret Thatcher by ideology and power.”¹⁰⁹ Ideology played a part in each leader’s outlook on the world, even if Gandhi scored lower in that section. Thatcher’s passion for individuality, Meir’s passion for a Jewish state, and Gandhi’s passion for India governed their actions and rhetoric.

Thatcher called for women to run for office far more than her right-leaning policies, which tout individualism, would suggest. However she did so within the context of calling each individual woman to run for office, or to vote. Her ideology governed her policies. Similarly, Meir did not embrace feminism even though her left-leaning policies might have suggested otherwise. Rather, her political outlook shaped her view toward

¹⁰⁸ Dale 59.

¹⁰⁹ Steinberg 309.

women's mobilization. Women should mobilize because everyone should mobilize, and women should obtain equality because everyone should be equal. Gandhi's actions and rhetoric reflect Meir's more than Thatcher's, but also remain distinct. Gandhi's sense of her own importance in leading the Indian people pervaded everything she did. While she had passion for her country like Meir, her belief in her own power trumped that passion.

Studying the speeches, statements, and interviews of these three women leaders provides a window into the nuanced view each woman had in relation to the women's movement. Thatcher remained consistent in her rhetoric related to mobilizing women, which suggests that she held genuine, deep-rooted beliefs in her desire to see more women in politics. Meir's policies also aligned with her speeches, which focused on creating an egalitarian Jewish State for men and women. Gandhi actively pursued helping women's movements and other marginalized groups, like Muslims. Yet Gandhi opposed feminism as a label just as vehemently as Thatcher and Meir. Ultimately, their statements or actions before office show that they all cared about women's advancement in society. So why did their actions not reflect this? How come once each woman obtained power she did not actively encourage women to vote or pursue higher office?

Firstly, none of these women promised to actively advance women's roles while in office. While each woman expressed the desire to see more women in politics – or in Meir and Gandhi's case, worked with women organizations before they became prime minister – none promised to explicitly address the issue while in government. Secondly, each woman's policy objectives took precedent over her desire to see more women in politics. Thatcher was far more passionate about changing the economic climate in the UK and restoring the country back to greatness. Meir's concerns involved creating a

sustainable Jewish State, and Gandhi cared about unilaterally helping the Indian people. These women's disassociation with their gender did not conflict with their desire to see more women in the political realm. Additionally, their repudiation of feminism did not actually mean they did not have feminist ideas. In reality, like most politicians, these women cared far more about their policy objectives than about the feminist movement. Additionally, each woman saw her success as proof that other women could obtain higher up political positions. Gandhi's egalitarian upbringing and Meir's firm egalitarian outlook contributed to this view: they had made it to the top, so could other women. Thatcher's own views on individual accomplishments contributed to her view. Although none of the leaders explicitly mentioned that their own success provided a pathway for other women, their views toward feminism and mobilizing women to vote or pursue office reflect this belief.

As Steinberg noted, each woman possessed a strong dominant character trait. She quoted a passage from Medzini's *The Proud Jewess*, stating: "Because of the fact that she [Meir] had no doubts about the justness of her ways and the means needed to reach them, she became a dogmatic woman characterized by a lack of patience for ideas that did not match her positions, and she expressed her views with a sense of self-righteousness that became one of her trademarks in Israel. Anyone who opposed her on her way wasn't 'one of ours.'"¹¹⁰ Although written about Meir, the same statement equally applies to Thatcher and Gandhi. The dominant character trait also contributed to their outlook on feminism. Since each woman transcended her gender by becoming prime minister, she did not see a

¹¹⁰ Ibid 303.

need for the feminist movement, even if she held some feminist sentiments. Their stubbornness toward feminism coincides with their stubbornness toward policies.

Fierce, genuine belief in their respective views binds these women together and makes their rhetoric so enticing to study. None of these women used their gender as a means to get elected. When they mentioned gender, they often did so within the context of interviewers asking them about it.

Chapter 5: Looking ahead

5.1 Tzipi Livni

In 2009, Tzipi Livni almost became the second female Prime Minister of Israel, but her party was unable to form a coalition. The election went to Benjamin Netanyahu, head of the right-leaning Likud Party, which won 27 seats compared to 28 for Livni's party called Kadima.¹¹¹ Unlike Thatcher, Meir, and Gandhi, Livni intentionally used her gender during the campaign in an attempt to win the election.

Livni's political career began in 1999 when she was elected to the Knesset (Israel's parliament) as a member of the Likud Party.¹¹² She held various minor positions for the next few years, and "made efforts to achieve a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict."¹¹³ She worked with Ariel Sharon to form the Kadima Party in 2005, and he appointed her as Foreign Minister. Livni is the second woman to hold this post after Meir.¹¹⁴

Aside from similarities in their Foreign Minister post, Livni and Meir had very different backgrounds and outlooks on increasing women participation. Born in Tel Aviv in 1958 to right-wing Zionist parents, Livni came from a politically active family. Her father served as a member in the Knesset under the Likud Party from 1974-1984.¹¹⁵ Unlike Meir who embraced Zionism somewhat despite her parents, Livni followed in the footsteps of her activist parents. Livni's relation with Israel was markedly different than

¹¹¹ Asher and Shamir 3.

¹¹² Finkel, Lior. "The Role of Women in Israeli-Palestinian Peace Negotiations." *The Atkin Paper Series* (2012): Print. 18.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ "Tzipi Livni." *Jewish Virtual Library*. American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, 2012. Web. 20 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/TLivni.html>>.

Meir's relationship. Not having to focus on the establishment of a state, Livni focused on peace talks with Palestinians. In 2007, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert appointed Livni to lead the Israeli delegation to the negotiations with Palestinians.¹¹⁶ Livni argued for the inclusion of women in the peace talks since women had an active role in politics just as men did.¹¹⁷ Like Meir, she stated that women's rights were not her driving force for entering politics, but "I did act to increase the level of representation of women on the boards of financial companies and to gain equal pay for female government employees."¹¹⁸

The elections in Israel in 2009 and 1969 were very different, as were the parties Meir and Livni affiliated with. In 1969, the left-leaning Labor Party remained the dominant party in the Israeli parliament. In 2009, Kadima was still newly formed. Established by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, the Kadima party broke away from the Likud Party, with a special focus on foreign policy initiatives. As Sharon stated, the platform called for "maximum security and assuring that Israel be a Jewish national home and that another state that shall arise be demilitarized, with terrorists disarmed."¹¹⁹

Even though Livni and Meir represent female leaders from the same country who were heads of their respective parties, their differences far outweigh their similarities. Meir came to power at a time when Israel was only 20 years old, and had just doubled in size after the 1967 war. She actively helped establish the State of Israel, even signing

¹¹⁶ Finkel 3.

¹¹⁷ Ibid 9.

¹¹⁸ Ibid 20.

¹¹⁹ Krusch, David. "Kadima Party." *Jewish Virtual Library*. American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, 22 Nov. 2005. Web. 20 Nov. 2012.
<<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Politics/sharonnewparty.html>>.

Israel's declaration of independence.¹²⁰ Additionally, Meir became prime minister circumstantially after the previous prime minister had fallen ill, whereas Livni had to actively campaign for the position.

Gender issues permeated the 2009 elections in Israel. As one book on the elections said: "In the election campaign of 2009, the issue of gender equality was not on the public agenda from the outset. However, the fact that a woman was one of the candidates for prime minister and that the election campaign was highly personalized, directed the debate to the qualities of the rivals, and unintentionally caused the issue of gender to enter the discourse and become part of the campaign."¹²¹ Attacks on Livni's gender from the Labor and Likud Parties forced Livni to associate with her gender. Meir did not experience the same lashings from the other parties in Israel. Additionally, the increasing importance of media in the 2009 election brought more players into the election. "The gender campaign which they [Kadima] initiated came about as a response to the wave created by the Internet in which women conveyed angry messages to one another about the disparaging attitude to Livni and the campaign managers' demand to respond."¹²² Perhaps the higher expectations of the status of women in 2009 caused women to mobilize around Livni's campaign.

Meir did not use her gender as a political campaign tactic in the way Livni did, even when it might have benefited her.¹²³ While Meir seemed to transcend her gender in many ways, Livni used it as a campaign tactic. Additionally, Thatcher and Gandhi did not explicitly use their gender as a campaign strategy. While Thatcher made pithy comments

¹²⁰ Genovese 145.

¹²¹ Asher and Shamir 186.

¹²² Ibid 169.

¹²³ See page 28. Meir did not want Ben-Gurion to include her in his cabinet solely based on her gender.

during her ascent to power (“If you want anything said, ask a man. If you want anything done, ask a woman.”),¹²⁴ she did not court people’s votes based on her gender, she did so based on her merit. The Indian Syndicate incorrectly assumed they could manipulate Gandhi because she was a woman, but she did not actively endorse this stereotype, nor did she run as a female candidate.

While the general outlook of these three major women leaders in the 1960s and 1970s was anti the feminist label, a careful study of their speeches, letters, and actions toward women’s movements before they became prime minister shows that these women in charge were not afraid to encourage women to run for office. Thatcher, Meir, and Gandhi noted that gender and feminism had nothing to do with their own successes, yet actively encouraged women to pursue politics in some capacity. A brief glimpse at Livni reveals that gender issues played a larger overt role in her election than for the elections of Thatcher, Meir, or Gandhi.

5.2 Areas for further study

This paper presents a comparison between Thatcher, Meir, and Gandhi’s identification with feminism and promotion of women’s participation before they obtained office. Hopefully this paper can open up discourse on these women’s shifting rhetoric and tone throughout their career. Did their tones remain consistent? Is there a clear difference in tone from their first years in office to their later years? Is there a noticeable difference between pre-election rhetoric and their rhetoric once in office?

¹²⁴ Dale 25.

While this paper offers a brief section on Livni's campaign tactics in the 2009 election, it would be interesting to look at her earlier rhetoric and outlook throughout her political career. Like Thatcher, did she encourage women to pursue political office? Or did she completely invest herself in the goal of a Jewish State like Meir? How did feminism in the modern period affect Livni's statements? Aside from looking at Livni, one could compare Thatcher, Meir and Gandhi to three modern day leaders who ran for political office. How has rhetoric changed? Has the emergence of sound bites in media allowed for women to talk about gender more or less? Has associating or disassociating with gender affected a specific woman's chances of winning the election?

Additionally, one could look at modern politicians who did achieve the status of prime minister and compare their pre-election rhetoric with their actions in office. Did their pronouncements on gender and encouraging women to vote correspond with their actions toward women while in office? Have current female leaders focused on women's issues more than Thatcher, Meir, and Gandhi? If so, what factors contribute to this? The study of women political leaders – and specifically their statements about their gender and women's movements before obtaining office – remains a relatively new field. The field constantly changes as more and more women gain higher office.

Looking just at Livni as a case study shows that modern politics does not unequivocally shy away from the gender question. As more and more women obtain the highest positions, it will be interesting to note how they present themselves as women and how they relate to their female constituents. While Thatcher, Meir, and Gandhi were remarkable women who served as role models for many females, they are still the only

female heads to serve their countries. It will be fascinating to see how the next female prime minister in one of these countries compares to these giants among leaders.

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