

Zion of Their Own Hebrew Women's Nationalist Writing

By

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Abstract

This dissertation is a critical exploration of the makings, ethics and politics of Zionist women's Zionism. While the large and diverse body of scholarship on gender and the Zionist project posit women among the marginalized Others of the masculine Zionist subject, I investigate the Zionist imaginary forged in the writings of Zionist women who never accepted the assumption that Zionism is, in essence, a masculine project, and who did, in writing, claim Zionism their own, remolding it in response to women's complicated stance at the junction of Judaism, Zionism and modernity.

Reading prose by Hemda Ben-Yehuda, Sara Azaryahu, Rivka Alper, Neḥama Poḥatchevsky, and Dvora Baron, I trace the ways women writers of the first half of the 20th century feminize the grand narratives of Zionism. These women authors, I argue, transpose Zionism into the realm of "women's issues," and weave its tenets with women's gendered traumas, their projects of liberation and equality, and their fraught relations with work, writing and love.

This interrogation of the makings of women's nationalism enables me to provide a critique of the ethics and politics embedded in women's Zionist visions. Placing the textual production of Zionist Ashkenazi women within the context of global relations of power, I glean women's particular investments in the Zionist racial, ethnic and national hierarchies, and highlight the ways in which the constitution of the Zionist feminine subject is implicated in the demarcation of the non-Western Other. Zionist women's Zionism, I propose, is a position fraught by the one-sided love for the nation, colonial

anxieties and desires, and restless Sisyphean efforts of re-conceptualization and re-narration.

A note on Translation and Transliteration

The translations of literature and theory excerpts from Hebrew to English are by me unless otherwise indicated in the footnotes. The translations of the quotations from the Bible are by Jewish Publication Society (1985) unless otherwise noted. The transliteration of Hebrew is based on the transliteration style of the Library of Congress with minor modifications. For example, I transliterated the consonant *tzadik* as *tz*, because several key terms used in this dissertation are commonly spelled in this way. Proper names and well-known terms are spelled according to common English usage.

CHAPTER I

Introduction: Zionist Women's Zionism: Makings, Ethics and Politics

The last three decades have seen the emergence of several strands of critique directed at the Zionist project. Post-Zionist historians have highlighted the devastating effects Zionism had had on the Arab inhabitants of Palestine.¹ In the evolving field of Mizrahi studies, scholars have exposed the oppression of Jews of Middle-Eastern and North-African descent by the Zionist Ashkenazi hegemony.² And gender studies scholars have fleshed out the investment of mainstream Zionism in the construction of masculinity and the consequent marginalization of Zionist women.³ While the research of gender and women in Zionism was undoubtedly nourished by the same scholarly climate that fostered the Post-Zionist and Mizrahi critiques, the theoretical and political dialogue

¹ I refer here to the work the group called The New Historians, who, as of the late 1980s, have been challenging the dominant narratives in Israeli society regarding the establishment of the State of Israel. See, for example, Benny Morris' *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949* and Ilan Pappé's *Britain and Arab-Israeli Conflict*.

² In contemporary Hebrew the term Ashkenazi/Ashkenazim refers to Jews who have immigrated to Israel from Europe and the term Mizrahi/Mizrahim refers to Jews of Middle Eastern and North African descent. Recently several Post-Zionist critics have proposed to name the latter communities Arab-Jews, but this term has been very controversial among the Israeli Mizrahim. I understand and identify with the politics signified by the term Arab-Jews, i.e., with the notion that the Zionist Ashkenazi hegemony is to a large extent responsible for the opposition between Jews and Arabs who have lived side by side in the Middle-East and North-Africa before the establishment of Israel. However, for the sake of clarity I will use the term Mizrahim in this dissertation. For an example of Mizrahi critique, see Ella Shohat's *Israeli Cinema: East West and the Politics of Representation and Taboo Memories: Diasporic Voices*, Yehuda Shehav's *Ha-Yehudim ha-'Aravim: leumiyut, dat, etniyut* (The Arab-Jews: Nationality, Religion, Ethnicity), and Amiel Alcalay's *After Jews and Arabs: Remaking Levantine Culture*.

³ Notable in this context is the work of scholars such as Daniel Boyarin and Michael Gluzman who have highlighted the inter-connection between Zionism and modern masculinity, and the work of feminist scholars such as Deborah Bernstein, Billie Melman, Yaffa Berlovitz, Tamar Hess and Margalit Shilo who have offered fascinating analyses of the Zionist feminine experience. The work of most of these scholars will be thoroughly discussed in the following pages of this introduction.

between gender studies and the other critical strands has been tenuous. This dissertation proposes to contribute to the cultivation of such a dialogue through an interrogation of the nationalist imaginary of Zionist Ashkenazi women.

Much of the recent critique of Zionism has been geared toward the diversification of the Zionist story by recovering of the voices of the oppressed, and bringing into the collective consciousness narratives that were silenced by the Zionist “melting pot.”⁴ In women’s studies, the gesture of “voicing the silenced” has a long trajectory. “The emergence of feminist literary study,” as Lillian S. Robinson argues, “has been characterized, at the base, by scholarship devoted to the discovery, republication, and reappraisal of lost and undervalued writers and their work” (87). From Virginia Woolf’s revelation of the 17th and 18th century predecessors of Jane Austen and George Elliot (“A room” 75-102), to the work of feminist scholars such as Patricia Meyer Spacks (*The Female Imagination*), Ellen Moers (*Literary Women*), Louise Bernikow (*The World Split Open*), and Elaine Showalter (*Literature of Their Own*), a considerable amount of feminist intellectual energy has been invested in an attempt to recover a women’s literary tradition by foregrounding the work of minor women writers.

In the context of the critical study of Zionism, the gesture of voicing the silenced was particularly meaningful for feminist historians, sociologists and literary scholars seeking to refute the Zionist “myth of gender equality,”⁵ by conjuring early Zionist women’s voices of distress and resistance. The study of Hebrew women’s prose of the

⁴ Among such projects we may count Amiel Alcalay’s study, *After Jews and Arabs: Remaking Levantine Culture*, that charts the cultural production of Middle-Eastern and North-African Jews and the anthology, *Keys to the Garden*, that brings together a wide array of Mizrahi voices. We may also note projects such as Yaffa Berlovitz’ anthology, *She-ani adamah ve-adam* (Tender Rib), that introduces women’s prose of the pre-state period and Tamar Hess’ dissertation on Zionist women’s autobiography.

⁵ According to this myth, which was dominant up until the Israeli feminist revival in the 1970s, women enjoy full equality in the Zionist society, since they are eligible to vote and serve in the army.

pre-state period has been a particularly productive site for the project of recovering women's voices, for this body of writing has a unique trajectory of muteness and rediscovery in the Zionist cultural memory. While the first half of the 20th century featured the evolution of a substantive corpus of prose written by Ashkenazi Zionist women, only in the last decade and a half, due to the pioneering work of feminist scholars such as Yaffa Berlovitz, Tamar Hess and Orly Lubin, has the readership of Hebrew literature begun to grasp the extent and significance of this body of writing. If up until the late 1990s Dvora Baron was considered the only major female prose writer active in of the pre-state period, we now recognize the work of fiction writers such as H̄emda Ben-Yehuda, Neḥama Poḥatchevsky, Elisheva Biḥovsky, Rivka Alper, Pnina Kaspi, and Shoshana Shababo, the autobiographical writings of figures such as Rachel Yanait Ben-Tzvi, Henya Pekleman and Sara Azaryahu, and the essayistic and critical writings of Rachel Katzanelson, H̄ava Shapiro and Hanna Tahon.

Insofar as it sheds light on the several literary texts, which up to now have received little or no attention from the readership of Hebrew literature, this dissertation participates in the project of voicing unheard women-writers. However, a major thrust of this project is resisting the distortion the notion of "voicing the silenced" has produced in the scholarship on Zionist women. In the current scholarship on women and Zionism, I argue, the category of gender, construed as a site of predicament and resistance, has overshadowed other aspects of the position of Zionist Ashkenazi women within the Zionist project: In particular, women's own investment in the Zionist project and in the relations of power that undergird it.

If I were to frame Zionist women's writing of the pre-state period, I would characterize it as Zionist feminist literature. By this I mean that by and large this corpus has a double thematic focus: Women's predicament within the patriarchal Zionist social structure *and* women's visions of Zionism. Largely, however, the feminist scholarship concerning early Zionist women has focused on the first dimension while leaving the second dimension, i.e., Zionist women's Zionism, under-investigated. That is to say, foregrounding the gendered predicament of Zionist women and the ways in which their prose expresses their frustration and protest, the feminist scholarship on Hebrew women's writing has rarely interrogated women's desire and efforts to constitute themselves as proper subjects of the nation and to determine the relevance of the Zionist project to their gendered experience as women. To be clear, it is not that scholars do not recognize the fact that Zionist women were Zionists, but rather that this facet of their experience and imagination does not seem to arouse much analytical curiosity. Rather, Zionist women's Zionism is mostly dismissed as superficial cover-up for something more interesting, calling upon the critical thinker to dig through it in order to explore the intriguing world of the Other.

This dissertation proposes to fill the scholarly lacuna concerning Zionist women's Zionism by interrogating the nationalist visions furnished in Ashkenazi women's prose of the first half of the 20th century. My work intertwines two analytical threads:

The first thread traces the makings of Zionist women's Zionism, that is, the ways in which women authors transpose the Zionist grand narratives and core dilemmas into the realm of "women's issues." At a time during which the nation serves as a platform for contemplation of a new Jewish/Hebrew identity, and in which the cultural and social

meanings of womanhood are undergoing significant changes with the advent of feminism, Zionist women writers, I contend, strive to connect between the projects of the New Jew and that of the New Woman. Hebrew women's prose features the strains of making this connection. My analyses of the writings of Hemda Ben-Yehuda, Sara Azaryahu, Rivka Alper, Neḥama Poḥatchevsky and Dvora Baron demonstrate how female authors weave the tenets of Zionism with women's gendered traumas, their projects of liberation and equality, and their fraught relations with work, writing and love.

The second thread of my analysis is an interrogation of the ethics and politics of Zionist women's Zionism, that is, of the relations between the Zionist self and its ethnic and national Others as set up by Hebrew women's texts. That is to say, at the same time as it probes the intricacies of Zionist women's Zionism, this dissertation also places it on the political map of the ethnic, racial and national power-relations produced by Zionism. Questions about Zionism, I presuppose, should be inextricably bound with questions about what Zionism does to those marked as its Others. The study of gender should not obscure other socio-political hierarchies, but rather enrich and complicate our critical perspective. My inquiry into Hebrew women's writing would show how substantially their appropriations and revisions of Zionism rely on gestures of demarcation, exoticization, orientalizing and othering of Arabs, Bedouins and Mizraḥim. Thus, I underscore, Zionist women's Zionism is not an ethical alternative to mainstream Zionism, but an expansion of its domain.

I see the two foci of my exploration as complementary parts of the same move: complicating the story of Zionist Ashkenazi women by including in it their nationalist

desires *and* their frustrations, their privilege *and* their disadvantage, their Westernness *and* their sense of foreignness in the Zionist space, their whiteness *and* their strangeness.

The following pages of this introduction delineate the major directions the study of gender, women and Zionism has taken in the last three of decades, and highlight what I see as the blind spots in the current stage of the research. I also include in this introductory chapter a few close readings of textual instances that encapsulate some dilemmas facing the feminist reader of Hebrew women's nationalist writings. The chapter is organized so that my close readings are in dialogue with the more conceptual discussions, but not organically situated within them. This does not mean to confuse the reader, but rather to signal the type of fluid relations between past and present, theory and literature, politics and poetics that are, in my mind, the markers of feminist reading.

* * *

And holding sick Brura's hand, she mumbled sadly: "my mother over there is weak and ill, and I have left her with people who cannot take care of her adequately. How could I have committed such a sin?" – "A sin? What sin, Tamara?" asked Brura in her low voice – "on the contrary, we atone for the sins of our parents, who did not answer the call and did not salvage the Land in time" . . . And with her coarse hand Tamara held the long and lean fingers of her friend, squeezed them tightly, and gave them a long loving kiss. "I love, love you, Brura" – her warm lips mumbled, and she felt a wonderful stream going through her body and the whole world was filled with love. In such moments she forgot that there was sadness in her, that there were longings for her home, for her mother, longings for something distant, unattainable and nameless. At that moment she knew that it was good for her in the commune [*kvutzah*], and there was no corner in the world warmer than this one. Just a little bit of love and goodwill, and one could overcome all doubts and desperation. (Pohatchevsky, "Be-tzel ha-kvutzah" 56)⁶

"הנה אמי שם גם היא חלשה וחולה, ואני עזבתי על ידי אלה, ובהרימה את ראשה ובהחזיקה ביד החולה היא ממלמלת מתוך תוגה: "את החטא הזה? – את החטא, תמרה?" – שואלת שאינם מסוגלים לטפל בה כראוי, איך יכולתי לעשות את העול הזה, את החטא הזה? ברורה בקולה הרפה – "להפך, והלא אנו מכפרים על חטאיהם של הורינו, אשר לא נענו לקריאה ולא הלכו בעוד מועד לגאול את הארץ..."

בידה הגסה אחזה את אצבעות חברתה הדקות והארוכות, לחצה אותן בחזקה, גחנה אליהן ונשקה להן נשיקה ארוכה, לבבית. "אני אוהבת, אוהבת אותך, ברורה" – מלמלו שפתייה החמות וזרם נפלא חשה עובר בגופה וכל העולם נמלא אהבה. היא שכחה ברגעים אלה שיש לה עצבות, געגועים על בית, על אם, שיש לה כמיהה לדבר רחוק, בלתי-מושג, אשר לא תדע כמותו בשם. ברגע זה ידעה כי טוב לה בקבוצה ואין פנת-עולם חמה מזו. רק מעט אהבה ורצון טוב, ואפשר להתגבר על כל הספקות והיאוש.

The passage cited above, taken from Neḥama Poḥatchevsky's story "Be-tzel ha-kvutzah" (In the Shadow of the Commune), features two women in a tender moment of intimacy. Tamara, the protagonist of the story, was initially in love with Brura's husband. However, while taking care of the sick Brura, the locus of Tamara's emotions shifts. She reveals that the one she really loves is Brura, and this recognition helps her overcome her doubts regarding her place in the Zionist space. The scene above, which begins with Tamara's remorse over leaving her sick mother in Russia, ends with the reassurance that "there is no corner in the world warmer" than the Zionist commune. The story of leaving the mother behind to find new life on the land is, on the face of it, a quintessential Zionist narrative (Seidman 114-115). However, what stands out in the encounter between Tamara and Brura is the way women's intimacy facilitates this Zionist trajectory. The warmth, the love and the goodwill that compensate for the feelings of guilt, doubt and desperation are created within women's homoerotic space.

Poḥatchevsky's story "Be-tzel ha-kvutzah" narrates the struggles of Tamara, a young woman living in a Zionist commune, leading to the eventual affirmation of the Zionist choices she has made despite the experience of heartbreak in the commune and her sense of guilt for leaving her mother. The first draft of "Be-tzel ha-kvutzah" is titled "Be-tokh ha-nekudah,"⁷ literally "Inside the Point," and clearly a takeoff of the 1904 novel *Misaviv la-nekudah* (Around the Point) by Yosef Ḥayim Brenner, who later

⁷ I thank the archive of Jewish Library in Montreal for sending me a copy of this manuscript. The story of this first draft is in itself of interest. Poḥatchevsky indeed wrote "Be-tokh ha-nekudah" during 1925-1926, subtitling it "a novel" rather than a short story (JPL P0024). She then gave the manuscript to the publisher and critic Reuben Brainin, probably in the hopes that he would help her publish it. Brainin, however, left for Canada with the manuscript and has never replied to Poḥatchevsky's desperate requests to give it back to her. In order to write "Be-tzel ha-kvutzah," she had then to reconstruct the novel from scratch (Govrin, "Nefesh" 151-153). It is interesting to note that Brenner has also lost the draft of the first chapters of *Misaviv la-nekudah* during his defection from the Red Army in 1903, and he had to write the novel again in London in 1904 (Shapira, *Brenner* 60-65).

became a prominent Zionist author.⁸ The English translation may miss Poḥatchevsky's irony. The *nekudah*, the point in *Misaviv la-nekudah*, is an intangible entity. The various young male Jewish intellectuals in Brenner's novel are all hopelessly chasing and being chased by some kind of a "point" as they drift between the old Jewish world they left, the modernizing European urban space, and the new national framework of Zionism.⁹ The word *nekudah* in the Eretz-Yisraeli context Poḥatchevsky writes of is a much more concrete term that refers to a Zionist agricultural settlement in Palestine, a small "dot" on the changing map of the land. Inside the *nekudah*, the settlement, the commune, the land, Poḥatchevsky arguably responds to Brenner, one should be able to find meaning, place, sense. That is, inside the *nekudah* one would be able to find – the "point." Notably, the way to the "point" inside the *nekudah* passes through women's tender flirtations. Instead of a drama mobilized by the crises of Jewish and Zionist masculinity, such as the ones furnished by Brenner in *Misaviv* and other works (Pinsker, *Literary Passports* 173-179, 216-225; Gluzman 136-181), Poḥatchevsky offers us a Zionist poetic space revolving around the feminine "point." Further musing about the corporeal meaning of the *nekudah* in the context of women's homoeroticism may be in order here, but, for the purpose of this discussion suffice to say that Poḥatchevsky's response to Brenner is feminine and Zionist at once; that is, it is Zionist insofar as Zionism, for Poḥatchevsky, is feminine. Indeed, in her revision of Brenner, it is the gentle fingers of women that find the point inside the Zionist *nekudah*.

⁸ Yosef Ḥayim Brenner (1881-1921) was a prominent writer and ideologue of the second Zionist immigration wave (1904-1914). His literary work, including novels such as *Shkhol ve-khishalon* (Failure and Bereavement) and *Ba-ḥoref* (In the Winter), is considered seminal to the development of the Hebrew literary canon. Brenner was violently murdered by Palestinians in 1921, which gave his figure an almost mythical status in the cultural memory of the Zionist labor movement.

⁹ For an analysis of this novel in the context of the crisis of modern Jewish masculinity, see Pinsker, *Literary Passports* 216-225.

The warm Zionist *nekudah* in Połatchevsky's story, however, is constituted as a haven amidst wild and violent surroundings. And so, when Tamara, on her way to the commune, passes through a piece of land that seems barren, she comments:

This bareness was caused by wild people, who have uprooted and cut everything that grew out of the rock for small benefit.

-- How this People knows to destroy and to corrupt! She says to the driver.

-- Still they know how to make some kind of agriculture for themselves, the driver says.

-- Yes, when it comes to themselves they are smart, but what other people have created they exploit and destroy without compassion. (37)¹⁰

The Zionist feminine subject here constructs an Other who is strong, irrational and cruel, and a relationship between the self and the Other that is fraught with conflict, victimization and destruction. Połatchevsky's rhetoric in this passage is one of hate, fear and intolerance. Invoking the Zionist myth of the *halutzim* as peaceful workers of the land threatened by the Arab savages, she, of course, elides the violence embedded in the Zionist settlement, which consists of the employment of financial, cultural and political power to gradually marginalize the Arab stakes in the land. If the first scene cited above participates in the making of women's Zionism, by furnishing the Zionist feminine place as the "warmest corner in the world," the scene of Tamara's travel maps the world outside of the *nekudah* in accordance with nationalist and racist paradigms.

The appearance of gentle female interaction alongside hate and racism in the same text does not necessarily pose a problem in the logic of the story. There is no reason why

¹⁰ שממה זו נגרמה על-ידי בני-אדם פראים, שעקרו וקצצו כל מה שצמח בסלע לשם תועלת פעוטה. – כמה יודע העם הזה לחבל ולהשחית! – אומרת תמרה לחבר הנוהג בפרסים. – ובכל-זאת הרי לעצמם יודעים הם ליצור חקלאות כל שהיא – אומר הלז. – כן, לעצמם הם מתחכמים, אבל מה שיצרו לאחרים, מנצלים הם ומחריבים בלי חמלה.

a feminized Zionism would not be imbued in the same discourse of othering that underlies the Zionist settlement in Palestine in general. Indeed, many feminist post-colonialist studies have shown out the complicity of white Western women with the politics and practice of colonialism. The idea of women as part of “a society of outsiders” (Woolf, “Three Guineas” 153-208), which is removed from war and violence, have been contested numerous times by now. Yet, in Hebrew women’s writing, the contiguity of refreshing literary moments depicting the Zionist feminine experience with moments of flat conservative and nationalistic racism arouses a certain dissonance for the Hebrew feminist reader. Our feminist training conditions us to recover our predecessors, to save them from oblivion, not to implicate them in racism and violence. The following sections of this introduction unpack this dissonance, by situating it within the history of the research on women, gender and Zionism.

Were You There or Were You But a Dream?¹¹ Recovering Women’s Prose

In 1994, Lily Rattok published the anthology of Hebrew women’s prose, *Ha-kol ha-aher* (The Other Voice). Ironically, while the title of the anthology foregrounds women’s voice, its extensive afterword was criticized by other feminist Israeli scholars for silencing non-canonical women writers of the pre-state period. These critiques referred to Rattok’s contention that Hebrew women’s prose was born twice: Once in 1902 with the publication of the first stories by Dvora Baron and then a second time in 1966 with Amalya Kahana-Karmon’s first collection of stories. Rattok, it was claimed, ignores an extensive body of women’s prose that did not enter the Hebrew and Israeli literary canon.

¹¹ הדיית או חלמתי חלום? (רחל)

In 2003, Yaffa Berlovitz published the anthology *She-ani adamah ve-adam* (Tender Rib), which brings together prose by Hebrew women from the pre-state period. In the afterword of this collection, Berlovitz emphatically claims that Rattok's concept of "double birth" forges a misleading map of Hebrew literature, and in fact, reinforces the Zionist androcentrism by neglecting to address the abundance of women's prose written in the time of the Yishuv.¹² Hebrew women, Berlovitz argues, have written prose "from the time of the return to the land of Israel with the revival of the settlement in it . . . and they did not stop but rather expanded their efforts responding to the concerns of the female reader living in the Yishuv" (345). Against Rattok's focus on the solitary stance of Dvora Baron within the male-dominated canon of early Zionism, Berlovitz maintains the existence of a vast tradition of Hebrew women's prose, which, just like the masculine canon, may be mapped generationally, according to the author's time of birth and time of immigration to Palestine (320). According to Berlovitz, authors such as H̄emda Ben-Yehuda, Neḥama Poḥatchevsky and Dvora Baron, who came to Palestine around the turn of the 20th century, belong to the first generation of women authors; authors who came to the land during the 1910s, such as Batya Kahana and Rivka Alper, belong to the second generation; while authors who came during the 1920s at a young age and were raised as natives, like Sara Gluzman, Shoshana Shrira and Yehudith Hendel, constitute the third generation. Although she essentially mimics the major historian of Hebrew literature, Gershon Shaked, Berlovitz underscores that her different generational divisions stem from her understanding of "female creation of the pre-state period as an autonomous entity with its own poetics" (320). Berlovitz, thus, on the one hand, shares Shaked's

¹² The pre-state Zionist settlement in Palestine.

assumption that Hebrew literature should be situated within Zionist history,¹³ but on the other hand, contends there is “a feminine experience that transcends literary schools, political affiliations, and ethnic identifications” (320). In fact, Berlovitz shares this assumption with Rattok, whose afterword’s title – “Kol ishah makirah et zeh” (Every Woman Knows This) – implies the existence of a unified feminine knowledge.

Also in 2003, Tamar Hess, in her dissertation on the autobiographical writings of women of the second Zionist immigration wave, joins Berlovitz’ critique of Rattok, claiming that the latter’s approach suppresses not only non-canonical women authors, but also the non-canonical genre of autobiography, in which early Zionist women extensively wrote. Hess situates Rattok’s text alongside Yael Feldman’s study of Israeli women’s prose of the 1980s, maintaining that in marking the 1980s as the time when feminist consciousness emerges in Hebrew women’s literature, Feldman, like Rattok, collaborates with the patriarchal framework of Zionism in silencing the “mothers of feminism” (8). Hess’ naming of Zionist women authors of the pre-state period as the “mothers of feminism,” attests, I would propose, to the workings of a strong undercurrent in contemporary feminist scholarship on early Zionist women: The search for the “mother’s bosom,” as Hess consciously names the writings she recovers (3).

While, as mentioned earlier, the desire to recover unacknowledged ancestors is not unique to Israeli feminist scholarship, the particular split history of Zionist/Israeli feminism intensifies this desire. This history features approximately 25 years of feminist inactivity, from the establishment of the state in 1948 up until the 1970s, by dint of the prevalent “the myth of equality.” According to this myth, Israeli women, who were given

¹³ This assumption was persuasively critiqued in Shachar Pinsker’s extensive study on Hebrew Literature’s place within European modernism. See: *Literary Passports*, esp. 17-25.

suffrage rights from the moment of the establishment of the State in Israel, as well the “right” to serve in the army “like men,” were already liberated (Hazleton 15-37; Safran 13-18). These assumptions substantiated the notion that Israeli society did not need a feminist movement, which had strong hold in Israel up until the 1970s, when the influence of the American second wave feminism along with the social instability in Israel after the 1973 war, sparked a feminist revival (Safran 75-106). Israeli feminists’ readings of pre-state Hebrew women’s literature – their recovery of the “lost continent” of women’s prose as Berlovitz terms it – is part of this process of disillusionment, a fraught awakening from a year’s long dream. The recovery of women’s prose, in this context, is not only a gesture toward diversification of the national cultural memory, but also an act of compensation for the years of stagnation by finding the forgotten roots of Hebrew feminist self-assertion.

However, the excitement about the recovery of “our mothers” marks Israeli feminist literary criticism with a conspicuous distortion. During the 1990s, other parts of the academic world, particularly American academia, saw the development of a rich body of feminist critique of the relationship between women, nationalism and colonialism, which problematized the notions of a unified feminine subject or homogenous gendered oppression.¹⁴ These developments seem to have had little impact on feminist scholarship on Hebrew women, which still, as we have seen, invokes a unified “women’s experience” of predominantly gendered exclusion and marginalization, without accounting for other

¹⁴ See, for example: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s analysis of Jane Eyre, “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism”; Trinh T. Minh-ha’s poetic theoretical work, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*; Vron Ware’s study of white women colonial contexts, *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History*; Jenny Sharpe’s *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text*; Anne McClintock’s *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, esp. 258-295; and Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s seminal essay, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses.”

social categories, such as nationality, ethnicity and class, as if defending the “mothers” against any blemish. In contrast with the claim implied in the title of Feldman’s book – “No Room of Their Own” – it seems as though the excitement about finding the “mothers of feminism,” proving their existence, recovering their lost voices, somehow inspires Israeli feminist literary criticism of the 1990s and 2000s to imagine a “women’s room,” where war, occupation, violence, racism and oppressions other than our own cannot touch us.

* * *

In 1934, on the second page of the first issue of *Dvar ha-po‘elet*, the monthly publication of the women-workers movement, we find a short story by Tova Yaffe titled “Ba-drakhim” (On the Roads), in which a narrator is walking from an unknown place to an un-named Zionist colony, somewhat frightened to be alone on the open road, until she encounters a group of Arab women:

Approaching the valley I feel a little bit of fear. Then I see Arab women. My fear vanishes and I think: in this sense, at least, women are better than men. In the kingdom of women the fist has less control. It seems to me that all women, despite differences of nation and race, are close to each other in some way. And when I approach them I have the feeling of “I dwell among mine own people.”¹⁵ (6-7)

So seductive is this notion of the “kingdom of women,” of a separate sphere where “the fist has less control,” that it throws even the most cynical researcher (and I am not that) into internal turmoil and conflict. After all, the idea of a women’s space, separate from the politics of “the fist,” has long and deep roots in feminist thought. See, for example, Virginia Woolf in “Three Guineas”:

¹⁵ עם התקרבות הואדי עולה במקצת גם רגש הפחד. מתגלות לפני נשים ערביות. פחדי נמוג ואני מהרהרת: במובן זה, בכל אופן, טובות הנשים מהגברים. בממלכת הנשים יש לאגרוף פחות שליטה. נדמה לי, כי כל הנשים למרות הבדלי האומות והגזעים, קרובות ביניהן במשהו. בגשתי אליהן קמה בי מעין הרגשה של “בתוך עמי אנכי יושבת.”

For though many instincts are held more or less in common by both sexes, to fight has always been the man's habit, not the woman's. Law and practice have developed that difference, whether innate or accidental. Scarcely a human being in the course of history has fallen to a woman's rifle; the vast majority of birds and beasts have been killed by you, not by us; and it is difficult to judge what we do not share. (158)

Woolf's descriptive claim has its persuasive force. As the political world is governed by men, one can safely claim that war also is a masculinist domain. The problem lies in the Western woman's denial of her investment in that domain. While the hope for a different ethics grounded in the feminine seems warranted, when such a space is claimed from a position of privilege it easily slips into a self-righteous erasure of the different effects of power on different subjects (Mohanti 255-259; Yeğenoğlu 95-120; Shohat, "Culture of Empire" 17-69).

I go down to the valley. The Arab women, two elderly women and a girl, sit by their jars, which they have just filled with water from the spring. They give me a dish and look at me puzzled. Their amazement is not clear to me. I approach them and ask for water. They show me a dint amidst the dirty valley where clean water springs. They speak among themselves: A woman? Yes, girl! When they first saw me, wrapped in my cape, with short hair, and with my head uncovered, they could not decide who I am and what I am, and only when the wind blew through my cape revealing my dress, they understood. The girl asks, "Are you not afraid, to go by yourself?" And I answer, "No, is there fear? But all people are good." The girl does not agree, and is puzzled by my naiveté. She repeats my sentence with the irony of someone who knows life as it is, "All people are good!?" (7)¹⁶

After constituting the "kingdom of women" in her mind, the actual encounter between the Zionist narrator and the Arab both troubles and affirms her idyllic vision. First, it turns out that while she recognized them as women from afar, a recognition that has sparked her theory of "a kingdom of women," the women in the valley did not even

¹⁶ אני מתקרבת ויורדת לוואדי. הערביות, שתי זקנות וילדה אחת, יושבות על יד כדיהן, אשר אך עתה מלאום מים מהמעין. הן מסתכלות בי ותמהות. תמהונן לא מובן לי. אני נגשת ומבקשת מים. הן נותנות לי כלי ומראות לי, בתוך הוואדי המרופש גומה קטנה שבה נובעים מים נקיים. הן משוחחות ביניהן: אשה? כן, ילדה! בראותן אותי עטופה שכמיה, גזורת שערות וגלויית ראש, לא יכלו להחליט מי ומה אני, ורק כשהתבדרה שכמייתי, ונראתה שמלתי, הוברר להן. הילדה שואלת אותי בסגנונה: "לא תפחדי, תלכי לבדך?" ואני עונה: "לא, האם יש פחד? הלא כל האנשים טובים." הילדה אינה מסכימה לדברי, מתפלאה על תמימותי, וחוזרת באירוניה של אדם המכיר את החיים: "כל האנשים טובים!?"

acknowledge her as a woman. While she imagines that she “dwells among her people,” for them she is a stranger, whom they help out of kindness. The difference between the points of view of the different women becomes even clearer when the young girl ironically mirrors the narrator’s claim that “all people are good,” thus inverting the child-adult relationship the narrator has seemingly tried to create, speaking as “someone who knows life,” and contesting her imaginary safe feminine world.

The narrator herself immediately recognizes the falsity of her remark and apologizes:

I apologize: no, that’s not true, but the road is not very far now and I have to get to my place, for whom should I wait? The elderly women understand me, and “console” me that that road is indeed not that dangerous. (ibid)¹⁷

The grandiose visions of “all people are good” and “the kingdom of women” are replaced by concrete realistic explanation, and false naiveté is exchanged for compassionate practicality on the part of the Arab women. The road is “not that dangerous,” not because of some universal truth – “all people are good” – but because the narrator has no choice but to walk this road by herself now, and there is no point of scaring her. The idea of women’s solidarity is thus reassured and destabilized at once in this story. Whereas in this concrete encounter, kindness and compassion prevail, the narrator’s grand statements about the closeness of all women to each other and the goodness of all people, are challenged as naïve.

And the narrator is still on her way to the Zionist colony, to “her place” (*li-mkomi*), but now the road suddenly seems confusing:

¹⁷ אני מתנצלת: לא זאת, אבל הדרך לא רחוקה ועלי להגיע למקומי, ולמי אחכה? הזקנות מבינות אותי, משתתפות "בצערי" ומנחמות אותי כי אמנם הדרך לא מסוכנת כל כך.

Now the road is not very far anymore: one more slope, one more hill, one more slope and... I lose my count; and it's hard for me to calculate the number of hills and slopes awaiting me on the roads. These are the roads of the Land of Israel. (ibid)¹⁸

Clarity becomes confusion as the author, who testifies at the beginning of the story that she knows “every inch of this road,” suddenly loses count of the hills ahead. If at the beginning of the story she clearly states she has walked two hours, and has passed half of the way, now it seems unclear how far she is indeed from “her place,” as if the encounter at the water fountain, which confounded all “universal truths,” also somehow troubled the Zionist woman’s sense of control over space.

The Other Message: The Subversive Subject in Hebrew Feminist Literary Studies

Dan Miron’s 1991 study of Hebrew women-poets, *Imahot meyasdot, aḥayot ḥorgot* (Founding Mothers, Stepsisters) may be considered the first comprehensive study of Zionist women’s writing. In an attempt to define the predicament of writing as a Zionist woman, Miron states that: “In Hebrew literature of the beginning of the 20th century the life-experience of the young Jewish woman is interpreted as private-personal experience, while the life-experience of the new Jewish man is presented as metonymic of the national experience” (*Imahot* 67). Hebrew Women, Miron claims, had difficulty expressing themselves in writing, because they could not respond to the imperative of representing the nation since their “life experience” was not considered representative of the national drama. As Shachar Pinsker puts it in his study of gender and nationalism in Hebrew literature, in a culture that assigned literature with the project of representing the

¹⁸ עתה לא תרחק עוד הדרך: עוד ירידה ועוד עליה, עוד ירידה ו... החשבון מטשטש לפני. קשה לחשב את מספר העליות והירידות הצפונות לי עוד בדרכים. כאלה הם הדרכים בא"י.

New Hebrew Man, it was almost impossible for a Hebrew female writer, to “fashion a viable feminine national subject” (“Imagining the Beloved” 119). The significant strand in the feminist criticism of Hebrew literature that focuses on the ways in which female writers subvert the national grand narratives seems to stem from these assumptions. Consciously or unconsciously, feminist critics of Hebrew literature uphold Miron’s gendered distinction between possible and impossible national metonyms. Thus, they develop an analytical framework, in which the Hebrew feminine subject emerges not as representative of the nation, but as a subversive subject whose voice undermines the grand narratives of the nation.

A significant starting point for a discussion of feminine subversion in Hebrew literature may be traced to the dialogue that took place in the early 1990s, in the first issues of the prominent Israeli periodical *Teoryah u-vikoret* (Theory and Criticism). Issues number 2 and 3 of this publication, which is generally dedicated to critical thinking on Israeli politics and culture, feature articles by Rivka Feldhay and Orly Lubin about women’s literature. Feldhay focuses on the writing of Amalya Kahana-Karmon, invoking Julia Kristeva’s concept of the semiotic,¹⁹ in order to point toward a subversive layer in Kahana-Karmon’s writing (69-88). Lubin’s article theorizes the concept of subversive feminine reading as a process of “rewriting the [reader’s] personal narrative” in a way that exposes the subjugation, marginalization and exclusion of the feminine subject by the normative hegemonic text. In issue number 5 of *Teoryah u-vikoret* that came out in 1994, Lily Rattok published a response to Feldhay and Lubin, vehemently critiquing their ideas of subversion. Rattok’s main issue with Lubin has to do with her

¹⁹ Kristeva defines the “semiotic” as a modality of language associated with the rhythms and drives flowing between mother and child at the pre-oedipal stage (*La révolution* 17-100).

supposed claim (which Lubin later denies having made) that “belonging to the “othered” group is a necessary and sufficient condition for subversive feminist reading” (165).²⁰ Against Feldhay, Rattok contends that the application of the theoretical ideas of Kristeva, which are grounded in a Christian framework, to Hebrew literature distorts Feldhay’s reading of Kahana-Karmon, for it elides the significance of the Jewish-Israeli context of Kahana-Karmon’s prose. Rattok concludes her critique with a comment that explicitly refers to Feldhay, but in fact raises a larger concern regarding the possibility of a feminist position within Israeli Zionist culture:

I believe that Feldhay’s definition of the traditional Jew as “the Other” . . . [is], in fact, meant to serve the political agenda of her article: presenting “Israeliness” as the suppression of all “Others” But this agenda does not correspond with Kahana-Karmon’s positions. (176)

In the same issue of *Teoryah u-vikoret*, Feldhay and Lubin post two brief responses to Rattok. Both responses focus on Rattok’s theoretical misunderstandings. Feldhay focuses on explaining Kristeva’s concept of desire in great detail. Rattok’s misreading of this concept, she claims, underlies her objection to Feldhay’s reading of Kahana-Karmon (179-181). Lubin (justly) denies having argued that “belonging to the othered group is a necessary and sufficient condition for subversive reading” (178), and concludes her response proclaiming that:

To the best of my knowledge, Rattok, who has indeed been studying women’s literature for decades, was never interested in theoretical questions . . . thus, one cannot demand that she would participate in theoretical discussions . . . Rattok’s discussion of some of the questions that come up from my article forgoes the theoretical context and the history of the theories that underlie my claims. Therefore, she sometimes addresses only the literal meaning of words. I see my theoretical articles as part of a dialogue taking place in a theoretical discourse,

²⁰ I follow here Rattok’s organization of her argument, which reverses the order of publication of Feldhay’s and Lubin’s articles.

the theoretical feminist discourse, and Rattok's reservations ignore this discourse, and, thus, exclude themselves from any theoretical dialogue. (Ibid)

Although Feldhay and Lubin seem technically correct in attacking Rattok's theoretical positions, my interest here is not taking sides in the fraught theoretical debate, but rather pointing out the ways in which, again, the Israeli debate on Hebrew women's literature is displaced from the Israeli Zionist space. Curiously, neither Lubin nor Feldhay respond to Rattok's final remarks regarding Kahana-Karmon's Zionist feminist position. Beyond the theoretical and interpretive divides between Rattok, Feldhay and Lubin, Rattok opens a localized political debate about relations between Hebrew women, feminism and nationalism. This debate is not picked up by the other two scholars, whose theoretical assertions seem to work against any attempt to localize the discussion of women's writing. See, for example, Feldhay's dismissive response of Rattok's critique of her application of Kristeva:

I did not know that theories have national boundaries. In their very essence theories are supposed to represent a universal truth. Of course, you can always point out the cultural constraints that limit their validity, but the assumption that the Christian origin of the theoretician precludes *a priori* the possibility of applying her theory, and that Kahana-Karmon's work is meaningful only in the context of Jewish culture seems provincial, unfounded, and contrasted to the spirit of the author. (181)

It is surprising to hear from a sophisticated critic like Feldhay that "in essence theories are supposed to represent a universal truth." Rattok's claim that Kahana-Karmon is in fact a Zionist feminist subject longing to participate in the Israeli political sphere, remains unanswered, as the Israeli debate about feminist subversion, like that on the silence or silencing of pre-state women, loses itself in theoretical convolutions, shutting out the concrete Israeli context. It seems strange how the affiliation of Zionist and Israeli

women's literature with Zionism remains un-theorized within the scope of this debate, as if only subversion is deemed worthy of theory.

In her 2003 study of women's strategies of reading, *Ishah koret ishah* (A Woman Reads a Woman), Lubin expands her conceptualization of feminist subversion. As in the earlier article, Lubin's "feminine reading" emerges a universal mode. Her theorization of it switches between Israeli, British and American texts without much attention to the different political-historical contexts in which the texts are written. According to Lubin,

The subversive act is undertaken when a wholesale rebellion is impossible; it settles for less than is really desired: a complete replacement of the normative and exclusive system with an alternative system. When this total option is unavailable ... the subversive act remains as a way of constituting *an autonomous subject vis-à-vis the center*. The subversive act means holding the two ends of the rope: continuing to exist, culturally, in a community, whose norms exclude the margins, and constituting a subject that controls its destiny even if only partially, even if only by placing it in the margins. When the subversive act is performed by the text, it carries a similar double message: on the one hand, the text transmits a series of established norms regarding medium, genre, style, themes and ideology, and, on the other hand, it enables the reception of another message, sometimes a contrasting message, enabling the reader to extract a system of norms and convictions, that does not correspond with interests of the hegemonic center but posits an alternative grounded in the excluded margins. (76; my emphasis)

The subversive text then is a compromise, a reduced and sublimated act of resistance, where revolution is impossible. Insofar as women construct their subjectivity through reading and writing, they need to constitute themselves as subjects of "the other message" "hidden" in text. In the context of Hebrew literature, this message is always tied with the exclusion of femininity from the Zionist narrative and enables the constitution of "an autonomous feminine subject" at the margins of the hegemonic space. The relations between the dominant text and the "other message," according to Lubin, are essentially ones of repression and resistance.

The possibility of a different relationship between the messages women-writers send and Zionist hegemony is considered throughout the chapters of this dissertation. While Zionist women certainly protest their own marginalization, their protest, I argue, is charged with intense desire to belong to the nation. Their messages are messages of unrequited love for the nation, not of subversion. That is, there is no conflict of messages in Zionist women's texts. Rather, there is a discord – between women's nationalism and Zionist androcentrism – and strained efforts to alleviate this discord, to smooth the dissonance, to work through the rifts between women and nation.

In contrast with Lubin, Yaffa Berlovitz addresses a possibility of a non-subversive Zionist women's writing, but, remarkably, throughout her extensive body of scholarship, this well published scholar never elaborates on this possibility. Indeed, in her essay from 2000, “Le-tivo shel ha-narativ ha-nashi ha-Tziyoni,” (On the Zionist Feminine Narrative), Berlovitz initially neatly divides women's literature of the pre-state into three separate modes:

A. Collective stories, parallel to the masculine Zionist narrative, in which women-writers narrate the life in Eretz-Yisrael in their own voice . . . B. Personal-national stories of women as settlers, pioneers, workers and soldiers . . . stories that complement the monolithic Zionist masculine story and its canonical representations . . . C. Subversive feminine stories, in which women-authors harshly criticize the Zionist practice which is exclusively identified with men . . . lamenting their disappointment with their exclusion from any significant national work. *Here, I would like to focus on the subversive feminine voice.* (“Ha-narativ ha-nashi” 421; my emphasis)

Berlovitz' afterword to the aforementioned 2003 anthology *She-ani adamah ve-adam* reiterates the idea that a substantial part of Zionist women's prose was, in fact, wholeheartedly Zionist, but again, does not offer any critical analysis of this trend:

The national narrative developed in women's prose is marked by two thematic moves: A) preparing and initiating women for their role in the Yishuv through

romantization and feminization of the Zionist vision. B) Underscoring the Eretz-Yisraeli crisis, or the melancholizing of the Zionist project as a masculine project, with both women and the land as its victims. (“Yabeshet avudah” 321)

While the second “thematic move,” the subversive move, is unpacked in several of Berlovitz’ publications,²¹ with regards to the first move, the “romantization and feminization of the Zionist vision,” Berlovitz refers the reader to one conference paper from 2001, which was never published.²² Berlovitz, like Lubin and Feldhay, appears to be overwhelmingly more intrigued by the subversive gesture in women’s writing. Like Lubin, Berlovitz splits the feminine-Zionist text into two texts – feminine and Zionist. Relying on Elaine Showalter’s distinction between the dominant text and the subtext in women’s literature, she traces in Neḥama Poḥatchevsky’s stories; for example, “a feminine oppositional text that subverts the authoritative masculine narrative” (“Ha-narativ ha-nashi” 430). Berlovitz, however, differs from Lubin in her ideological

²¹ “Literature by Women of the First Aliyah: Aspirations for Women's Renaissance in Eretz-Israel.” *Pioneers and Homemakers, Women in Pre-State Israel Society*. Ed.: Deborah S. Bernstein. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992. 49-73; “Kol ha-melankhoyah ke-kol ha-meḥah: Neḥama Poḥatchevsky, aḥat ha-sofrot ha-rishonot be-Eretz-Yisrael” (The Voice of Melancholy as the Voice of Protest: Neḥama Puhatchevsky, One of the First Writers in Eretz-Israel). *Eshnav le-ḥayehen shel nashim be-ḥavarot yehudiyot* (A View into the Lives of Women in Jewish Societies). Ed. Yael Atzmon. Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, Jerusalem, 1995. 325-336; “No Home at Home: Women's Fiction vs. Zionist Practice.” *Discourse on Gender/Gendered Discourse in the Middle East*. Ed. Boaz Shoshan. Westport: Praeger, 2000. 95-115; “Le-tivo shel ha-nerativ ha-Tziyoni ha-nashi – hathalat meah/sof meah (ha-kol ha-bikorti ha-ḥatrani) (Standard of Zionist Feminine Narrative, Early Century/Late Century (The Critical Subversive Voice). *Bein sifrut le-hevrah – ‘iyunim b-atarbut ha-‘Ivrit ha-hadashah*; maamarim mugashim le-Gershon Shaked (Between Literature and Society: Studies in New Hebrew Culture; Essays Presented to Gershon Shaked). Eds. Yehudith Barel, Yigal Schwartz and Tamar.S. Hess. Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad/Keter, 2000. 421-439; “Siporet ha-nashim bi-ṭkufat ha-Yishuv: reorganizatsyah shel tarbut muderet” (Women's Fiction in the Yishuv Period: Reorganization of an Excluded Culture). *Harimi be-khoah kolekh: kolot nashiyim u-farshanut feministit be-limudey hayahdut* (Lift Up Thy Voice with Strength: On Feminine Voices and Feminist Interpretation in Jewish Studies). Ed. Rina Levin Melamed. Tel Aviv: Schechter Institute for Miskal Publishers/Yedioth Aharonot Sifrey Hemed. 2001. 97-121.

²² To my request if she would consider sending the text of the presentation to me, Berlovitz responded that she is unable to find it in her files at the moment (5/14/2012). Some discussion of Hemda Ben-Yehuda’s Zionist writing is to be found in Berlovitz’ article “Literature by Women of the First Aliyah: Aspirations for Women's Renaissance in Eretz-Israel,” notably with no reference to the conspicuous connection between Orientalism and Zionism in Ben-Yehuda’s writing, which will be discussed in the Chapter Two of this dissertation. Berlovitz also engages with the figure of the Zionist Eretz-Yisraeli woman in her article: “Be-ḥipus aḥar dyokan ‘ha-Eretz-Yisraelit’” (In Search for the Figure of the Eretz-Yisraeli Woman), but here, too, the scholar’s attitude toward women’s nationalism is that of admiration, not of critique.

position, *vis-à-vis* Zionism. We may recall her statement that women wrote prose “from the time of the *return* to the Land of Israel with the revival of the settlement in it” (345; my emphasis). Berlovitz then upholds the Zionist narrative of “return” and “revival.” Her relative scarcity of attention to women’s Zionism, thus, seems to derive not from the desire to unsettle the tenets of the Zionist project through the category of the “the feminine,” but rather from the perception of Zionist women’s Zionism as unproblematic, and therefore not a productive field for the analytical mind. Notwithstanding their political differences, in splitting women’s texts into dominant texts and hidden subtext, both Lubin and Berlovitz constitute their own autonomous subjectivity as critical interrogators of texts, who are able to decipher hidden meanings, draw subtle distinctions and categories, and re-tell stories as feminists.

Against the theories of text/subtext offered by Lubin and Berlovitz, one may posit the Wendy Zierler’s 2004 study, *And Rachel Stole the Idols*, which offers the term “stealing” as key for reading women’s literature. Zierler argues that:

Early Hebrew women writers of prose fiction *and* poetry aimed in a real, self-conscious sense to ‘capture the literary territory of men’ – to steal the language of the fathers as well as to create works of literature that represent their unique, women’s perspective on many time-honored themes and communal issues . . . These writers and poets sought “[not] only to join with their compatriots in the literary arena,” but also to retell traditional, male-authored stories in new ways, often against the grain of dominant masculine modes. (11-12)

Zierler’s suggestions may indeed be productive for thinking of Zionist women’s writing as geared toward reclaiming the Zionist narrative, rather than undermining it. However, curiously, Zionism does not play a central role in Zierler’s theory of stealing. Inspired, like Lubin and Berlovitz, by Western theories of subversion, she focuses on women’s “stealing of the Hebrew language,” without problematizing the relationship between the

idea of Modern Hebrew and nationalism, and on stealing biblical narratives, without accounting for the ideological deployment of the Bible in the Zionist context (Shapira, “Ha-Tanakh” 1-33). The “time-honored themes and communal issues” she mentions as objects of women’s stealing in the citation above do not include “Zionist issues.” Particularly telling are Zierler’s readings of Hebrew women-poets’ revisions of the land-as-woman metaphor, which never address the political meaning of the Zionist conquest of the land (Katz 82-94). Women’s “stealing” is, for Zierler, a courageous and liberating gesture. The relations between women’s writing and the nationalistic discourse of power that underlies the Zionist project are, again, not part of the theoretical discussion.

One may understand the fascination of feminist scholars of Hebrew literature with the idea of subversion in the terms offered by Saba Mahmood in the context of Muslim women’s participation in the Egyptian religious movement. Mahmood critiques the way the concept of subversion serves Western feminist scholarship in order to assign agency to Muslim women (1-39). Grounded in the liberal doctrine of autonomous subjectivity, this scholarship, Mahmood argues, is blind to the possibility of other non-Western forms of agency construction. “When women’s actions seem to reinscribe what appear to be ‘instruments of their own oppression,’” Mahmood explains:

the social analyst can point to moments of disruption of, and articulation of points of opposition to, male authority . . . Agency, in this form of analysis, is understood as the capacity to realize one’s own interests against the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will, or other obstacles (whether individual or collective). Thus the humanist desire for autonomy and self-expression constitutes the substrate, the slumbering ember that can spark the flame in the form of an act of resistance when conditions permit. (8)

Granted, the case of Zionist women is substantially different from that of the women of the Mosques Movement Mahmood analyzes. First, the hegemonic structure here is the

nation and not religion, and second, by and large, Zionist women, in contrast with the women of the Mosques Movement, upheld the same liberal convictions of freedom and autonomy that Mahmood problematizes. The usefulness of Mahmood's theorization to my discussion has to do less with the history of pre-state Zionist women, and more with the history of Israeli and Jewish feminist scholarship about pre-state Zionist women.

For like the Western feminist scholars that Mahmood criticizes, feminist scholars of Hebrew literature seem intensely invested in moments of textual subversion as moments where the feminine subject emerges, and are mostly blind to the ways in which Zionist women's subjectivity is constructed in Hebrew women's writing through passionate reinforcement and expansion of Zionist ideology. In the context of Israeli feminist literary criticism, I would argue, the concept of subversion allows feminist scholars to separate women from the burden of Zionism as a project of domination over and oppression of Zionism's other Others – Palestinians and non-Western Jews. Zionist women's constitution of their own subjectivity is conveniently construed, within the scope of the scholarship discussed above, as an ethical step toward uprooting the Zionist hegemony. All this when, in fact, authors such as Baron, Ben-Yehuda and Połatchevsky, who have been read as "subversive," explicitly articulate their desire to contribute to Zionism, to strengthen the nation, and, in some cases more boldly than their male counterparts, give voices to prejudice and racism.

To be clear, it is not my contention that the feminine Hebrew voice is not "different" from the hegemonic one. Nor is it my claim that feminine narratives do not destabilize the Zionist power structures. On the contrary, I would propose that the clash between Zionist women's vehement nationalism and Zionist androcentrism produces

moments of dissonance that eventually may be read as “unsettling” the national hegemony. However, we cannot understand these moments of dissonance without first unpacking women’s investment in the nation as a source of privilege and power, without analyzing the articulations of this investment and interrogating its ramifications with regards to women’s ethical position toward Zionism’s other Others. It is, I contend, women’s over-passionate but unrequited love for Zionism that ends up having a disruptive force. This love is, in many cases, inextricably bound with hate for the Others of the nation, who are perceived as threats to the fragile national identity of Zionist women. The love, the hate, the appropriation and the disruption of power all need to be addressed if we are to understand the complexity of the Zionist feminine narrative.

If feminist scholars of Hebrew literature, such as Lubin, Rattok, Berlovitz, Feldhay and Hess tend to ground their readings in the theoretical discourse on women’s writing and reading from the position of the Other, invoking the work of Western feminist scholars from the late 1970s and early 1980s such as Elaine Showalter, Teresa de Lauretis, Judith Fetterley, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Jonathan Culler and others, a crucial theoretical context of my work is the feminist post-colonialist scholarship, evolving mostly during the 1990s, on Western women’s complicated relationship with nationalism and colonialism. Central to this scholarship is the claim that there is no unified category named “woman,” but rather multiple positions shaped by the intersecting categories of gender, ethnicity, class, nationality and race (see, for example, Mohanty 256; Yeğenoğlu 95-120). In this context, scholars have unpacked the split position of white women as marginalized subjects in comparison with their male counterparts and as privileged colonizers *vis-à-vis* their ethnic, racial and national Others

(see, for example, Chaudhuri and Strobel 1-18; McClintock 352-390; Lewis 4-5;). Moreover, as it has also been shown in numerous colonial contexts, white women cannot be considered to be merely “trapped” in an ambiguous position, but rather the very evolution of western feminism was grounded in colonial distinctions between the “new” liberated white woman and the colonized primitive native woman (Spivak 262-280; Trinh T. Minh-ha 79-118; Ware 3-45; Sharpe 27-56; McClintock 258-295; Mohanty 255-278). With regards to the writing of Zionist Ashkenazi women as well, I argue, one should consider not only their marginalization within the Zionist project, but also the privileges this project endowed or promised to endow them with, and the ways in which they recast Zionist politics of power according to their own gendered stakes in the nation. Reading Zionist women as Western women, and not merely as “women,” may help us move away from the subversive “compulsion” that seems to haunt the feminist discourse on Hebrew literature.

* * *

I have not sung to you, my country
I have not glorified your name
with tales of bravery,
from many battlefields;
Only a tree – my hands have planted
on the peaceful shores of the Jordan River
Only a pathway – my feet have conquered
in the fields

Very meager, indeed
I know, my mother
Very meager is
the offering of your daughter;
Only a roar of joy
at daybreak
Only a secret cry
for your poverty
(Rachel 25)²³

²³ לא שרתי לך, ארצי, / ולא פארתי שמך / בעלילות גבורה, / בשלל קרבות / רק עץ – ידי נטעו / חופי ירדן שוקטים, / רק שביל – / כבשו רגלי / על פני שדות. / אכן דלה מאוד – / ידעתי זאת האם, / אכן דלה מאוד / מנחת בתך. / רק קול תרועת הגיל / ביום יגה האור, / רק בכי במסתרים / עלי עונייך. (45)

Rachel Bluwstein's poem "El artzi" (To My Country) was published in 1927 in Rachel's²⁴ collection of poems *Safiah* (Aftergrowth), and had a long afterlife in Zionist and Israeli culture as a popular song, sung by choruses of the *kibbutzim* and Zionist youth movements, and performed by some of Israel's major singers in numerous national cultural events (Shapira, *Herev* 198). Dan Miron brings this poem as an example of the ways in which traits such as modesty, poverty and simplicity usher the entrance of Hebrew women's poetry into the canon by constituting it as complementary of, but not competing with, men's poetry (*Imahot* 98-99, 153-160). In "El artzi," the markers of women's poetry emerge as the markers of the mother-daughter connection of the speaker with the land. The oppositions set in the first stanza between sound and silence, war and planting, heroism and meagerness, glory and poverty are clearly gendered. It is the daughter's nationalism that appears as nurturing, loving and peaceful. Possibly invoking the biblical story of Cain and Abel, Rachel feminizes the figure of the unwanted son, Cain, the worker of the land, transforming him from a jealous man of violence into a gentle feminine figure, whose modest gift corresponds with the modesty of the motherly earth.

Anita Shapira's discussion of this poem demonstrates the significance of Rachel's feminized Zionism for the evolution of the Zionist ethos. "This was the image that the Zionist labor movement adopted for itself," Shapira explains, "simple in its manners, modest in its speech, identified with the Eretz-Yisraeli landscape, lover of work – a peaceful movement" (*Herev* 199). This self-perception underlies what Shapira terms "The Defensive Ethos," an ideological apparatus that throughout the first three decades of

²⁴ In Hebrew, Rachel is usually referred to by her first name, which is a testimony of her mythical standing in Hebrew culture.

the 20th century facilitated the suppression of any recognition of a possible national conflict over the land (*Herev* 179-296). According to this vision, the Zionist Yishuv forms a peace-loving agricultural community that would only defend itself against attacks, but never initiate violence. The conquest of the land and the appropriation of its resources are not considered aggression in this frame of thought, but rather constitute an integral part of the romanticized image of the hard working pioneer. Through Rachel's poem and its deployment in Zionist culture we may very clearly observe how the construction of feminine – as modest, simple, poor etc. – coincides with the construction of Zionism's main protagonist – the *halutz*, the worker of the land. That is, rather than being a venue for a subversive message, the feminine in Rachel's poem serves to obfuscate the political hierarchies forged through the Zionist "work of the land," that is, to obscure the dimension of power and violence involved in the Zionist settlement of the land. The echoes of the line "*rak shvil kavshu raglay*" (only a pathway – my feet have conquered) seem to resonate with bitter irony in today's political reality in Israel-Palestine, as the verb "to conquer" is transposed from the context of war to the context of the intimate concrete touch between the lone female walker and the soil.

In the second stanza of Rachel's poem, however, a certain violent undercurrent seems to erupt with the phrase "*tru'at ha-gil*" ("roar of joy"), which re-invokes the context of war. Notably, the roar is the only loud noise in the poem, which overall emphasizes silence and the negation of sound (I have not sung, peaceful shores, secret cry). We may perhaps read this phrase as the implosion of the tensed relationship between the imagery of modesty, poverty and purity and the concrete situation of "conquering" the land. With Rachel's *tru'aa*, it seems, the unconscious of the Zionist

“defensive ethos” – the reality of a conflict over land – bursts into the peaceful scene of the mother (land)-daughter (worker) interaction. If at the beginning of the second stanza the speaker posits herself as a feminized Cain – the daughter worker of the land whose offerings are meager – then the second part of the stanza conjures up the violence associated with the figure of Cain. Indeed, the “roar of joy at daybreak” could be the victorious roar of joy of the killer. Rachel, of course, quickly suppresses the noise of war and goes back to crying in secret over the poverty of the land, and yet, the silence has already been interrupted. The feminine poetic site has emerged as the site of suppressed but present violence. What she has conquered is not merely a pathway, one is tempted to say.

I Have Only Known How to Tell of Myself? Women’s History and Gendered History

While the previous sections introduced tensions and debates that have been central to the feminist literary criticism of Hebrew literature, a substantial part of the study of women, gender and Zionism has been done by feminist historians. In this section, I would like to glean some of the questions raised in feminist historiography of Zionism. One pivotal concern of this scholarship is the move proposed by American feminist historian Joan Wallach Scott from “women’s history” to “gendered history.” In her seminal 1986 essay, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” Wallach Scott invites feminist historians to go beyond the descriptive mode of uncovering “women’s history,” which merely adds materials to official history without questioning its modes of production, and to take on the project of gendering history, by probing analytical questions such as “how

does gender work in human social relationships? How does gender give meaning to the organization and perception of historical knowledge?” (1055).

Billie Melman’s pioneering 1997 article, “Min ha-shulayim el ha-historyah shel ha-Yishuv” (From the Margins to the History of the Yishuv), constitutes the most substantial elaboration of Scott’s ideas in the context of the historiography of Zionism. Melman argues that in focusing on a “discourse of exclusion,” the scholarship on Hebrew women reproduces the relations of power between center and margins upheld by Zionism, and obfuscates the less stable aspects of the reality of gender in the Yishuv. Melman claims the discourse on gender and nation in the early Yishuv period consisted of a polyphony of voices that did not converge into one authoritative position (246-247). My venture to reread Zionism as a gendered project that does not exclusively revolve around the New Hebrew Man is certainly indebted to Melman’s critique of the androcentrism of the history of the Yishuv.

Melman’s article, however, demonstrates a certain ambiguity related to the transition from the “history of women” to “history of gender,” which diminishes the persuasive force of her suggestions. The history of gender, as framed by Melman, seems to entail two analytical moves: The first is a sort of “counter affirmative action” move, demanding that the research, which up to now supposedly has focused on bringing the experience of women to light, will attend to the construction of both femininity and masculinity as inter-related processes in the context of the nation; the second move involves the gender of the nation itself, highlighting the gendered and sexualized metaphors used by nationalists to speak of the nation. While Melman claims her attention is focused on the private sphere, where Zionist gender relations are less stable, in moving

between these two levels of analysis, she herself reproduces the gendered division between private and public. On the level of the private sphere, Melman skillfully traces the processes by which distinctions between femininities and masculinities were blurred, bringing forth instances of cross-dressing, queerness, and playfulness (255-266). On the level of national metaphors, however, she calls our attention to the use of the reified image of the sexually violated woman as a metaphor for the state of the nation (250-252; 271-273). Thus, in the framework offered by Melman, while instances of gender instability are possible in the private sphere, on the level of the collective discourse, the patriarchal division between women as victims and men as saviors or protectors is maintained.²⁵

This ambiguity, in my reading, attests to a deeply-rooted split that informs the feminist scholarship on Zionist women, and limits the scope of its critical analysis. Women, according to this scholarship, envision mostly themselves, as if committed to Rachel Bluwstein's famous line – "*rak 'al 'atzmi lesaper yada 'di*" (I know to tell only of myself). Thus, the women in the images that Melman analyzes, for example, are able to imagine themselves crossing gender-lines privately, but not affecting the collective cultural consciousness. Men, on the other hand, are able to envision and conceptualize the nation as a whole, and thus produce images that shape the Zionist public sphere. While Melman limits her study of women's writing to a few archived diaries and letters and one published autobiography,²⁶ the vast corpus of Zionist women's prose reveals a much more comprehensive and diverse engagement of women with Zionism. The fact is that

²⁵ Chapter Four of this work examines a particular revision of the raped Jewish woman narrative by woman-author Rivka Alper, where the focus is not on men saving/not saving their women, but on women's effort to recover from the trauma of sexual assault through the national project.

²⁶ She uses letters and diaries from the archives of a few Zikhron Yaakov families, Aharonson, Belkind and Feinberg, as well the autobiography of Yehudith Harrari, *Bein ha-kramim* (Amidst the Vineyards).

women did not write only of themselves. Rather, as the chapters of this dissertation show, women wrote of the nation, the land, labor, the Zionist body, and of their Others.

Another problem with the concept of gender-instead-of-women's history is that it assumes the scholar as a neutral authority, who is able to objectively assess what kind of knowledge is only relevant to women, and what kind of knowledge has a broader analytical valued meaning; essentially, that it concerns men as well. One of the more extreme manifestations of this problem in Israeli historiography is Yossi Ben-Artzi's article titled "Have Gender Studies Changed Our Attitude toward the Historiography of the Aliyah and Settlement Process?" (2001). "To what extent," Ben-Artzi asks:

Would we write a book on the history of the settlement differently if we scrutinized all these issues through the prism of gender? Would we just gain additional knowledge, a contribution in the form of uncovering new facts about women's "participation" or exclusion, or would we, perhaps, forge new insight into the settlement endeavor?" (20)

Following a brief survey of the diverse body of feminist research on the Yishuv published in Israel during the 1990s, Ben-Artzi resolves that "all of them combined created a new picture of the gender situation in the context of the Aliyah and settlement, but all of them together did not coalesce to create a new or different book of settlement history in general, or its main issues in particular" (22). Although Ben-Artzi never references Joan Wallach Scott, his article exemplifies the risk entailed by her theory, provoking the question, should the significance of the study of women's histories be determined by its contribution to the study of the – presumably more important subject matter – Zionist settlement?

In her 2007 study of women in the early Yishuv, Margalit Shilo directly responds to Ben-Artzi's question:

Yossi Ben-Artzi's challenging question, whether the study of women and gender changed our understanding of the history of the Aliyah and the settlement . . . should be answered with an unequivocal yes. The gendered perspective contributes to a new understanding of the Israeli experience The feminine story is not opposite to the masculine story, but rather "complements" it. Without it reality is lacking and the project of building the land is without validity [*mamashut*]. (34-35)

We may observe in Shilo's remarks a slippage between the lacks of history and the lacks of reality, between the way the feminine story "complements" the masculine one, and the way it "complements" – gives *mamashut* – to the project of building the land. Indeed, Shilo, in contrast with the literary critics whose work I discussed in the previous section, does not disregard Zionist women's Zionism, but rather celebrates it. According to her approach, the contribution of women and gender studies to the study of Zionism parallels the contribution of Zionist women to the Zionist project. Thus, with Shilo, the move from "women's history" to "gendered history" becomes a Zionist move. While like Shilo, I too maintain that women's stories of Zionism did not form an opposition to the masculine stories, my approach differs from hers in two significant ways. First, I do not see any easy complementary relationship between the androcentric framework of Zionism and "the feminine story." Rather, I trace in women's writing fraught efforts to re-narrate the Zionist project, which time and again clash with the patriarchal tenets of mainstream Zionism. Second, Zionist women's Zionism is not a cause for "celebration," in my readings, but rather an issue to be scrutinized in light of the critical insights provided by post-Zionist and Mizrahi critiques in recent decades.

Zionist Oedipus: Jewish Masculinity Studies

In contrast with Ben Artzi's claim that the study of gender and Zionism never produced a new Zionist narrative, a rich and diverse body of scholarship seems to do just that, by

interrogating the inextricable relations between Zionism and the formation of the New Hebrew Man. Psychoanalysis, in itself an androcentric field, serves as a pivotal frame of reference for these investigations, which foreground masculine tropes such as castration anxiety, desire for the mother (land), and body building.

The unacknowledged naissance of the research of Zionism and masculinity may be traced to two semi-academic essays published in the 1970s by Jay Y. Gonen and Lesley Hazleton. Gonen's 1975 attempt at a psychoanalytic critique of Zionism maps the Zionist narrative of return onto the Oedipal drama, postulating the essential Zionist gesture as a breach of command of the godly father by the Zionist sons, who venture to conquer the body of the mother-land. Hazleton's 1977 pioneering study *Israeli Women* is considered the first critique of the "myth of equality" and the first comprehensive account of Israeli women's marginalization within the Zionist dream. In the chapter "Zionism and Manhood" Hazleton invokes Gonen's psychoanalytic model of the Zionist encounter with the land as an incestuous scene, and asks:

But while Zion played Jocasta to the male pioneers' Oedipus, where was the Agamemnon for the women pioneers' Electra? What value could all this libidinous attraction have for them? What archetypical images could it arouse in a woman's mind? What role was there for women in this scenario of sons and fathers fertilizing the motherland? (93)

The studies discussed below, published during the 1990s and 2000s, do not reference the brief dialogue between Gonen and Hazleton. This omission is indicative of the rift between the studies of Jewish and Zionist masculinity, taking place mostly within the American academy, in the field of Jewish studies, and the Israeli feminist scholarship on women in Zionism. In both fields, however, Hazleton's questions remain in need of a comprehensive answer.

The work of George Mosse on nationalism, modernity and masculinity provided Jewish studies scholars with a conceptual framework for rethinking Zionism as a gendered project. Mosse shows how modern nationalism evolved in conjunction with the stereotype of the modern man, a figure which boasts muscular features, self-control, and uncompromising assertiveness (*Image of Man* 3-16; *Nationalism and Sexuality* 1-22). While the male figure stands for the values of progress and modernity, women in this framework serve as symbols of the nation, embodying the immutable values of tradition (*Image of Man* 8-9). Jews, according to Mosse, like Gypsies and homosexuals, serve as counter-types against which modern masculinity is constituted. Zionism, in this context, is the project of redeeming the Jews from this position of otherness, and reconstructing them in accordance with the powerful image of the modern man.

Daniel Boyarin's oft-quoted work construes this process as the "Colonial Drag," suggesting that Zionism was the most extreme form of assimilation, an effort to imitate the Aryan man, and eliminate the effeminate image of the old Jew. Significantly, in a way that is quite unusual for Jewish studies, Boyarin invokes Homi Bhabha's concept of mimicry, arguing that Zionism was "the ultimate version of that practice," with the "colonized" Jews transforming, through Zionism, into a mirror-image of their oppressors.²⁷ However, Boyarin emphasizes while "Zionism in its discursive forms and practices is very *similar* to colonialism" (308), it differs from Western colonialism in several ways, the most significant of which is that its main objects were the Jews themselves, and not the actual natives of Palestine, who were rarely noticed. It is hard to argue with Boyarin's astute analysis of Zionism, and it is not my intention to do so, for

²⁷ For discussions of the relevance of postcolonial theory to Zionism, see also the collection edited by Yehouda Shenhav, *Kolonialiyut ve-hamatav ha-postkoloniyali*.

my point here is highlighting the way certain analytical frameworks become loci of attention while others remain unexplored. Boyarin's insistence that the Jews were the primary targets of their own colonial project may serve as an example of the way this process works. Granted, it is not so much that Boyarin disregards the Palestinians, or the Mizrahim, as the victims of the Zionist project.²⁸ He absolves himself from such blame, stating "this should not be read as a trivialization of the disastrous effects of this discourse, especially with respect to its primary victims, the Palestinians" (309). However, the narrative that Boyarin's influential work foregrounds is such an intellectually seductive intra-Jewish-Ashkenazi narrative, that all other stories become "effects," ramifications, of this story, and their own complexity is obscured. This narrative is also, of course, an intra-masculine narrative. The problem I recognize here thus lies not in the singular analysis, which may be very persuasive, but with the way certain ideas, such as the idea of New Hebrew Man as the core of the Zionist project, become so prevalent that they tend to homogenize the intellectual arena in which they operate.

It does not seem coincidental that psychoanalysis becomes one of the major frameworks of interpretation within the field that may be termed "Jewish masculinity studies." David Biale, author of the comprehensive study *Eros and the Jews*, explains: "since psychoanalysis necessarily colors any study of sexuality, and is also explicitly Jewish in its origins, it is appropriate to reflect on what it has to say about our subject" (5). Indeed, Freud's psychoanalysis is central to any modern discussion of sexuality, and it bears a complicated relation to Jewishness. However, it is also an explicitly

²⁸ See Edward Said's "Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Victims" and Ella Shohat's "Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims."

androcentric field whose main narrative, the Oedipal narrative, makes masculine desire the model for all desires. While in 1975 Gonen directly applies the Oedipal story to the Zionist story, 22 years later, Boyarin historicizes the relations between Zionism and psychoanalysis, arguing that they both revolve around the project of normalizing Jewish masculinity. Arguably, however, the relations between Jewish masculinity studies and psychoanalysis are also sustained by the androcentrism of the Oedipal narrative, whose seductive cultural presence produces a certain center-margins setup, which is very hard to shake off. Hazleton's questions must resonate here: if Oedipus is the only story possible, how can the relations between women and the nation be articulated?

“Zionism promised an erotic revolution for the Jews,” Biale argues, “the creation of a virile New Hebrew Man but also the rejection of the inequality of women found in traditional Judaism in favor of full equality between the sexes in all spheres of life” (176-177), but, in fact, he shows, “as long as Zionism was seen as the creation of a virile New Man against the allegedly feminine impotence of exile, women would have difficulty finding truly equal place” (187). As Biale's discussion continues, women remain in the place of the outsiders, complaining or accepting their marginalization. From the start, however, while the New Hebrew Man grounded in German romanticism is the subject and object of the promised erotic revolution, it is not clear what the relationship is between the vague idea of “women's equality . . . in all areas of life” and Zionism as an erotic revolution, unless one assumes that everything that has to do with women is necessarily erotic. Biale's slippage here is endemic of the field of Jewish masculinity studies. The Zionist imagination, as a fraught site of desires, drives, anxieties, pain and pleasures, is masculine. Zionist women justly fight for equality, but their story lacks the

tensions, complexes and dilemmas of desire that capture the scholar's attention in the field. In this framework again, women's complex investment in the nation remains untheorized.

Cynthia Enloe's claim that, "nationalism typically has sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope" (44), thus seems to fit the Jewish Zionist case. In the Jewish/Zionist psycho-sexual drama, Jewish men have taken the place of hysterics (Gilman, *Freud, Race and Gender* 93-168). Michael Gluzman in his study of the Zionist masculine body (34-182) analyzes the psycho-sexual torments of the Jewish male *vis-à-vis* the imperative of masculinization through the nation. The national masculine subject is a conflicted subject full of neurosis, whose complex inner life as textualized by Hebrew male authors, are grounds for subtle close analysis. In this sense, one of the signs of women's marginalization within Jewish gender studies is the absence of a parallel tormented feminine modern subject as a point of departure for thinking of the nation, within the scope of this scholarship, although figures of neurotic women are not rare in women's prose. However, since it is the masculine narcissistic wound that is to be healed through nationalism, women, it seems, do not have the privilege to be the protagonist of the national drama. Biale complains in his introduction that "with very few exceptions, what we know of women's sexuality was filtered through male eyes" (8). If Zionism is defined as an "erotic revolution," and if Jewish women's sexuality remains, to a large extent a mystery, then there is no way to construe her stakes in the Zionist story except as "a search for equality" to be like men. If her wound is invisible, then she cannot be the subject of the nation.

Nonetheless, the Zionist women authors I read in this dissertation knew their own wounds, and their nationalism did derive from those wounds. Zionist women authors, I argue, wrote their own national dramas, and posited themselves as the protagonists of these dramas. With the understanding that masculinity was a central issue for Zionism, I proceed to read the writing of Zionist women writers of the period who did not share the assumption that this was the only issue.

* * *

I'm telling him about the planting, about different kinds of trees, about the seedlings of the cedar-trees. But it seems that Bialik is not listening to what I am saying. He looks at me, looks at the other women-members, looks at the faded colours of our "sweaters," the overalls – the loose pants, the heavy muddy shoes, our rough warty hands, our tanned faces, and his face is sad. We also look at ourselves then. Indeed work makes the colours of clothes fade and the face scorched. But this is work, and it brings blessing to our souls. And this, after all, was Bialik's call to the pioneers: "Ascend, ascend, to the top of the mountain ascend!" (Rivka Alper, *Banot ba-nir* 47-48).²⁹

The above passage is taken from *Banot ba-nir* (Women in the Meadow), Rivka Alper's documentary project about the educational Zionist women's farms established in Palestine during the 1920s. The passage depicts the visit of the Hebrew national poet Ḥayim Naḥman Bialik to one of the farms. Listening to the narrator's tales about women's accomplishments in working the land, Bialik keeps silent, which frustrates the narrator. Instead of commending the women for their work, Bialik looks at the women with sadness, which makes them self-conscious of their shabby appearance.

The efforts of the women-workers, the poet's gaze insinuates, disfigure the feminine body in a manner to which the national poet cannot respond. Despite her

²⁹ אני מספרת לו על הנטיעה, על מיני העצים, על שתילי הארזים. אך דומה כי ביאליק אינו מקשיב לדברי. הוא סוקר אותי, סוקר את החברות, מביט על ה"סוודרים" הדהויים, הסרבליים -- המכנסיים הרחבים, על הנעלים הכבדות המכוסות בוץ, על ידינו הגסות המיובלות ועל פנינו השזופים משמש ורוח ופניו עצובים. הסיבונג גם אנו את עינינו על עצמנו. אכן, בעבודה ידה הבגד והפנים נשזפים. אך כזו היא דרך העבודה ובה מקור הברכה לנפשו. הן כה קרא ביאליק לחלוצי העם: "העפילו, העפילו, אל ראש ההר העפילו!"

disappointment, the narrator ventures to compensate for the poet's silence by offering her own interpretation of the upsetting sight of the meager feminine bodies: "Indeed work makes the colours of clothes fade and the face tanned. But this is work, and it brings blessing to our souls" (ibid); moreover, she argues, the women-workers are in fact responding to Bialik's own call: "ascend!" (*ha'apilu*). Curiously, the narrator in fact misquotes Bialik. The song she cites was not written by Bialik but by the poet Levin Kipnis. Written in 1919, the song "Ha-ma'apilim" did not originally refer to the illegal immigrants in the Mandate period, who were called *ma'apilim*, but is rather a marching-song, sung in the context of Zionist field-trips, calling the hikers to get to the top of the mountain (www.zemer.co.il).

Moreover, the reference to Bialik's silence invokes the long period in Bialik's life in which he wrote no poems (1911-1917), and "his prolonged poetic silence increasingly burdened him, his friends and his readers" (Holtzman 156). The critic David Kimhi writes in 1920:

Bialik is silent – and here come a group of babblers trying to explain the reason for his silence, and we are fortunate enough to have more writing about the silent Bialik than on Bialik the poet. And the reason is simple: It is easier to write about the silent Bialik than it is to write about Bialik the poet – and this is an interesting and enticing theme. (13)³⁰

The narrator of *Banot ba-nir* performs a double gesture of appropriation with regard to the silent poet. First, she appropriates the "interesting and enticing theme" of his dramatic silence, making it into a response to women's work, and second, she forces words down his throat, assigning him with a song he did not write, and making the women-workers the addressees of his presumed words.

³⁰ ביאליק שותק – והנה באים חבר מלהגים ועומדים לבאר את סיבת שתיקתו, וזכינו כבר שחרבו לכתוב על ביאליק השותק מאשר על ביאליק המשורר. והסיבה פשוטה: על ביאליק השותק נקל יותר לכתוב מאשר על ביאליק המשורר – והתימה מעניינת ומגרה.

One may observe in Alper's depiction of Bialik's visit to the women's farm the tension between the drama of the masculine subject, the tormented silent poet, and the seemingly much less important drama of women-workers. In this reading, women's bodies vacillate between the demands of the "work of the land" and the demands of the male gaze expecting them to be pretty, and the silence of the male poet is equivalent to the silence of the androcentric history of Zionism with regards to Zionist women's issues. The woman narrator of *Banot Ba-nir*, notably, responds to this predicament with an effort to synthesize the dramas. Against the refusal of the national poet to give words to the work of women, against his refusal to constitute the women-workers as anything more than the objects of his gaze, the female-narrator takes it upon herself to make up a feminine national narrative, in which the poet and women are in dialogue: his words are directed at them and their work is the proper response to his call. They are the answer to his drama of speech and silence; they are the signs that his speech is heard, and yet the mistake, or lie, about the song Bialik has not written, remains as a trace of the strain of the female-author, who strives to re-narrate a story that marginalize her.

Activists and Writers

The following chapters of this dissertation present and analyze the nationalist writings of five Zionist women: Hemda Ben-Yehuda, Sara Azaryahu, Rivka Alper, Neḥama Poḥatchevsky, and Dvora Baron. Except for Baron, all of the writers discussed here were also engaged with Zionist feminist activism. As a journalist, Ben-Yehuda was a vocal proponent of women's rights, and has worked against the attempts of orthodox community leaders to limit women's participation in the public sphere. Azaryahu and

Poḥatchevsky were both major activists in the struggle for women's suffrage for the Yishuv's institutions in the early 1920s, and Poḥatchevsky was also a long time community activist in the colony of Rishon Le-Tziyon. Rivka Alper was active in the women-workers' movement, and a journalist in *Dvar ha-po'elet* (The Woman-Worker's Word), a publication that aimed to represent Zionist women's perspectives on the matters of the Yishuv. Among the five, Baron is the only one whose feminist critique was most and foremost articulated through her fiction. Indeed, many of Baron's stories deliver messages of protest against the patriarchy of traditional Jewish society and the androcentrism of Zionism. The fact that these women-writers were invested in feminist politics is significant for my discussion, for this project is, ultimately, an interrogation of Zionist feminism, which, in contrast with other Western feminisms, developed as part as of the national movement. In this context, it seems crucial to bridge the disciplinary gap between sociological and historical analyses of Zionist women's activism and feminist literary criticism of women's writing, and demonstrate how including women in a critical study of Zionism provides us with the opportunity to expand and diversify our perspective on the fraught interrelations between Zionist culture, ideology and practice.

The corpus of Hebrew women's prose of the pre-state period is, as mentioned earlier, vast and diverse, and the phenomenon of feminized nationalism is by no means limited to the works of the five writers discussed here. However, the work of each of the authors discussed below provides an opportunity for a discussion of a particular theme or a set of themes that were central to the Zionist gendered imagination: land, self, body, labor and immigration.

Chapter Two of this dissertation foregrounds the perspective of author Hamada Ben-Yehuda (1873-1951) on issues of land, rootedness, and nativeness. In her stories “Ḥatat Ephraim” (The Sin of Ephraim; 1902) and “Ḥavat bney Rechav” (The Farm of the Rechabites; 1903), Ben-Yehuda, I argue, intertwines the Jewish Zionist dilemmas of placedness with the question of the New Hebrew Woman. The result of this “unholy match” is, in my reading, the emergence of a dissonance between the Zionist women’s project of liberation and the national project. As a way of alleviating this dissonance Ben-Yehuda imagines an Orientalized native woman, who appears as the perfect partner for the New Hebrew Man and the perfect sacrifice for the nation.

Chapter Three engages with the concept of the “new Jewish self” through the autobiography of the Zionist suffragist Sara Azaryahu (1873-1962). Azaryahu’s text strives to patch together the Zionist construction of the New Jew with the modern European story of the New Woman. Her efforts to make this connection consist of recurrent demarcation of the opposition between the Zionist self and its non-Western Others, the Mizraḥim and the Palestinians. Highlighting the sharp East-West dichotomies sustaining Azaryahu’s emancipatory narrative, and tracing the text’s various gestures of erasure and exclusion, I show how discourses of racial, ethnic and national difference inform and shape the Zionist feminist self. At the same time, however, I claim that the text also produces an analogy between the exclusion of Palestinian and Mizraḥi women from Zionist feminist emancipatory projects and the self-erasure of “everything feminine” and “everything Jewish” that ushers Azaryahu’s self constitution both as an autobiographer and as a democratic subject. In this sense, I argue, the text undermines the clear-cut East-West dichotomy that on the surface it strives to maintain.

Chapter Four focuses on the Zionist feminine body. I argue that against the backdrop of the vast engagement in Jewish and Hebrew studies with the reconstruction of the masculine Jewish body as emblem of the Zionist project, the writings of Rivka Alper (1902-1958) narrate Zionism as a story about feminine corporeality composed out of gendered traumas and issues of beauty and beautification. Tracing the intertextual relations between Alper's first novel *Pirpurey mahapekhah* (Quivers of Revolution; 1930) and her biographical project *Ha-mitnaḥalim ba-har* (Settlers in the Mountain; 1944), I recover an alternative story of the Zionist body: Beginning with a reality of sexual and gendered abuse in the Diaspora, continuing with the aspiration to be healed and become beautiful through the connection with the land in Palestine, and ending with the image of the excessively adorned feminine body as metonym for the degeneration of the Zionist project. Eventually, the narrative Alper provides, I argue, entails rethinking the Zionist project of body formation, not in terms of building, growing muscles and phalluses, but rather in terms of undressing the body of adornments and ornaments, and producing a functional ascetic form whose purpose is the work of the land.

Questions of the body lead to questions of labor in Chapter Five, which discusses an alternative framework for contemplating the prestigious Zionist project of Hebrew labor in the writings of prose writer Neḥama Poḥatchevsky (1869-1934). In her stories "Ha-motza" (The Way Out; 1930) and "Bi-vdidut" (In Solitude; 1930), Poḥatchevsky, I argue, "feminizes" the Zionist discourse of exclusive Hebrew labor in Palestine, transforming it from a discourse of masculine body-building and conquest of land into a discourse of charity, sentimentality, and hospitality. At the same time, the fragile feminine subject constructed by this discourse maintains the racist politics that underlie

the project of Hebrew labor, as the woman-protagonists of the stories develop analogical hatreds of Arabs and Zionist men, both perceived as “owners” of land, labor and women. A troubling juxtaposition of proto-feminism and racism thus governs Pohatchevsky’s “feminine” discourse of labor.

Finally, Chapter Six reconsiders the work of the only canonical woman-writer of the pre-state period, Dvora Baron (1887-1956), tracing the ways in which she re-inscribes the transition between exile and the land as a feminine experience, a familial-national romance, whose center is not Oedipus but the Jewish daughter. Whereas much of the feminist readings of Baron construe her as a subversive feminine voice within the masculinized Zionist space, Baron’s novel *Ha-golim* (The Exiles; 1943, 1956) and the stories “Turkim” (Turks) and “Bney Keidar” (Sons of Keidar) enact colonialist and Orientalist discourses of femininity as they narrate women’s journeys from the Diaspora to the Land. To read Baron as secluded from national history and politics, I argue, is to elude the profound ways in which Zionist ideology shapes and is shaped by her prose.

Reading short fiction, novels, autobiographies, biographies, newspaper articles and archival materials, this dissertation aims to unravel the gendered Zionist imagination, not as the exclusive terrain of the New Hebrew Man, but as an asymmetrical, and yet tenacious, rivalry between marginal and dominant, feminine and masculine interventions. Offering a nuanced panoramic outlook on Hebrew women’s investments in the national project, I hope to contribute to global gender studies as well as to the critical study of Zionism, by developing a new feminist theorization of the relations between gender and nation, one that transcends the distinction between complicity and subversion, but designates critical force to the marginal subject’s unrequited desire for the nation. Zionist

women's texts, I propose, make a particularly productive venue for probing women's complex position vis-à-vis modern nationalism, a position which is fraught by the one-sided love for the nation, but that nevertheless features restless Sisyphean intellectual efforts to re-conceptualize and re-narrate the nation, to make it their own, to love on their own terms.

CHAPTER II

Split Fantasy:

The Land and the Question of the New Hebrew Woman in the Writings of H̄emda Ben-Yehuda

Introduction: Gender and Jewish Dilemmas of Placedness

Whether *he* knew it or not, whether *he* wished it or not – indeed, *he* desperately hoped otherwise and did much to deceive *himself – the Jew . . .* remained in transit. Judaism defines itself as a visa to the messianic ‘other land’. (Steiner 318; my emphasis)

Not the origin: She doesn’t go back there. A boy’s journey is the return to the native land, the Heimweh Freud speaks of, the nostalgia that makes man a being who tends to come back to the point of departure to appropriate it for himself and die there. A girl’s journey is farther to the unknown, to invent. (Cixous, “Sorties” 93)

To say the idea of a Jewish homeland is one of the fundamentals of Zionist ideology seems as an obvious statement (Ben Ari and Bilu 3). And yet, each term in this phrase – “Jewish” “home” “land,” – opens critical questions concerning the Zionist project: What is the “land” for the “Jews? A distant object of religious yearning or a concrete space to conquer and inhabit? (Ben-Ari and Bilu 1-24; Davies; Zakim 1-22; Schweid 139-216; Gurevitch and Aran, “The Land of Israel: Myth and Phenomenon” 195-210; Gurevitch and Aran, ‘*Al ha-makom* 7-102; Gurevitch 203-216) Can the “land” as a “home” ever sit well with Jewishness considering the centrality of exile to the evolution of Jewish culture? (Boyarin and Boyarin 693-725; Gurevitch and Aran 195-210; Gurevitch 203-216; Steiner 304-327) Insofar as it strives for a homeland, in what sense, if at all, is

Zionism, Jewish? (Boyarin 271-313; Raz-Krakotzkin 23-55). These questions, probed in recent decades, are the backdrop for my discussion of Hemda Ben-Yehuda's writings.

However, while most of the studies referenced above assume the Jewish man as the subject of the national dilemma of placedness, Hemda Ben-Yehuda, I show, complicates it further by inserting into it the question of the New Hebrew Woman. As we shall see in the following pages, the entanglement of the two threads – the Jewish return to the land and the question of woman – fleshes out an uncomfortable dissonance between women and the nation. This chapter introduces the New Hebrew Woman's crisis of identity as phrased by Hemda Ben-Yehuda, and analyzes Ben-Yehuda's intervention in the Zionist and Jewish problematic surrounding issues of placedness, rootedness and nativeness. It traces Ben-Yehuda's textual efforts to tie together issues of place with issues of gender and women, and, eventually, her failure. This failure, I show, is intermingled with the production of a figure, whose variants will reappear throughout all the chapters of this dissertation – the figure of the Orientalized woman, which, in this chapter, emerges as a stand-in for the New Hebrew Woman.

The Jewish dilemma of placedness unfolded in several venues in recent years, offering a potent frame of thought for a critique of Zionism. A notable example is the 1997 anthology *Grasping Land* edited by Yoram Bilu and Eyal Ben Ari. In the introduction of this collection Bilu and Ben Ari call for “questioning the very assumption of the centrality of land and place in various Jewish and Jewish Israeli discourses” (4). Jonathan Boyarin, in his final note for the same collection, comments that “the process of de-diasporization – ‘the predicament of homecoming’ . . . – represents simultaneously an attempt to take up an interrupted continuity with ancient Israel, and a break with

traditional diaspora Judaism” (217), reminding us of the split between Jewish culture and “the process of ingathering, conceived as a return to a shared and collectively possessed land . . .” (ibid). In an earlier article (1993) Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin oppose two narratives about the Jews and land: “One . . . begins with an imaginary autochthony – ‘In the Land of Israel this people came into existence’ – and ends with the triumphant return of the People to their natural Land, making them ‘re-autochthonized’,” while the other “begins with a people forever unconnected with a particular land, a people that calls into question the idea that a people must have a land in order to be a people” (718). The ambiguity of the land as a concept in Jewish and Zionist thought is also the focus of Gideon Aran and Zali Gurevitch’s essay “The Land of Israel: Myth and Phenomenon” (1994), where they make a compelling distinction between “place” as the “specific stretch of land on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean where modern Israel is located” and “Place,” “an idea, a voice, a thought in relation to which the tangible place, as its earthly manifestation, is secondary” (195).³¹ “In the Israeli experience,” argue Gurevitch and Aran, “the local sense of place – home, work, friends, pleasures – is influenced and even determined by the tension and ambiguity emanating from the idea of Place” (195-196). While Boyarin and Boyarin clearly advocate privileging the alternative narrative of no-land repressed by Zionism,³² Gurevitch and Aran argue that a dual perception of the land – as both “place” and “Place” – is inherent to both Judaism and Zionism. In any case, this mode of critique of Zionism challenges the idea of a simple, natural, organic

³¹ “Place,” *Ha-Makom*, is also a name of God in Jewish religion, that is it represents the absolute opposite than anything local, corporeal or concrete.

³² On this direction of thought, see also: Raz-Krakotzkin 23-55. Raz-Krakotzkin identifies “The Negation of Exile” as a central Zionist move, and calls for a return of exile into the Israeli public discourse as means of opening it up to acknowledgement of the oppression of Arabs and Mizrahi Jews by the Zionism.

connection between the Jews and the land, and, thus, problematizes any simple story of Jewish homecoming or return to origins in Palestine.

Hemda Ben-Yehuda's two stories, "Ḥatat Ephraim" (The Sin of Ephraim) and "Ḥavat bney Rechav" (The Farm of the Rechabites), published in installments in the daily paper *Hashkafa* in 1902-1903, provide a woman's version of the Jewish/Zionist dilemma of placedness. The stories recount the quest of a former colonist named Ephraim to find the lost tribe of the Rechabites, a tribe of Jewish Bedouins, believed to have remained on the land since biblical times. In her analysis of the "Hebrew Bedouin" identity, Yael Zerubavel argues that the Bedouins were construed by early Zionists as "living representations of their biblical forefathers" (319), and thus as a much desperately craved "bridge to that distant past" (ibid).³³ Zerubavel, however, also points out that the association of the Bedouins with "the love of wandering in open spaces was antithetical to the Zionist emphasis on 'striking roots in the land'" (332), conjuring up the figure of "the wandering Jew" marked in Zionist imagination "as a symptom of the pathological condition of the exilic Jewish society" (ibid). For Zerubavel, this discord between Zionist ideology and the Hebrew-Bedouin model is a sign of Zionist "selectiveness" in shaping the figure of the New Hebrew.³⁴ Perhaps a more complex understanding of the attraction of early Zionists to the Bedouins despite their association with nomadism has to do with the significance of the desert as "non-place" in Jewish culture, as recognized by

³³ For other references to the Hebrew-Bedouin myth, see also: Moshe Smilansky's 1942 memorial book for the First Aliyah, *Mishpaha ha-adamah* (Family of the Land), where the figure of a Zionist Hebrew-Bedouin named Abu-Yosef is presented; Yehuda Burla's 1920 story "Be-ein kokhav" (No Star), where a Yemenite Jew is also in search for the Jews of Haibar in order to ask them to come to the rescue of the Jews of Yemen who suffer from persecution; and Yaakov Rabinowitz's 1929 novel *Mas'ot Amasai ha-shomer* (The Travels of Amasai the Guard), which depicts a figure of a Zionist guard who lives with the Bedouins.

³⁴ On the process of making the New Hebrew as a process of selecting components from various cultural models, see Itamar Even Zohar's seminal article, "The Emergence of a Native Hebrew Culture in Palestine 1882-1948."

Gurevitch and Aran. “The desert,” claim Gurevitch and Aran, “does not disappear at the time of settlement, but persists as homeland to the idea . . . as if in the non-place, in the desert and in exile, released from the burden of the place, the People can return to itself, that is, to the idea” (*‘Al ha-makom* 35).³⁵

The centrality of the desert in the Jewish/Zionist culture, I would propose, also constitutes one of the intersections between Zionist imagination and Orientalism. As a return to an imaginary Place in the East where the self may find itself anew, the Zionist return is resonant with another journey. The journey of the Orientalist, as described, for example, by Rana Kabbani, is also a circular journey:

It moves away from the self, yet returns more deeply into it the further the narrator moves into the unknown . . . It leads the reader back, unintentionally perhaps despite itself, to the emblematic Ithaca that originally provided the desire to move away from it, as it would ultimately provide the need to return. (179)

As the Hebrew-Bedouin stands at this juncture between Zionism and Orientalism, any discussion of this figure cannot remain uncritical of the desire to control the East embedded in the Orientalist imagination. While certain discussions of Hebrew Orientalism, insofar as it idealizes the “Native,” conceive of it as a possible site of reconciliation, “an inspiring model of cooperation and even integration between Jews and Arabs in Palestine” (Peleg 13), my approach takes into account the crucial interdependence between Orientalism and colonialist politics (Said 9-10). Viewed in this light, I contend, the problematic of the Zionist relationship to space cannot be separated from the colonial framework in which it operates,³⁶ as the Zionist enactment of the dream of “Place” maps unto the colonialist dream of the “Orient” – both constitute a site of

³⁵ On the significance of the desert see also, Zali Gurevitch’s article in *Grasping Land*, “The Double Site of Israel” 212-213.

³⁶ The critiques of Aran and Gurevitch’s essay referred to this aspect of Place. See: Ofir, *Ma‘ariv* 12.20.91; Laor, *Haaretz* 1.7.92, 1.31.92.

origin where the Western masculine subject is rejuvenated. Curiously, in Hemda Ben-Yehuda's writing, it is the infiltration of "the woman question" into this complex that makes the colonial frame apparent, as objectification of and domination over the native woman become a central strand of the Zionist journey.

Yaron Peleg, in his study of Orientalism in Hebrew literature of the turn of the century, describes the emergence of the Arab man as a model for Hebrew masculinity, as transposing "the inspiration for Nordau's 'muscular Judaism' from the Slavic peasants of Eastern Europe to the society of fighting Bedouins" (78). Indeed, the Zionist journey shares with other Orientalist journeys, among other things, the white male as their ultimate subject. In narrating a Zionist man's search for origins among the Bedouins, Ben-Yehuda enacts the Zionist and Orientalist discourses of masculinity, but adds another layer to the Orientalist Zionist quest. Introducing the question of woman into the two masculinist discourses, she entangles the already fraught narrative of Jewish return with the no less difficult Zionist feminist search for the New Hebrew Woman. Paradoxically, the attempt to tell a double story of masculine and feminine self-revelation, to write both as a feminist and as a nationalist, ends up, not only exposing the oppressive implications of the Zionist search for origins, but also collapsing the logic of the entire endeavor, by dooming its protagonists to a mute and invisible existence in the desert non-place.

Before turning to a close analysis of "Ḥatat Ephraim" and "Ḥavat bney Rechav," I would like to introduce an earlier series of texts in which Ben-Yehuda dwells on the question of woman. In 1896, Hemda Ben-Yehuda began to publish the section "Ezrat nashim" (The Women's Section) in the daily newspaper *Ha-tzvi*, in which she proposes

to engage with issues concerning the women of the Yishuv. The questions and tensions that are raised in “Ezrat nashim”, I argue, echo in and trouble the later stories. The following pages thus provide a close reading of “Ezrat nashim.” Only then shall I move to the 1902-1903 stories, and unpack the ways in which they entangle dilemmas of placedness with issues of gender and women. Eventually, I contend, the masculine narrative of returning to the land and the feminine narrative of constructing the New Hebrew Woman violently clash with each other, a clash embodied by the figure of the Orientalized woman, who appears as *deus ex machina* of the Jewish Zionist dilemma.

The Question of the New Hebrew Woman, 1896

If a person should speak to us about an English woman, or a French woman, or a German, Russian, Italian, etc., they may only mention the name of her nation, and already we have an idea what they speak of. This woman, she is standing before us . . . not so if we speak of the Hebrew woman . . . if we say a Hebrew-Russian woman or Hebrew-English woman etc., she stands before us . . . but the Hebrew woman of the Land of Israel is a total enigma . . . this name, “the Jewish woman of the Land of Israel,” does not give us any idea of her appearance, her clothing, her education, her progress, her wisdom, her language, her soul, or even her life . . . (H. Ben-Yehuda, “Yehudiyat Eretz-Yisrael” 3)³⁷

These words by Hēmda Ben-Yehuda were written in 1896 in the daily newspaper *Ha-tzvi*. Hēmda’s husband, Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, the famous modernizer of the Hebrew language,³⁸ was convinced that women’s use of the language will help make the reviving

³⁷ אם ידבר לנו אדם על אודות אישה אנגליה, צרפתייה, גרמנייה, רוסייה או איטלקיה וכו' וכו' די לו רק להזכיר לנו שם עמה וכבר יש לנו מושג על אודות מה ידברו לנו. האישה הזאת הנה היא עומדת לפנינו במראה, בתכונתה, במדרגת השכלתה, במנהגיה, בלשונה. אנו כבר יודעים יותר או פחות את מעלותיה, חסרונותיה, את גדולתה או בינוניותה, את נטיות נפשה, במה תבחר ובמה תמאס. לא כן אם נדבר על אודות אישה עבריייה. מיד שאול ישאלונו, איזו אישה עבריה, מאיזה מקום, מה היא, למי היא קרובה, למי היא דומה, מה תכונתה? אולם די להוסיף עוד דיבור אחד ולאמר, אישה עבריה רוסיית, עבריה אנגלית, וכדומה וצורתה עומדת לפנינו... אך חידה גמורה היא האישה העבריה בארץ ישראל, אשר לא נוכל להוסיף להתאר עבריה שום תאר אחר.... השם הזה "יהודיית ארץ ישראל" אינו נותן לנו שום מושג ממראה בכלל, ממלבושיה, מהשכלתה, מהתפתחותה, מבינתה, מלשונה מתכונת נפשה, אף לא מחייה.

³⁸ Eliezer Ben-Yehuda (1858-1922) is the figure most associated in the Zionist collective memory with the revival of Modern Hebrew Language. He was an advocate of the project of making Hebrew a speaking language, an editor of several Hebrew newspapers, and the author of the Ben-Yehuda dictionary.

language more sensitive and flexible, and thus he instructed his talented young wife to take up writing (H. Ben-Yehuda, *Eliezer* 129-130). Embarrassed by her less than perfect Hebrew she was reluctant (ZA A43/47; A192/1160). Yet, eventually she did begin publishing, in March 1896, a section in *Ha-tzvi*, entitled “Ezrat nashim.” During March and April of that year, she published four articles in “Ezrat nashim.” Afterward, the section ceased to appear for unknown reasons. Notwithstanding its short lifespan, “Ezrat nashim,” I suggest, opened a unique discussion on the New Hebrew Woman as a category of national identity.

A cautionary footnote by Eliezer Ben-Yehuda is attached to the first article of “Ezrat nashim”:

We fear the words of the people of *Havatzet* [newspaper of the Old Yishuv³⁹] who complain about the articles concerning “the beautiful sex” published in *Ha-tzvi* from time to time, because, they say, this agitates the nerves (they must know from experience what these things have caused them to do). Thus, we established a separate section for these kind of things, so that whoever is afraid and soft hearted, shall see the title of this section and shall not enter the “Women’s Section,” so as not to be tempted to sin. (3)⁴⁰

At first glance, the written “Women’s Section” seems to have the same function as the women’s section at the synagogue. It allows women to participate in public life, but keeps them in a secluded space. The sarcastic tone of the footnote, however – with the people of *Havatzet* as weak complaining men frightened of the “beautiful sex” – construes the written “Women’s Section” as a parody of the one at the synagogue. If in the traditional Ashkenazi synagogue, the women’s section is usually located above the main hall, outside of men’s scope of vision, here the “secluded” space is placed on same

³⁹ The Old Yishuv is a term used to refer the Jewish settlement in Palestine before the Zionist waves of immigration.

⁴⁰ יראנו מפני דברי מפליצקי החבצלת הצועקים ככרוכיה על הדברים הבאים בהצבי מעת לעת על "המין היפה", יען זה מגרה העצבים (כנראה הם יודעים זה בניסיון ומי יודע למה הביאום הדברים האלה) ונאמר לקבוע לדברים ממין זה מדור בפני עצמם, ויהא כל איש הירא ורך הלב וראה את הציון על המדור וישמר בחוץ, ולא יכנס ב'עזרת נשים' זו ולא יכשל הלילה בדבר עבירה.

plane with “men’s sections” on the newspaper page, in men’s plain sight. Eliezer’s “warning” sets up old Jews versus new Jews against each other as rivals over the question of women. The image of the old Jew, who is “afraid and soft hearted” *vis-à-vis* women, because he is unable to control his sexual drives, corresponds with the Anti-Semitic image of the Jew, which was to a large extent incorporated into Zionist culture (Boyarin 301-303; Biale 3-4). In contrast with that image stands the liberal modern man, Eliezer, who encourages women’s writing. Women’s writing is thus deployed not only as part of the project of diversifying language, instilling it with feminine tenderness, but also as a badge of honor of the New Hebrew Man who facilitates it.

Notably, the topic of Hemda’s essay itself is the contrast between the defined image of the New Hebrew Man and the amorphous figure of the New Hebrew Woman:

This name, “the Jewish woman of the Land of Israel” [*Yehudiyat Eretz-Yisrael*] does not give us any idea of her appearance, her clothing, her education, her progress, her wisdom, her language, her soul, or even her life . . . the same words with minor difference, minus one letter, the words, “the Jewish man of the Land of Israel” [*Yehudi Eretz-Yisrael*] bring to mind various pictures. Some imagine an old Jew, wearing long clothes, with long beard and *payot*, standing barefoot at the Wailing Wall, praying all day and all night. Others imagine a young man, weak, frail, lazy, who stands at door of the charity office with a certificate testifying that he had another child, and he has come to collect his share. The youth, amongst whom the ideas of settlement in the land, revival of the language, and national education now spread, imagine the Jewish man of the land of Israel as a young, strong, and heroic man, with his plow on his shoulder rushing to work, or the man who has both bodily and spiritual strength (because one often thinks that these two go together), who spreads enlightenment, education and knowledge, who arouses the national sentiments in big and small hearts alike, who revives the language through his speech and writing. More and more images are created, quick as a light, upon hearing the short phrase “the Jewish man of the Land of Israel.” But if we just add the letter “*taf*” to that term [we get *Yehudiyat*] all strength, interest and meaning escape, and we cannot even speculate what figure these words embroider in front of our eyes. Could it be that we cannot imagine any figure? Could it be that this being is neither large nor small, neither fat nor thin, neither strong nor weak, neither good nor bad, neither smart nor stupid, neither industrious nor lazy? Could there be in nature such total negation? (3)⁴¹

⁴¹ אלה המילים בעצמן בשינוי קטן, כמעט רק קוצה של יוד, בחסרון אות אחת, אם נאמר למשל לא יהודית ארץ-ישראל, כי אם יהודי ארץ ישראל -- מחזיקות בקרבן אוצר ציורים שונים, אחדים מדמים להם יהודי א"י זקן, לבוש בגדים ארוכים עטוף שקוע, בזקן גדול ופאות ארוכות, עומד חלוץ נעליים יום ולילה ומתפלל אצל כותל המערבי. אחרים רואים בהם אדם צעיר לימים,

It seems as though Hemda's beginners' Hebrew allows her to pay attention to the process of signification, or, rather, to the way in which the additional letter *taf*, the Hebrew feminine suffix, paralyzes this process. If the phrase *Yehudi Eretz-Yisrael* (The Jewish Man of the Land of Israel) easily refers to a set of visible images, the phrase *Yehudiyat Eretz-Yisrael* (The Jewish Woman of the Land of Israel) emerges as an empty signifier, "total negation." In fact, the feminine letter is assigned a destructive power by Hemda. It voids all meaning created by the masculine phrase. Read in relation to the editor's footnote the Hebrew grammar is charged with bitter irony. While the editor, in his sarcastic way, boasts the visibility of "the beautiful sex" on the pages of his newspaper, mocking those who would not dare to look, the woman-author maintains that there is nothing to see. The Jewish woman of the Land of Israel is invisible and unspeakable. If Eliezer Ben-Yehuda expected his wife's writing to make the Hebrew language softer and more sensitive, she, instead, deconstructs "his" language exposing the violent conflict between the feminine and the masculine embedded in it.

The pseudonym Hemda chooses for herself, Hida, an enigma, makes her both the subject and object of her own inquiry. The predicament that attests to women's marginality in the national consciousness also enables Hemda's writing. The lack of an image representing the Jewish woman of the Land of Israel is the pretext for Hemda's own emergence as a speaking subject. This ambiguity charges her call, at the end of this

חלש, רפה כוח, בטלון, העומד בפתח ועד כל הכוללים בתעודתו בידו כי נולד לו עוד ילד למזו"ט והוא בא לקבל "חלוקיקתו". בני הנעורים אשר עתה מתפשט ביניהם רעיון יישוב ארץ-ישראל, תחיית הלשון והשכלת העם, הם מדמים להם יהודי ארץ-ישראל, צעיר, גיבור, חזק במחשבתו על כתפו, ממהר לעבודתו, או גיבור בגוף וברוח יחד (את גיבור הרוח ידמה לו האדם תמיד גם לגיבור הגוף) המפיץ אור, השכלה ודעת, המעורר רגש לאומי בלבבות גדולים וקטנים, המחיה השפה בכוח דיבורו, בכתיבתו, ועוד ציורים כאלה וכאלה יוצרים במהירות הברק הדברים המעטים "יהודי ארץ ישראל". רק האות ת' שנוסף על הדיבור הזה באמרנו יהודית לוקח ממנו כל כוחו, כל עניינו, כל פירושו ואין אנו יכולים אפילו לשער מה היא הצורה אשר צרוף המילים האלה רוקם לפני עינינו? האמנם לא תצטייר שום צורה? האפשר כי זאת בריה שאינה לא גדולה ולא קטנה, לא עבה ולא דלה, לא חזקה ולא רפה, לא טובה ולא רעה, לא חכמה ולא אווילה, לא אמיצת הלב ולא פחדנית, לא ריקה ולא רצינית, לא עבדנית ולא בטלנית? האם אפשר כי תמצא בטבע מן שלילה גמורה כזאת?

first article of “Ezrat nashim,” for the women of the land to offer solution for the enigma, “What is she? Perhaps some Jewish Woman of the Land of Israel could answer that” (ibid). The next article of “Ezrat nashim” is published two weeks after the first. Hida opens this article reporting that, “Countless (*ein mispar*) letters arrived from the women of the Land of Israel answering the question of what they are,” but in parentheses she adds a reservation – “The readers may guess to the best of their ability whether ‘countless’ (*ein mispar*) means great many or total absence.” Did a conversation about the New Hebrew Woman ever begin then? Instead of solving the enigma of the New Hebrew Woman, Hida leaves us with another enigma, subtly and humorously employing her beginners’ Hebrew once again to propose an alternative interpretation to the term *ein mispar*. While the correct meaning is “countless,” or too many to count, the phrase literally translates, “no number,” or perhaps, again, “a total negation.”

“Who is speaking, then?” asks Julia Kristeva, “voice without body, body without voice, silent anguish choking on the rhythms of words, the tones of sounds, the colors of images, but without words, without sounds, without images: outside time, outside knowledge” (*About Chinese Women* 15). For Kristeva, the feminine is everything which is outside the symbolic order, indeed, “a total negation.” In the Kristevian model, for a woman to speak she has to identify with the paternal function; that is, she has to speak in the words of her father/lover/editor. This Oedipal set up fits into the Ben-Yehuda family romance, where a protégé wife gains access to the public sphere by using the language that the authoritative husband requires her to speak. However, Hida, we have noted, takes pleasure in tearing holes within the symbolic order which she is forced to enter. As Hida she arguably parodies the place of the unknown assigned to her within that order. In

this context, the term *ein mispar*, like the letter *taf*, embody the clash between the desire to speak of women, to reveal the identity of “The Jewish Woman of the Land of Israel” and the silence that that femininity marks in the masculine national symbolic order.

Yet, as Hida would go on to recount the various notes she received, or didn't, from the women of the land, the feminine knot of silence and speech takes shape as figures of women:

There is no way to print all the answers in the small space the editor has assigned for this, so we shall make do with only a few: The Jewish woman of Land of Israel is the woman who shaved her head when she married at the age of twelve. She wears at least five covers on her head, her dress is a little short, she wears a scarf on her shoulders. She prepares for Sabbath as of Wednesday. The Jewish woman of the Land of Israel, the real one, the only pure and true one, is the one who washes her home all day, washing [*sponja*] is her life, her most beloved pleasure, all kinds of washing, clothes and floors, she cleans and scratch and scrubs her home, her dishes, her dresses and underwear, absolute cleanliness, not a touch of dust, not a little spot. She doesn't know anything except for the affairs of the home. The honor of the king's daughter is inside. She doesn't know how to read or write, not even pray in most cases. And still she is not a bigot, she loves life, she loves being a woman, she wants people to like her look, she likes adorning herself, she likes flowers, she wants love. She is as far from education as the East from the West, but her gestures are pretty. And she is beautiful, with her wide shiny eyes, her tall figure. Her scarves and jewelry, she reminds us of the daughters of Zion of Isaiah and Mapu. The Jewish woman of the Land of Israel is any Jewish woman in the Land of Israel who did not go astray. She wears a wig, and there is no need to shave, because no one should look under the wig and not into our hearts and minds. (“Yehudiyat Eretz-Yisrael” (part 2) 5)⁴²

⁴² אין שום יכולת להדפיס את כל התשובות בהחלק הקטן אשר קבע לזה העורך וע"כ נסתפק באחדות: יהודית א"י היא דווקא האישה המגלחה ודווקא אשר נשאה לאיש בהיותה בת שתים עשרה, החבושה לפחות חמש מטפחות על ראשה, בשמלה קצת קצרה ולא בסרח רח"ל, ברדיד על כתפיה, בתופלים ולא חלילה בנעליים כגויות גמורות. המכינה שבת מיום הרביעי לפחות, המדלקת הנרות שעה או שתיים קדם שקיעת החמה. מה היא יהודית ארץ ישראל? מי זה לא יודע? "יהודית ארץ ישראל" האמיתית, העיקרית, בלי תערובות, בלי זיוף, היא העוסקת בספונג'ה כל ימיה אשר ספונג'ה היא חייה, תענוגה היותר גדול, היותר נעים, ספונג'ה מכל מין, כיבוס ורחיצה ורחיצה וכיבוס, המנקה ושפה ומגרדת וחוככת ומחזקת את ביתה וכליה ושמלותיה ולבניה בניקיון גמור, מדוקדק, בלי אבק קל, בלי כתם קטון, אשר הסדין שהיא עטופה בו בלכתה בחוץ זך כשלג, בגדיה ושמלותיה טהורים מכל לכלוך, אינה יודעת שום דבר אחר בלתי ענייני הבית, אשר כל כבודה בת מלך פנימה, אינה יודעת לא כתוב ולא קרוא ועפ"י רוב אפילו להתפלל, זהירה בכל הדינים ואפילו בפרטי פרטיהן, ובכל זאת איננה קנאית, אוהבת חיים, אוהבת להיות אשה, חפצה למצוא חן בעיני אנשים, אוהבת להתקשט ולהתבשם, אוהבת פרחים, מבקשה אהבה, מדברת חן, צנועה אך לא צנועתנית, חסידה אך לא משגעת, רחוקה מהשכלה כרחוק מזרח ומערב ובכל זאת תנועותיה גאות, דיבורה בענוה ואדיבות ודרך ארץ היותר מדוקדק, ולפעמים גם נאה, וגם יפה וגם נחמדה מאוד, עיניה גדולות ונוצצות ומבריקות ומלבבות, הולכת בקומה זקופה, נטויה גרון, משקרת עיניים, עדויה בשביסים ושהרונים ועכסים, ומזכרת קצת את בנות ציון של ישע'ל ומפו. -- יהודית ארץ ישראל היא כל אישה עבריייה היושבת בגבולי ארץ ישראל, אשר לא סרה מדרכיה, לובשת פאה נכרית, שומרת שבת ויותר מצוותיה ואין לנו כלל צורך להגלח, ואם דורשים זה ממנו, זה המצאת המגלחות הארורות אשר בדו מלבן, ואין לשום אדם אפילו רשות להתבונן מתחת הפאה הנכרייה וכמו כן בלבנו ובדעתנו.

Countless are the letters, the pictures, the women, and the space assigned by “The Editor” is so small it almost explodes. Two weeks pass since the first article, and suddenly, instead of a void we get a flood, an explosion, as if the women of the land were only waiting for one woman to begin, to breach the floodgate. Hemda’s initial remark about the phrase *ein mispar* makes it hard for the reader to know for sure whether letters were indeed received or whether the author herself made up the various possible figures of the Jewish woman of the Land of Israel. It is clear, however that there is a drive here to create a clear differentiation, like the one defining Hebrew men, between the old and the new, to create a national narrative of transformation for women as well.

This task, however, emerges as complicated, as soon as distinctions are drawn between the two kinds of women of the Old Yishuv: the woman with the shaved head (the Ashkenazi woman) and the woman who does not shave her head (the Sephardic woman).⁴³ The length and details of her descriptions give the impression that her eyes are unable to stop looking at the women of old Jerusalem. Just like the old Jewish men Eliezer mocks, her desiring gaze goes astray. Instead of looking straight to the Zionist colony, she, like the old Jews of *Havatzelet*, cannot avoid the seductive sight of the women hiding behind the walls of the old city. With the Sephardic woman, the author seems particularly fascinated, lovingly carrying on, adoring and sexualizing the cleanliness and beauty of her figure. Hida’s inquiring gaze places the Sephardic woman amidst a play of exposure and concealment, in a way which is reminiscent of the work of the Orientalizing gaze of the male colonialist (Kabbani 35-48). On the one hand, every detail of her body and demeanor is registered by the gaze; on the other hand, so is her

⁴³ Margalit Shilo, in her study on the women of the old Jerusalemite Yishuv clarifies the ethnic identity of the different feminine figures Hemda describes, based on her depiction of their clothes and costumes. See: *Nesikha or Shvuya* 12-13.

attempt to conceal parts of herself from the gazes of others – “because no one should look under the wig and not into our hearts and minds” (3), which seems to only make her more enticing. Against her will, Hida, notably, is able to look into the “heart and mind” of the Sephardic woman: “she loves life, she loves being a woman, she wants people to like her look, she likes adorning herself, she likes flowers, she wants love.” Orientalist discourse coincides here with the attempt to recover the authentic Jewish woman of the Land of Israel, as the sensuous Sephardic woman also reminds the author of “the daughters of Zion of Isaiah and Mapu” (ibid).

Whereas in the case of “the Jewish Man of the Land of Israel,” it was clear, which figures are obsolete (the traditional Jews), and which is to be celebrated as worthy model (the Zionist man), with women’s figures, the evaluative distinctions are not as clear. While the Zionist woman is definitely depicted favorably by Hida, her image seems to pale in comparison with the vividness of the Sephardic woman:

The Jewish woman of the Land of Israel is the lover of Zion, the lover of her people, who speaks her language, and takes interest in her people. She is in the land because she loves the land . . . The Jewish woman of the Land of Israel is the settler, who has left the pleasures of the world and went to the desert. She waters the land with her tears and sweat; she lives a life of work, with no servants, but a life of spiritual peace, material poverty, but spiritual happiness . . . (conclusion in the next issue). (Ibid)⁴⁴

If the Sephardic woman of Jerusalem is celebrated for her sensual and sensuous femininity, the Zionist woman epitomizes resignation from material life in favor of spiritual ideals. There is no description of the body and clothing of the Zionist woman.

The only materiality assigned to her is sweat and tears with which she waters the land.

⁴⁴ העולם עם כל תענוגיו, התיישבה חובבת ציון, חובבת עמה, המדברת לשונה, והמתעניינת בכל הנעשה בבני עמה פה . . . במדבר, ובדמעה יהודית ארץ ישראל היא התושבה אשר עזבה את העולם עם כל תענוגיו, התיישבה במדבר, ובדמעה ובזעת אפה השקתה האדמה . . . החיה עתה חיי עבודה, בלי משרתות ומשרתים, אבל חיי מנוחה רוחנית, חיי דחק בגשמיות, אבל אושר רוחני . . . (סוף בגיליון הבא) .

Whereas the old Jewish woman loves “being a woman,” the settler-woman loves her land and people. Whereas the body of the Sephardic woman is covered but adorned, hidden but present, the Zionist women’s body melts into the land with tears and sweat. With the “lover of Zion,” “the Jewish woman of the Land of Israel,” becomes invisible again. She has no shape or figure, only ideals, tears and sweat. While the story of the New Hebrew Man is often told as the story of moving away from the spiritual life of traditional Judaism to corporeal existence on the land (Gluzman 11-33), the story of the New Hebrew Woman, as told by H̄emda Ben-Yehuda, goes in the opposite direction: she loses her feminine body for the national ideal of the land. Note that in her presentation of the New Hebrew Man, in an effort not to exclude her husband, the tuberculosis patient, from the Zionist story, H̄emda blurs the difference between spiritual and physical strength: “the man who has both bodily and spiritual strong (because one often thinks that these two go together).” With the Zionist man body and spirit coincide. With the Zionist woman, one comes at the expense of the other.

We have noted how this play of presence and absence, appearance and disappearance, converges with the text’s Orientalist undertone, as if on these shaky grounds only one figure can stand safely: the Other woman, sensual, desired, corporeal, like the “Eastern woman,” probed in Rana Kabbani’s interpretation of Said. According to Kabbani, the paradigmatic “Eastern woman,” as a site of Western sexual fantasies and anxieties, is the figure of Scheherazade, who, mediated by Orientalist translations and adaptations of *Arabian Nights*, “took Europe by storm” as of the 18th century (48). I mention this figure, because in a strange way Scheherazade does make an appearance in “Ezrat nashim.” After reading all the letters, H̄ida promises at the end of the article “a

conclusion” in the next issue. In the next issue nothing comes. Only three weeks later “Ezrat nashim” continues, but no direct conclusion to the question of the Hebrew woman is to be found in it. Instead, there is an article titled “Eshet mofet” (An Exemplary Woman), in memory of Isabel Burton, the wife of the famous Orientalist, Richard Burton, the translator of *Arabian Nights* and one of the key figures in delivering the sexualized figure of Scheherazade to the West (Kabbani 81-111). Is this the promised answer, an exemplary woman to resolve the enigma of *ein mispar* solutions? Burton is indeed an exemplar. She followed her husband to the East, just like Hemda Ben-Yehuda did. She devoted her life to her husband’s work, just like the author of “Ezrat nashim.” She wrote his biography, like Hemda will for her husband. It is interesting to note how Hemda, whose pseudonym we recall mark herself as the subject and object of writing, after constituting herself as a female Orientalist, invokes a mirror-image of herself instead of the promised solution to the question of the Jewish woman of the land. The fact that Burton burned a large part of her husband’s work provides a certain twist to this move, however. Hemda, who is driven to writing by her admired husband, idealizes the mix of aggression and devotion Burton embodies. Again, within the wife’s compliant writing a potential for violence and destruction emerges, perhaps the same one Hemda assigns to the feminine letter *taf*.

The next and final column of “Ezrat nashim” is entitled “Od aḥat” (Another Woman). It speaks of another foreign woman, another exemplary woman, who has just died – Matilda Agramonte, the Cuban freedom-fighter. With these figures of dead exemplary women, “Ezrat nashim,” the place where Hebrew women were to talk about themselves, as if reiterates Hemda’s very first claim that “If a person should speak to us

about an English woman, or a French woman, or a German, Russian, Italian, etc this woman, she is standing before us . . . [but] the Hebrew woman of the land of Israel is a total enigma . . .” (3). “Ḥatat Ephraim” and “Ḥavat bney Rechav,” the two stories Ḥemda has written and published in 1902-1903, continue the exploration of the “enigma,” and, to an extent, offer “a solution,” but not without, once again discarding of the Hebrew woman, in favor of an-other, ‘*od aḥat*.

The Land, the Orient and the Question of Woman, 1892

Ben-Yehuda was happy and cheerful to return to his land . . . I was traveling to a foreign land, to the East, which attracted me and frightened me at once. . . . I wondered about Ben-Yehuda's desire for a land he was not born in, about his passionate love for his language and people, whereas I did not have any of that. The blue sea was my land. I did not want a homeland. It was pleasant to be free of all boundaries and bonds of enslavement to anything or anyone. (Ḥ. Ben-Yehuda, *Eliezer* 83-86)⁴⁵

Not the origin: She doesn't go back there. A boy's journey is the return to the native land, the Heimweh Freud speaks of, the nostalgia that makes man a being who tends to come back to the point of departure to appropriate it for himself and die there. A girl's journey is farther to the unknown, to invent. (Cixous 93)

On a ship sailing from Constantinople to Palestine in 1892, a sense of homecoming is missing for the young Ḥemda Ben-Yehuda traveling with her newlywed husband Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, the “prophet” of the Modern Hebrew Language. While “his land” is foreign to her in a very concrete way, as she has never been there, whereas he has been living in Jerusalem since 1881, it is also the very idea of a homeland that seems remote to Ḥemda Ben-Yehuda. Thus, his masculine desire for the land as a home is exchanged for the pleasure of the temporary homelessness granted by the blue sea, and thus, she is traveling to the East, a place of fear and attraction, a foreign land; as with Cixous, “A boy's

⁴⁵ בן יהודה היה צוהל ומאושר לחזור לארצו . . . אני נסעתי לארץ נכריה, למזרח, אשר משך אותי והפחידני כאחת. . . . תמהתי על הרגש המתאווני של בן יהודה לארץ שלא נולד בה, על אהבתו העזה ללשונו ולעמו, בעת שלי לא היה כלום לא מעבר מזה ולא מעבר מזה. הים הכחול היה ארצי. גם לא רציתי במולדת, נעים היה לי להיות משוחררת כל גבולות וכבלי עבדות למשהו ולמישהו.

journey is the return to the native land . . . a girl's journey is farther to the unknown, to invent" (93).

The statement "it was pleasant to be free of all boundaries and bonds of enslavement to anything or anyone" is conspicuous, given that these lines were published in 1941, following a lifetime *Ḥemda* devoted to Eliezer and his national endeavors. Her longing reference for the pleasures of freedom from anything or anyone thus may be read as a nostalgic allusion to a time before both national and gendered bonds were formed, that is to a time before the 20-year-old woman instantly became wife and assistant of the prophet of the Hebrew language. The split between the state of mind of the husband and wife on the ship reveals the dissonance between the story of New Woman, most likely on the mind of the woman on the ship at the turn of the century,⁴⁶ and the story of the old-new land undergirding men's homecoming. It is as if there are two different journeys, in two different geographies. A man is returning to his homeland. A woman travels away from the home to a foreign land. For him to the sea is a space to cross on the way toward homecoming. For her it is a site of freedom in which she desires to stay for no home-land would ever be hers. For the very idea of a home seems enslaving.

In *Milḥamah 'im ha-satan* (War with the Devil), *Ḥemda*'s unpublished version of Eliezer's biography, she provides a slightly different depiction of the moment of her arrival to the land:

Ben-Yehuda was happy and cheerful to return to his land, but it didn't mean anything for me . . . he is attached to a land which is really his land, while I am

⁴⁶ On the New Woman, see: Elaine Showalter's *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin De Siècle*; and Sally Ledger's. *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin De Siècle*. For a discussion of the figure of the New Jewish Woman and the tensions surrounding it as they are reflected in Hebrew literature of the time see: Pinsker, *Literary Passports* 237-274; See also on Russian women at the turn of the century: Laura Englestein's *The Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin the Siècle Russia* 334-358.

attached to a land which is not mine . . . I felt sadness and melancholy: I have nothing in this world but to live among the savages. (ZA A43/73)⁴⁷

Between the published and unpublished manuscripts of the husband's biography, the meaning of a woman's journey – its origin and destination – shifts, pointing toward the predicament of locating women's place within spaces scripted by men. If women travel to the unknown, Hemda Ben-Yehuda's unknown in this passage is termed the East, The Orient. In another depiction of her entry to the East in *Milhamah 'im ha-satan*, referring to her first encounter with the city of Jaffa, Hemda comments – “this is the East in the full sense of the word . . . the scent of Jaffa was horrible, the epitome of savagery, the very East of the East” (ZA A43/73).⁴⁸ Despite its inherent foreignness, and it is, of course, crucial that the Orient would be foreign to Europe, the Orient needs to always affirm something – “the full sense of the word” – which is familiar. In fact, like Eretz-Yisrael, the Orient is a space of imaginary play between the known and the unknown, the familiar and the strange. After all, as for any European traveler of her socio-economic class, “the East, in the full sense of the word,” as a place of fear and attraction, can never be completely foreign for Hemda. That is, to recognize the “full sense of the word,” *East*, she already needs to have an idea of that sense, which the vision of Jaffa materializes. In this sense, “The Orient,” Said writes, is, at times, “a place therefore of *déjà vu*” (180). In this context, returning to the couple on ship, his homeland and her foreign land are not only the same “place,” the same concrete piece of land, but also a doubly mapped “Place,” an imaginary site of desires and fears, which is never completely strange, nor completely homely.

⁴⁷ בן יהודה צהל והתרגש כל כך כשרק נראה את ארצו, אך לי לא אמר הדבר כלום... הכי הוא קשור לארץ שבאמת זו ארצו, ואני קשורה לארץ שאינה שלי... הרגשתי עצב ותוגה בלבי: אין לי כלום בעולם... לחיות בין הפראים.

⁴⁸ זה מזרח במלוא משמעות מילה זו...בושם העיר יפו היה איום, סמל הפראות מזרח שבמזרח!

She continues:

And all those veiled women of the East. And the East of which I have dreamt all my life, now that I belonged to it, scared me . . . And it seemed to me that not many days shall pass until I myself will become one of these veiled women, and the whole world will remain behind the scarf. (ZA A43/73)⁴⁹

In this quotation from *Milhamah 'im ha-satan*, the hand-written text in fact reads “the East...now that I ~~should have~~ belonged to it” but the words “should have” crossed out -- לֹא הָיִיתִי בְּעַצְמִי צְרִיכָה לְהִיָּתֵב שִׁיכָת לֹא, an erasure that doubles the temporality of the narrator’s belongness to the place, presenting it both as already there and as a state of affairs that should be, or should have been, already realized. The Zionist fantasy of homeland indeed oscillates between these temporalities. Homecoming assumes that one already belongs, and yet, as for Hemda Ben-Yehuda at the point of entry into the East, belonging is a command to be fulfilled, a potential to be realized. For belonging to become an uncontested reality, a natural state of things, the words of the command must be erased, for one cannot belong by command. Ben-Yehuda’s following sentence, however, highlights the foreseen subordination of the woman entering the Orient to a command that puts *her* under erasure. Portraying the Orient as a place of problematic gender-relations, the command “to belong” translates for Hemda into a command to “disappear” behind the scarf. The masculine return as regeneration coincides with women’s self-negation, and the Orient emerges as the location of this feminine erasure. The conflation of Jewish sentiments with Orientalist fascination thus translates in a particular gendered way in a woman’s imagination. Curiously, it is through the Orientalist framework that the predicament of the travelling young woman, who is about to be domesticated comes out, with no mention, of course, of her own future

⁴⁹ המזרח שכל ימי חיי חלמתי עליו כעת, שהייתי בעצמי שייכת לו, הפחדני, ונדמה לי כי לא יישארו ימים רבים וגם אני אהיה כאחת הנשים המכוסות האלו והעולם כולו יישאר מעבר לצעיף

“disappearance” at the shadow of Eliezer, the Western New Man. Taking as a point of departure, the feminine ambivalence about belonging to land and men we may now begin travelling through Hemda Ben Yehuda’s fantasy terrains.

The Prophet and the Harlot

The stories, “Ḥatat Ephraim” (the Sin of Ephraim) and “Ḥavat bney Rechav” (The Farm of the Rechabites) were published in installments in the journal *Hashkafa* during 1902 and 1903, that is, roughly a decade after the young woman on the ship was supposedly contemplating the meaning of her entry to the East. “Ḥatat Ephraim,” the first out of the two stories written and published, narrates the story of Ephraim, a successful colonist of the first Zionist immigration wave,⁵⁰ who is persuaded by his non-Zionist wife to leave Palestine for Australia. In “Ḥavat bney Rechav,” the second story, we find the same character, Ephraim, back in the Land, having left his wife and children in Australia, searching for the legendary Rechabites, the mythical Bedouin Jews. In this section, I show how the exchange of feminine and masculine allegories for the nation genders Ephraim’s travels, marking his journey back into the land as a quest toward recovering his lost manhood.

The opening of “Ḥatat Ephraim” depicts Ephraim as a Zionist prophet – “a man of words, a preacher . . . who had great influence on both old and young” (23). However, while in the public sphere Ephraim is remarkably eloquent, when he is left alone at home with his wife, in the private sphere, his powers of speech diminish and he remains mute

⁵⁰ The first Zionist immigration wave to Palestine, referred to in Zionist historiography as the First Aliyah, took place in the years 1881-1904. During these years around 29,000 Jews immigrated to Palestine. Most of them settled in the old cities of Jaffa and Jerusalem, but a small number of immigrants established agricultural colonies (*moshavot*), which are now the image most associated in Zionist collective memory with the first immigration wave.

against his wife's arguments in favor of leaving the land. Referring to his silence, Ben-Yehuda uses the biblical scripture "a cake not turn" (*JPS* 1917, Hosea 7.8),⁵¹ a term used in the book of Hosea to describe the susceptibility of the People of Israel to the influence of other nations. With the metaphor of an overly soft cake Ben-Yehuda makes the silence of her protagonist into a visual image that provocatively contrasts the figure of the muscular Jew. Ephraim is not only silent. He is also soft, flaccid and flat. Later in the story, in Australia, when Ephraim tells his wife about his decision to return to Palestine (33), the wife also alludes to Hosea, referring to Ephraim as "Ephraim tends the wind and pursues the gale" (12.2),⁵² again a scripture marking the People as frivolous and disloyal, and again an image that negates any notion of stable corporeal masculinity. The final line of "Hatat Ephraim" (42), cites yet another scripture from Hosea, appearing as an isolated concluding comment by the narrator – "Ephraim's guilt is bound up, his sin is stored away" (13.12).⁵³ All three citations appear in quotation-marks (and are the only direct citations from the Bible in the story), as if to bluntly draw the reader's attention to the biblical source, which, notably, also includes a story about a prophet and a problematic wife.

Indeed, the use of Hosea as an intertext may easily be understood in light of the fact that of all the books of the Bible, Hosea has the largest amount of references to the name Ephraim as collective name for Israel, thus establishing the figure of Ephraim as a representative of the Hebrew collective. However, beyond this obvious significance,

⁵¹ אפרים בעמים הוא יתבולל. אפרים היה כעוגה בלי הפוכה

I am using here the 1917 JPS translation, which seems clearer and more accurate in this case than the 1985 translation ("a cake incapable of turning"). It seems that the image refers to a kind of pancake or omelet that needs to be turned while cooked otherwise one side gets burned while the other side remains soft and uncooked.

⁵² אפרים רועה רוח ורודף קדים

⁵³ צרור עוון אפרים צפונה הטאתו

Hosea is also the first book of the Bible that evokes the metaphor of marriage between God and the People (Van-Dijk Hemmes 167) and the metaphor of whoredom (*znunim*) as an illustration of the People's betrayal of God (Bird 225). In the dramatic opening of the book of Hosea, God commands the prophet: "Go, get yourself a wife of whoredom and children of whoredom; for the land will stray from following the LORD" (*JPS* 1985, Hos. 1.2).⁵⁴ The analogy between Ephraim's wife and Hosea's "wife of whoredom" seems clear. What Ephraim's wife advocates is indeed assimilation "with the general stream of humanity" (23), which resonates with the prevalent theme in Hosea of the People's failure to keep its stable identity against the influence of others. Both wives, thus, are guilty of betrayal and are representative of a collective sin, which through the allegory of whoredom is marked as a feminine sin. Overcome by his wife's constant persuasions, "foreign thought [*maḥshavah zarah*] emerges in Ephraim's heart... desire, great craving" (24).⁵⁵ The sexualized language here further accentuates the connection with the biblical whore, as if by influencing him the wife makes Ephraim himself into a whore. Indeed, the biblical allusion blurs the boundary-lines between the husband and the wife, for both represent the People of Israel: Ephraim by dint of his collective name, and the wife through the parallels with the "woman of whoredom." Furthermore, normative gender relations are distorted, as the private sphere becomes a distorted mirror-image of the public sphere, in which the public masculine speaker, becomes mute and effeminate, and the wife, who does not have a place in the public sphere of Zionism, becomes a political preacher. Spreading a doctrine that resists the idea of a distinct Hebrew identity – "all peoples are one people" (23) – she, "the whore," takes on the position of the pimp who

⁵⁴ לך קח לך אשת זנונים וילדי זנונים כי זנה תזנה הארץ מאחרי יהוה

⁵⁵ הייתה מתעוררת בליבו מהשבה זרה... תשוקה, תאוה עזה...

seduces Ephraim himself to prostitute. The home thus becomes in this story a place of both emasculation and de-nationalization, infiltrated, through women's speech, by "foreign thoughts" and "foreign nations."

Notably, another biblical allegory emerges as central in "Ḥavat bney Rechav" – the allegory of Rechabites from the book of Jeremiah. Like in Hosea, in Jeremiah as well, the prophet is commanded to enact an instructive allegory for the relations between God and Israel. This time he is to go to the Rechabites and offer them wine. As they refuse, "for our ancestor, Jonadab son of Rechab, commanded us: 'You shall never drink wine, either you or your children'" (*JPS* 1985, Jer. 35.6-7),⁵⁶ the divine voice reproaches the People of Israel for failing to follow God's commandments in the same way that the Rechabites obey the words of their primordial father – "The commands of Jonadab son of Rechab have been fulfilled: he charged his children not to drink wine, and to this day they have not drunk, in obedience to the charge of their ancestor. But I spoke to you persistently, and you did not listen to me" (35.14).⁵⁷ Moving from Ben-Yehuda's first story, the story of Ephraim's exile, to the second, the story of his return, the feminine allegory of the "wife of whoredom," is replaced by the masculine allegory of the Rechabites, whose quintessential gesture is following the word of the father. The story of homecoming is thus defined as a story of re-masculinization. In this context, the transition between "Ḥatat Ephraim" and "Ḥavat bney Rechav" coincides with a more general change in Jewish imagination of the period. In his study of the Zionist body, Michael Gluzman argues that while the literature of the Haskalah, influenced by the poetics of the biblical prophets, tended to use the feminine body as a metaphor for the

⁵⁶ כי יונדב בן ריכב אבינו ציווה עלינו לאמור לא תשתו יין אתם ובניכם לעולם

⁵⁷ הוקם את דברי יהונדב בן ריכב אשר ציווה את בניו לבלתי שתות יין, ולא שתו עד היום הזה-- כי שמעו את מצוות אביהם. ואנכי דיברתי אליכם השכם ודבר ולא שמעתם אלי

nation, Zionist discourse began to refer to the nation as a masculine body recovering and strengthening after the sickness of exile (15). Influenced by the literature of the Haskalah but already grounded in Zionist ideology, Ḥemda Ben-Yehuda's stories not only evoke the two gendered metaphors, but also put them in conflict with each other, as if enacting the Zionist-Jewish metaphorical "war of the sexes."

What does it mean for Ḥemda Ben-Yehuda, a woman-author and an advocate of women's rights, to reiterate the patriarchal national story? What does it mean for her to discard the Jewish woman in favor of the law of the father? Where has the ambivalence of the woman on the ship gone? The following sections ponder these questions. For now, I would note that in Australia Ephraim changes his name to Erwig Johnson, a name which adds additional layer to the gendered dynamics in "Ḥatat Ephraim." While the first reference to the English slang word *John*, as the client of a prostitute is dated 1911, a reference to the name *Johnson* as slang for penis appears already in 1863 (*OED*). In any case, it seems plausible that this choice of name alludes, with a touch of irony, to Ephraim's contested virility. In "Ḥavat bney Rechav," as we shall see, the significance of the name Johnson is expanded, with further implications with regards to the competitions these two texts produce between genders and narratives.

Return and Deferment

Ephraim, who goes by the name of Johnson, has already reached, I suppose, his destination, and we are all impatiently waiting to hear from the author, who knows the heart and soul of her protagonists so well, what impression the state of the colonies made on his spirit, and how he has begun to heal the broken Yishuv . . . (E. Ben-Yehuda, "Apotropus" 2)⁵⁸

⁵⁸ אפרים המכונה ג'ונסון כבר הגיע, אני משער, למחוז חפצו, וכולנו אנו מחכים בקוצר רוח לשמוע מהסופרת כליות ולב יצוריה כל כך חוקרת, מה רושם עשה מעמד המושבות כעת על נפשו ובמה התחיל איש כמוהו לרפא את שברי היישוב המט והגוהה.

In the article cited above, published in February 1902 in the issue of *Hashkafa* following the conclusion of “Hatat Ephraim,” Eliezer Ben-Yehuda hastens his wife to complete the story of Ephraim and provide the readers with a narrative of his successful return. The Yishuv, Eliezer exclaims, is “broken” by the phenomenon of Jewish emigration – “they are escaping, escaping escaping from Metula, Zichron-Yaakov, Rehovot, Petah-Tikva” (2). Indeed, the 1901-1902 wave of Jewish emigration from the land is the stories’ obvious historical context (Berlovitz 138-140). In bringing back Ephraim, Hemda Ben-Yehuda is expected to offer the Yishuv a literary remedy. Hemda, however, delays the cure. Only three months later, in April 1902, does the first chapter of “Havat bney Rechav” appear, and the publication of its ten installments extends to June 1903, with almost a year-long break between the sixth and seventh chapters. Deferment, I would suggest, structures the promised story itself, in which the concrete political setting is rejected in favor of a fantasy. Julia Kristeva’s reading of history through sexual difference in “Women’s Time” may help in reading this pattern. For Kristeva, women’s time differs from the masculinized linear time, for it oscillates between the cyclical time of motherhood and reproduction and the monumental static time of myth and cultural memory (191-193). The feminine connection with a reservoir of timeless cultural memory constitutes, for Kristeva, women’s point of entry into national history. The tension between Eliezer’s political demand and Hemda’s fantastic response could be understood in these terms: the male editor asks for a direct solution, the female-writer gives him a myth.

Notably, at the very beginning of the story, Ephraim is already moving away from the actual politics of the broken colonies, which Eliezer posits as the context for his journey:

And in this desert beyond the river, in the depth of night the lonely man sees in his mind the colonies, as he saw them five days ago for real when he passed by them . . . "It is not yet the time for me to go there," he says with a sigh "I have to walk, always walk, like *the eternal Jew*, to walk further, walk through the land, *the length and breadth of it*, until I find what I am looking for, until I reach my cause and find a solution to my dream, and then..." ("Havat bney Rechav" 43; my emphasis).⁵⁹

Ephraim's walk away from the broken colonies in this passage evokes a double imaginary baggage. It is the walk of the eternal wandering Jew, the epitome of exile, but also the walk of Abram, who in Genesis 13 is commanded to walk through "the length and the breadth" of the land, as a mark of his God given ownership of space. Ephraim is thus walking in-between the diasporic wanderings of the Jews and the wanderings of the first Israelite. Like the Hebrew-Bedouin, Abraham is a figure that precedes any politics of difference. Thus, alluding to the walk of Abram, the walk of Ephraim at the beginning of "Havat bney Rechav" foreshadows the final destination of this journey, the myth of the Rechabites, a myth of an original unity between Jews and Arabs. Within this very allusion, however, the origin already emerges as deferred, for Genesis 13, as Arnold Eisen explains, is one moment in a cycle of exiles and returns that constitutes the stories of the ancient Hebrews (8). In this biblical chapter, Abram returns to the land after a brief exile in Egypt only to persist in leading a nomadic way of life. Thus, alongside the opposition between the exilic "wandering Jew" and the model of Jewish homeliness in the land, Abram (who, of course, was not a native of Canaan), the text marks an intimacy

⁵⁹ ובמדבר זה אשר מעבר לנהר, ובאישון ליל רואה הבודד בדמיונו את המושבות, כאשר ראה אותן לפני חמישה ימים בהקיץ בעברו על פניהן... "לא עת לי עתה לבוא שמה," אמר באנחה, "עלי ללכת, ללכת תמיד, כמו היהודי הנצחי, ללכת הלאה, לעבור הארץ לאורכה ולרוחבה עד שאשיג אשר אני מבקש, עד אשר אגיע למטרתי ואמצא פתרון לחלומי, ואז..."

between them. The imagined root is from the start uprooted. It is from the start a walk further away.

After passing by the colonies Ephraim then keeps walking, until, rescued from an attack by bandits, he finds himself in the tents of a Hebrew-Bedouin tribe led by his old colonist friend, Harbin. Harbin is now married to a Bedouin woman, and has transformed the members of the tribe into Hebrews, teaching them the Hebrew language, modernizing their customs, and giving equal rights to the women of the tribe. Harbin's clearly Orientalist vision, as he unfolds it for Ephraim (69), is a unified nation of Bedouins and Jews, where the Jews would act as agents of modernity and the Bedouins would provide a sense of nativeness and a natural organic connection with the land. Having spent some time in Harbin's tribe, at the tribe's gathering for Passover dinner, Ephraim declares, "I *am* one of those exiles longing to return to their land . . . I will go from here to the Negev, searching for our brothers the Rechabites" (67). Ephraim's proclamation that he *is* an exile although he is already in the land once again defers his homecoming. Here too the political vision Harbin offers, like the suggestions of Eliezer, is deferred in favor of a dream of unity that precedes difference, of an origin that precedes politics. In fact, the very selection of the Bedouins as models of nativeness, rather than for example the Arab *fellahin*, moves Ben-Yehuda even further away from the realm of politics. The myth of the Hebrew-Bedouin counters the political ideas advocated by "The Jerusalem Group," a group of young intellectuals, most of them descendants of Sephardic families of the Old Yishuv, and regular guests at the Ben-Yehuda household, who underscored the Arab *fellahin* as model of nativeness. It is the *fellahin*, not the Bedouins, argued members of this group, who exemplify a stubborn and persistent attachment to the land (Berlovitz

127; Belkind 17; Meyuhas 11). Bonding with the *fellahin*, however, requires attention to the concrete conflict over land, while the nomadic image of the Bedouins allows for a more remote fantasy. In Ben-Yehuda's story the option of the *fellahin* as models is physically eliminated as Harbin arrives to the Bedouin farm after killing a *fellah*. Fearing retribution he initially leaves the land, but suffering great agony and realizing he cannot live in exile, he returns secretly and finds shelter with the Bedouins. The exchange of the violent relations with the *fellahin* for peaceful coexistence with the Bedouins marks the nomadic as not only detached from the physical land – the “place” as in Aran and Gurevitch's formulation – but also from the colonialist politics the concreteness of “place” entails. The nomadic in this story, I would suggest, is a mode of returning to the double, both Oriental and Zionist, “Place,” without acknowledging its “placedness,” and without facing the concrete consequences of “return.” Ephraim's exchange at the end of the story of Harbin's modernized tribe for the Rechabites, the mythical Hebrew-Bedouin, further substantiates the link between the fantastic and the nomadic in this story. In this sense, the Rechabites, I propose, are not merely a fantasy, their nomadism embodies the way fantasy works in this story, moving away from the land as a concrete site of politics, into a mythical sandy realm of imaginary fluidity of territory and identity. Indeed, in a way the young woman writer brings us back to the sea, another non-place.

However, while Ephraim's journey is marked as a journey toward masculine origins, it does not end with his recovered potency. At a turning point in “Ḥavat bney Rechav,” when Ephraim stumbles by chance upon the scriptures from Jeremiah that refer to the Rechabites he is mostly impressed by God's commandment to the prophet to speak to the Rechabites: “The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the days of

Jehoiakim the son of Josiah of Judah: 'Go to the house of the Rechabites'... 'and speak to them'... 'and speak to them,' he repeated" (51).⁶⁰ The Rechabites thus hold a promise for Ephraim to restore him to the position of the Zionist prophet undermined by his wife in "Ḥatat Ephraim." However, when the prophet in Jeremiah goes to the Rechabites he is temporarily stripped of his role as a prophet; eventually, he does not preach to the Rechabites but is to listen and learn from them what it means to obey to the law of the father. A similar process takes place with Ephraim. While Ephraim claims that his plan for the Rechabites is "to slowly change their ways and their lives, until, in a little while, they won't recognize themselves" (76), like the healing of the colonies, this plan too is deferred. Instead of undertaking the promised transformation of the Rechabites, he himself becomes unrecognizable, as he decides to blend into the tribe hiding his Hebrew identity and his knowledge of the Hebrew language, notably pretending to relearn the language from the Rechabites. The journey that began with muted prophet thus ends with another silence.

Another intertext may be of use in this context. In Avraham Mapu's *Ahavat Tziyon* (Love of Zion), the phrase "*ro'eh ruah*" ("striveth after wind"), used as we recall by Ephraim's wife in "Ḥatat Ephraim," frequently appears in reference to the transition of Amnon, the protagonist of the novel, from simple country life to a life of luxury in the city of Jerusalem where he excels in public speaking. At one point in the novel, Azrikam, the antagonist of the novel, denounces Amnon for being transformed from "*ro'eh tzon*" (a shepherd) to "*ro'eh ruah*" (58). Ephraim in Ben-Yehuda's stories undergoes an opposite process: in the end he transforms from "*ro'eh ruah*" to "*ro'eh tzon*" – moving back from

⁶⁰ "הדבר אשר היה אל ירמיהו מאת ה' בימי יהויקים בן יאשיהו מלך יהודה לאמר: הלוך אל בית הריכבים... ודיברת אותם," קרא ⁶⁰ הלאה, "ודיברת אותם" שנה עוד פעם.

the luxurious foreign city to a life of simplicity as a shepherd. Indeed, after Ephraim resolves to hide his knowledge of Hebrew, “Ḥavat bney Rechav” ends with him joining the shepherds’ community, and the final line of the story reads “and Ephraim went with a few young men to cut the wool of the sheep” (77). Significantly in the context of the Ben-Yehudas’ project of reviving the Hebrew language, in choosing the Hebrew of the Rechabites over the Hebrew taught by Harbin to his tribe as part of their process of modernization, Ephraim seems to reject the artificiality of the construction of Modern Hebrew as part of the national project, in favor of a dream of Hebrew as a natural language that never died, that is, in favor of Hebrew as the language of the native, unified origin.

In *Milḥamah ‘im ha-satan*, Ḥemda reports on a lecture Eliezer gave before Arab scholars in Egypt, where he humorously designated the use of Arabic for the revival of Hebrew as “taking back what’s ours” (ZA A43/71). The Arab scholars who attended the lecture, according to Ḥemda, responded to the speech “with laughter of full understanding,” but said that “they too would be happy to get back the Arab roots that entered the Hebrew language.” To that Ben-Yehuda retorts that “this is a fair demand but first he wants to us to use them to create new words.” At the end of “Ḥavat bney Rechav” then, through the play of mirrors between silences, Ḥemda, it seems, pauses on the delay embedded in the curious dialogue between Eliezer and the scholars. While Eliezer appropriates the Arabic in order to enable the Jews to speak anew, Ḥemda’s Ephraim remains silent upon finding his “roots” in the desert. As language revival is exchanged for a fantasmatic recovery of unity, it becomes a pause, silence, a never ending voyage

into the double space of the Orient and the homeland, in which the new masculine subject is again nomadic, traveling in no-place toward an impossible idea.

Behind the Curtain: The Exchange of Women

Ben-Yehuda said to him [to Nordau]: Perhaps the daughter of another people will understand his national aspirations better than many Jewish women. And we have already seen that Jewish women interrupted their husbands in the settlement of the land and in the revival of the language demonstrating a kind of inexplicable stubbornness. (H. Ben-Yehuda, *Eliezer* 170)⁶¹

In the passage above, a quotation from Hemda Ben-Yehuda's biography of her husband, it is Eliezer Ben-Yehuda who "narrates" the replacement of the Jewish woman. The presence of the addressee, Max Nordau, further accentuates the misogynistic air of this discussion of the exchangeability of women, placing it in the context of the Zionist androcentrism with which Nordau is so strongly associated.⁶² Dated in 1897, Eliezer's remark, as reported by Hemda in 1941, seems to foreshadow the plot of Hemda's 1902-1903 stories, "Ḥatat Ephraim" and "Ḥavat bney Rechav," in which a deficient and disruptive Jewish wife is replaced by "a daughter of another people." The stories may be read as a detailed unpacking of Eliezer's succinct remark.⁶³ What does it mean for Hemda Ben-Yehuda, one of the first women who may be considered a Zionist feminist, to reiterate such a misogynistic plot, both in her biographical and in her fictional writing? How does the imaginary exchange of women sit with her concerns for "the Jewish

⁶¹ בן-יהודה אמר לו: אולי בת עם זר תבין יותר את שאיפותיו הלאומיות מהרבה נשים יהודיות. וכבר ראינו כי האישה היהודית הפריעה לבעלה גם בהתיישבות בארץ וגם בתחיית הלשון במין עקשנות בלתי מובנת. - אימי לא תבין זאת לעולם - ענה נורדאו.

⁶² Max Nordau (1849-1923), a Zionist ideologue, and author of the essay *Degeneration*, where he envisions the figure of the "muscular Jew," as a solution for the crisis of modern Jewish masculinity.

⁶³ The biography is published for the first time in 1941. However, Hemda is intensively engaged with recording the life of Eliezer throughout her life, as evident from the countless pages of her biographical writing to be found in the Ben-Yehuda files in the Zionist archive. Thus, it is not entirely clear when this text was written, that is, how many years did Hemda carry Eliezer's remark in her memory (if we are to assume that the remark was indeed made and is not retroactive projection of Hemda's fantasy).

Woman of the Land of Israel” as articulated in 1896 articles? What happens to her voice in the transition between dubbing *ein mispar* women and the repetition of men’s stories?

It is worth noting in this context that Hemda herself is a second wife, a replacement of her sister Dvora, who was Eliezer’s first wife. Dvora, we should note, was not one of the wives who “interrupted their husbands” in their nationalist projects as in Eliezer’s conversation with Nordau. She was also nothing like Ephraim’s assimilating wife. Conversely, Dvora followed Eliezer to Palestine and despite all difficulties attempted to assist him in his various projects. And yet, Dvora, in a sense, is a failed Jewish woman, especially in comparison with her younger sister Hemda, who took over the administrative management of the Hebrew dictionary project and was an active correspondent in Eliezer’s newspapers. While we cannot easily equate either Dvora with Ephraim’s first wife or Hemda with Shlomit, the Hebraized Bedouin replacement in “Havat bney Rechav,” note the following depiction by Hemda of Dvora’s decision to follow Eliezer to Palestine in Eliezer’s biography, and the invocation of the native woman in it:

And if perhaps Ben-Yehuda meditated in secret, who would the first Hebrew mother be at the time of the revival and *what name he will give her*, and thought that he will find in the Land of Israel a daughter of a distinguished Sephardic family whose ancestors are descendent of King David, and that he would not hesitate to sacrifice her . . . here his hand was stopped: a lamb for a burnt-offering, at his feet, Dvora, with her blue eyes.⁶⁴ (H. Ben-Yehuda, *Eliezer* (appendix) 43; my emphasis)

While throughout the text Hemda goes to great lengths to glorify her sister as a self-sacrificing saint, here, in the fantasy Hemda assigns her husband with, through the

⁶⁴ ואם הרהר אולי בן-יהודה במסתרים, מי תהיה האם העבריינה הראשונה בתקופת התחיה ומה שם יתן לה, וחשב שימצא בארץ ישראל בת לאיזו משפחה ספרדייה מיוחסת המתימרת, שאבות אבותיה היו מיוצאי חלציו של דוד המלך, יהיה יחוסה גדול כמה שיהיה, ולא יפקפק להביאה לקרבן – שיער מראש, שלא על נקלה תעשה מהפכה זו ללשוננו – המרתה מקודש לחול וממות לחיים – והיה מוכן לכל הפורענוניות. והנה נעצרה זרועו: כבשה לעולה, כורעת לרגליו: דבורה, זו, בעלת עיני התכלת.

allusion to the binding of Isaac, Dvora is designated the less worthy sacrifice, inferior to the perfect sacrifice of a native Sephardic woman in the same way in which a lamb would not have been a satisfactory sacrifice in the biblical story. Here again, Eliezer's life story as told by Hemda, echoes the narrative of "Havat bney Rechav," where Shlomit, a native "Oriental" woman, appears as the ultimate sacrifice enabling men's return to the land. In this context, it is interesting that Eliezer, in Hemda's imagination, wonders what name he will give to the native woman, for Shlomit is a name given to the Bedouin woman in the story by Harbin, as part of the process of Hebraizing the tribe. Again, the lines between the husband's life story and the wife's fantasy are blurred. Is she molding his psyche into the contours of her imaginary? Is she subjugating her own fantasy world to masculinist Orientalist romanticism? Whose story is she writing? And what kind of gesture is she making with regards to the narrative of the exchange of women? Appropriation? Revision? Submission?

In Gayle Rubin's critique of Levy Strauss and Freud, the exchange of women emerges as a core plot of patriarchy. In this narrative the exchange of women for goods, for other women, and for phalluses, structures the relations between men and enforces a taboo on women's relationships with each other. Women in this system are comparable to signs, to words; they are spoken between men; they are the means of communication between men; but they cannot be speakers themselves (116-118). In "Havat bney Rechav" the giving of the sheikh's daughter to Harbin is the moment of birth for Harbin's political vision of a Bedouin-Jewish nation. The depiction of the process leading to this exchange underscores the split between men's speech and women's silence:

She could not articulate her feelings in beautiful words. But her love for me, the strong, wild, hot, love, soon became well known. It was also a sign that she has recovered of her illness. Life arose in her in all their might. And she was full of

fire. No, not fire, flame, a limitless flame. When she rose from her sickbed, the sheikh called me and he put his two hands on my head, and said, "She will be your wife!" (63-64)⁶⁵

The marks of Orientalist sexist discourse are very clear in this passage. The enflamed, limitless, wild, but silent body of the Oriental woman, "who could not articulate her feelings," is given as a gift to the Western man by her father as means of forming an alliance. Moreover, the Oriental woman's love for the Western man attests to the healing of her body, or, better, the proof that she is ready to be given. She recovers into a system of exchange in which she can only be a sign, an object, a gift.

The story about the giving of the Oriental woman itself is also exchanged between men. Harbin tells it to Ephraim as part of a long speech at Ephraim's sickbed after the Hebrew-Bedouin tribe saves Ephraim who was attacked by bandits. This time it is the Western man who is ill and the story is given to him as a remedy. Hemda's re-narration of Harbin's narrative, however, complicates the system of exchange. On the one hand, she recounts the patriarchal story; on the other hand, she inserts into it the question of the New Hebrew Woman. Indeed, Hemda's feminist libratory concerns are by no means absent from Ephraim's sickbed. In fact, a large part of Harbin's speech is devoted to the problematic position of women within the Zionist project:

As long as we do not dedicate ourselves to their national education, as long as they do not know Hebrew, ancient and new literature, what kind of *emotions* can we expect from them, what kind of education can they give our children?! We cannot deny that in our villages, we have left the women completely alone. Which of us has ever taught his wife anything or even read to her! No wonder that by the time she is married a few years and has become the mother of two or three children, not only hasn't she made any progress and hasn't acquired the material and spiritual knowledge required to educate her children, but she has turned into nothing but a servant, forgetting even what she knew before... We went to the meetings, stayed there till midnight... and the women always stayed

⁶⁵ היא לא ידעה להגות את רגשותיה במילים יפות. אך את אהבתה אלי, האהבה הפראית, העזה, הלוהטת, נודעה מהרה, וזה היה לי גם סימן ברור כי שבה לאיתנה. התעוררו בה החיים בכל תוקפם, והייתה כולה מלאת אש. לא! זו לא אש, זו להבה, שלהבת בלי גבול ומיצרים!... כאשר קמה ממשכבה קרא לי השיך וישם את שתי ידיו על ראשי ויאמר: "היא תהיה לך לאשה!"

at home with the little children. . . . (61, translation (with my revisions) in Berlovitz, "Literature by Women of the First Aliyah" 59; my emphasis)⁶⁶

Again women's predicament is subordinated to the stories of men. The burden of initiating Jewish women into their national role is assigned by Harbin to Jewish men. For him it is because men have left women confined to the private sphere that they could not develop the right "emotions." Harbin's speech proceeds flowingly for some time along the same lines delineated in the excerpt above, but then comes to a sudden halt marked by an ellipsis mark that splits the speech in two: "whatever it may be," Harbin concludes, "today our women are in a position... emotion, they lack emotion!" (ibid). Immediately after the gap, the focus of Harbin's speech shifts from the Jewish woman to the Bedouin woman:

... *Emotion*, they lack *emotion*! Look at my wife. She is a savage Bedouin, and before I came to the farm she was hidden behind the curtain like all other women. She didn't know anything about life, religion, moral obligation. But she is a descendent of a vibrant people and a natural being. She learned Hebrew, because she didn't understand how she could be my wife, a mother of my children, and not know how to speak my language, the language of my people that soon became her people. She loves working the land simply because she has grown since childhood in the clear air, under the sky, and she loved spending nights outdoors with her brothers, guarding the herds, counting shooting stars. (61-62; my emphasis)⁶⁷

While Jewish women need nationalist education in order to develop "emotion," for the Bedouin woman, it seems that the possession of simple and natural "emotion," notably toward her husband, is what enables her to learn the Hebrew language and become part of

כל זמן שלא ניתן את כל ליבנו לחינוכן והשכלתן ברוח לאומי, כל עת שלא תדענה לשון עברית כראוי... איזו רגשות נוכל לבקש מהן, ואיזה חינוך יכולות הן לתת לילדינו?! וצריך להודות כי במושבותינו הינחנו את האישה לגמרי לנפשה. מי מאיתנו לימד את אשתו או קרא לפנייה! ועל כן שנים אחדות אחרי הנישואים, כאשר נהיתה האישה לאם לשנים-שלושה ילדים, לא בלבד שלא התקדמה ולא רכשה לה כל הידיעות הנצרכות לחינוך ילדיה בגשמיות וברוחניות, אלא נהפכה לשפחה אמיתית, אף שכחה את אשר ידעה לפניים. אנחנו הלכנו אל האסיפות, נשארנו עד הצות הלילה... ונשים נשארנו תמיד בבית עם הילדים הקטנים...

רגש, רגש חסר להן! התראה את אשתי, הלא היא בדוית פראה, ועד בואי לתוך החווה היתה גם היא כמו כל יתר הנשים נסתרת⁶⁷ מאחורי הפרגוד, לא ידעה דבר מן החיים, אף מושג מדת לא היה לא ולא משום חובה מוסרית. אבל היא בת עם חי ויצור טבעי, למדה לדבר עברית, כי לא הבינה איך תוכל להיות אשתי, אם לילדי, ולא לדעת לדבר בלשוני, בלשון עמי, אשר היה מהרה עמה. היא אוהבת עבודת השדה, זה פשוט, יען כי מילדותה גדלה באוויר צה תחת כיפת השמים, ואהבה ללון בחוץ עם אחיה שומרי העדרים, לספור הכוכבים הנופלים.

a Hebrew community. Thus, the second part of the speech retroactively puts the assumptions of the first part in question, throwing Jewish women into a vicious circle in which not naturally possessing “emotion” will inhibit them from acquiring artificially the “education” that is supposed, in turn, to produce the same emotion. The ellipsis marking Harbin’s pause seems to attest to the ambiguity of “Hebrew women’s position” which, as we recall, he sets out to define. Into the gap in Zionist speech that Hebrew women create, the Bedouin woman enters. The Oriental woman then is produced here as a patch, suturing the rift between Zionist women and men’s Zionism. In this sense, the Other woman is a gift to Zionist feminism. Her figure sutures the rifts in the Zionist feminist speech. It covers up the rift between the Zionist story and the story of the New Woman (we remember her standing on the ship), for she is in fact liberated by Zionist men. She embodies the Zionist feminine desire to belong to the nation, to return to the land, and find there unified self, a New Hebrew and a New Woman.

In “Havat bney Rechav,” notably, the protagonist Ephraim initially rejects the gift. Or, better, he does not accept the gift of the Oriental woman in the same simple way that Harbin does. If Harbin takes her as a sign of political alliance with the Bedouins, Ephraim keeps walking toward another, arguably deeper, meaning of the sign. He refuses to copy Harbin’s story and join the tribe and accept the Bedouin woman Shlomit as his wife the first time she is offered to him, stating: “My feelings to my wife... I love her despite all...” (68). For Shlomit to become a proper sign, Ephraim needs to penetrate deeper into and the desert, and she, notably, needs to sacrifice; or, better, she needs to become a sacrifice rather than a gift. While the first description of Shlomit stresses her richly ornamented look – “On her blackish neck there was a silver necklace ornamented

with square pieces of silver, and down in the middle – a large heavy golden coin. On her hands there were bracelets, and on her fingers – many rings” (66)⁶⁸ – when we meet her again at the farm of the Rechabites she is transformed into a beggar:

I went from village to village, from farm to farm, here I asked for a piece of bread, there I worked as a slave, and when I got here, I heard them talking... I thought they might be the Rechabites... I approached them and told them that *I am an orphan with no mother or father*, and they accepted me and took me in... (75-76; my emphasis)⁶⁹

The Orientalist desire is, on the one hand, instigated by the adornment of the Oriental woman, but on the other hand, strives to undress her. Here it is meshed together with the Zionist ascetic ethos advocated by Ephraim earlier in the story – “we have to renounce all the things we have become used to and that we truly miss” (50).⁷⁰ The stripping of Shlomit is also reminiscent of the undressing of Hosea’s wife of whoredom as punishment for her sins,⁷¹ which is followed by a reunification between the husband and the wife, notably, in the desert (Hos. 2.16-17). Conflating Orientalist imagination, Zionist ideology and biblical allusions, Ben-Yehuda seems to lead us toward a resolution of the complexities of Jewish homecoming through the “perfect” union between the Hebrew men and native women. If after their first encounter at Harbin’s tribe, Ephraim rejects Shlomit, following her act of self-sacrifice, he promises her love, specifically because of the nature of her transformation into a beggar exclaiming:

You went ahead of me, you wandered from door to door like ‘a living orphan,’ you found them before me and waited for me here, good for you, my girl, good

⁶⁸ על צווארה השחרחר היתה שרשרת כסף מקושטת בחתיכות כסף מרובעות, ולמטה באמצע – מטבעת זהב גדולה וכבדה. על ידיה
היו אצעות, על אצבעותיה-- טבעות רבות.

⁶⁹ הלכתי מכפר אל כפר, מחווה לחווה, פה ביקשתי חתיכת לחם, שם עבדתי כשפחה... וכשהגעתי הגה... שמעתי מדברים... אמרתי
...אולי אלה הם... התקרבת אליהם ואמרתי להם כי יתומה הנני בלי אב ואם ויקרבוני ויקבלוני לתוכם...

⁷⁰ On asceticism in Zionist culture see also: Almog 317-350.

⁷¹ Of course, a recurrent violent gesture in the books of the prophets tied to the metaphor of whoredom.

for you, you are fortunate. I will love you with all my heart!... I will love you here at the farm of the Rechabites! (77)⁷²

Shlomit's sacrifice of her ornaments is accompanied by another sacrifice – becoming an orphan. Whereas Ephraim is supposed to regain his origins in the desert, Shlomit has to forsake her origins, her mother and father. Zionist culture had a particular investment in the idea of orphanhood, for immigration to Palestine was often depicted in terms of abandoning the diasporic parents and being reborn as children of the land. But Shlomit's orphanization is different. While the Jewish woman cannot be reborn in Ben-Yehuda's story as she embodies the old that needs to be forsaken, the orphanized native woman is constructed as a stand-in for the obsolete "Jewish woman of the Land of Israel." In 1907, in another article in *Hashkafa*, Eliezer Ben-Yehuda refers to the marginality of the women of the first Zionist immigration wave, and to the critique often directed at them for being unable and unwilling to take equal part in their husband's nationalist projects. For the present discussion it is significant that he revisits the figure of the orphan in this context. In this essay, Eliezer, like Harbin in Hemda's story, seemingly defends Jewish women, claiming that "The wives of the farmers are not women-farmers . . . not because they don't want to be, but because they were not brought up to it and were not used to it from childhood" (1). He thus contemplates the establishment of an agricultural institution for women, but then questions the idea, as "it will not be easy to find fathers who will agree to submit their daughters, to education toward being simple farmers" (Ibid). The solution to this problem, he eventually proposes, is an educational institution for orphan girls who will be brought up to be a generation of women-farmers. While the fathers are the ones marked in the essay as gate-keepers who would not allow

⁷² הלכת לפני, סבבת על הפתחים 'יתומה חיה', מצאתים קודם ממני, חיכית לי פה, אשריך בתי אשריך, מזלך הטוב. אוהבך בכל
מאמצי כוחי!... אוהבך פה, בחוות בני ריכב!...

their daughters to become real partners of men in working the land, it is the mothers, who are replaced by the orphans, because they are already lost for the project not being “brought up to it.” The law of the father is thus obeyed while the mothers are discarded. A similar transition occurs in “Ḥavat bney Rechav”: the Orphan replaces the Jewish wife and mother. She, who comes from the no-place of the desert, who has no origins, can be reborn as the New Hebrew Woman.

Yet another sacrifice, however, concludes the women’s exchange narrative in “Ḥavat bney Rechav.” Shlomit, we may recall, was given equal rights as a woman in her former tribe, as part of the process of modernization executed by Harbin. Significantly, to be united with Ephraim at the Rechabites, she has to give up this newly-found equality. At the Rechabites, Shlomit observes, women live in traditional segregation – “It is very sad to live here, especially for a woman, always behind the curtain” (76) – to which Ephraim responds, “Never mind... don’t worry... we will unite with them, change their ways slowly...” (ibid). While Ephraim regains his origins, while his fantasy comes true, and having left his castrating Jewish wife he is a man among men again, women’s emancipation is deferred. Ephraim indeed promises that liberating the women will be an integral part of the project of incorporating of the Rechabites in the New Hebrew society. However, he says, “Such things cannot be done in haste. If you try to gain too much you will not gain anything.”⁷³ The deferment of the fulfillment of Ephraim’s promise of women’s liberation corresponds with the historical reality of postponement and marginalization of “women’s issues” in early Zionism. The first convention of “The Eretz-Yisraeli Union” in 1903, the same year in which this story is published, comes to

⁷³ תפשת מרובה, לא תפשת.

mind in this context. In this event, women were denied participation in the first political organization of the Yishuv because, as speakers in the convention phrased it, “the unity of the Yishuv” entailed the deferment of the issue of women until the opponents from the religious Old Yishuv would become ready to accept women as equals (Shilo 52-62). The parallels between this political reality and the conclusion of “Havat bney Rechav” seem clear: In both the desire for unity with traditional society defers the question of women’s equality. The historical anecdote and the fantastic story both lead women behind the curtain so that men can make the nation happen.

In Ben-Yehuda’s stories then, whereas men proceed toward self-discovery, women face identity crisis and self-sacrifice. To belong to the nation, women must disappear: first the outspoken Jewish woman is discarded; then, the Hebraized Bedouin is sent back behind the curtain. But now it may be time to return Hemda Ben-Yehuda’s careful choice of names for her protagonists. In Australia, we recall, Ephraim changed his name to Johnson. While upon his return to the land he changes his name back to Ephraim, the name of his beloved Shlomit seemingly conjures up Johnson. The English name Johnson alludes to the figure of John the Baptist, who was beheaded at the request of Shlomit (Salomé), the daughter of Herod, who asked for John’s head in order to please her mother. With the name Shlomit then, the daughter returns to the mother, or, even better, the deserted (Jewish) mother gets her revenge through the obedient daughter, Shlomit. Furthermore Shlomit, Salomé, carries with her a rich baggage of connotations, when she appears in a Hebrew story at the turn of the 20th century. As Shachar Pinsker underscores, the investment of Jewish literature of the *fin-de-siècle* in the figure of Salomé attested to the connection between this literature and the crises of modern

masculinity *vis-à-vis* the figure of the New Woman (147-154). Moreover, as Rana Kabbani shows, Salomé, like Scheherazade, is an iconic Orientalized woman, whose figure stands for wild sexuality and violence (114-115). Ben-Yehuda's Shlomit, we recall, leads Ephraim (Johnson) to his muted existence at the farm of the Rechabites. In fact, she is the one, who first pretends not to know Hebrew, but by the time Ephraim arrives, she already speaks: “‘gradually, I have ‘learned’ their language,’ Shlomit laughed, and her pearly white teeth shined behind her red lips” (76). The emphasis on Shlomit's mouth, which is notably followed by a kiss “full of fire and warmth” between Ephraim and Shlomit, invokes the scene where Salomé kisses the lips of the beheaded John in Oscar Wilde's play, which Kabbani brings as an example of association between violence and sexual desire as embodied by Salomé: “Ah! I have kissed thy mouth, Jokanaan, I have kissed thy mouth; there was a bitter taste on thy lips. Was it the taste of blood?” (Wilde qtd in Kabbani 114). With the context of Salomé and John in mind, and given Eliezer's intense passion for the language, Ephraim's decision to follow the example of Shlomit and pretend that he does not know Hebrew gains violent significance, as if he himself is metaphorically beheaded, in losing such a major function of his head as speaking Hebrew. Again, it seems with the question of the New Hebrew Woman, as before, with the letter *taf*, and the example of Isabel Burton, Hemda Ben-Yehuda insinuates a violent and destructive conflict between the feminine and the masculine.

The conclusion of “Havat bney Rechav” thus features a clash between the two national grand narratives in which Hemda works: the first is the story of the New Hebrew Man seeking to be re-masculinized by returning to the land; the second is a story of the New Hebrew Woman seeking to be liberated through the framework of nationalism.

Ephraim's quest in search of the Rechabites clearly belongs to the first narrative, while Harbin's discussion of women's place within Zionism and Shlomit's sad remarks in the final scene belong to the second. Ben-Yehuda's efforts to intertwine the two stories force us to see the acute incongruity between them: The New Hebrew Man and the New Hebrew Woman cannot live together; each of their stories depends upon the destruction of the other's story; men's return to their masculine selves depends on women's sacrifice; women's empowerment depends on men's castration.

The discussion of Ben-Yehuda's writing marks the dissonance embedded in women's nationalist writing as our point of departure. It also, however, highlights the predicament of acknowledging and articulating that dissonance, showing how in Ben-Yehuda's writing, dissonance is transmuted into Orientalist discourse fraught with violent undertones. The impossibility of matching together the feminine and masculine narratives within the framework of the nation is covered up through the figure of a native woman who can be a stand-in for the Jewish woman, both as a sacrificial lamb and as the avenger of her abandonment.

A Note on Writing and Married Life

It seems important to return now to the silence that concludes the story. The quest for origins ends with Ephraim's decision to hide his knowledge of Hebrew and pretend to learn the language from the Rechabites. As suggested earlier, considering the investment of the Ben-Yehuda family in the Hebrew language, this ending is remarkable. In *Milhamah 'im ha-satan*, Hemda plays with the word *milon*, a dictionary, and recounts how it was mockingly associated, by Ben Yehuda's enemies presumably, with the

scripture “*mi yitneni ba-midbar melon orḥim*” (Jer. 9.1; “Oh, to be in the desert at an encampment of wayfarers” *JPS* 1985), to insinuate sketchiness of Ben Yehuda’s project. The conclusion of “Ḥavat bney Rechav” may be read as realization of the exchange of *milon* with *melon orḥim*, joining in with the mocking opponents of Eliezer’s project, locating the origin of the language in the transient Bedouin encampment in the desert, in no-place, away from the distressed colonies. Women’s liberation is sacrificed but men’s national politics is exchanged in favor of a myth. Ḥemda is reiterating the story of the exchange of women, but instead of enabling masculine communication through it, she puts the New Hebrew Man on mute.

In another section of *Milḥamah ‘im ha-satan*, Ḥemda includes a rare passage in which she criticizes her relationship with Eliezer. The passage begins with a reference to an unknown event (the report on the event itself is missing from the archive file), which made Ḥemda infuriated with Eliezer. She recounts how she was “so angry that I despised this entire life, and said enough!”, and only the intervention of Itamar Ben Avi, Eliezer and Dvora’s son, convinced her to let matter go. However, she proceeds, “there were moments in Eliezer’s life, in which he knew I remembered or was thinking of the event,” and, furthermore:

Indeed, there was a time in my life where Ben-Yehuda was a high priest and I was a vassal serving before him. And then began a new period, in which we were equal people, flesh and blood, working together in mutual love and admiration...but Ben-Yehuda could not acknowledge or accept this stage of the relationship till the last day of his life. And it was almost always impossible to talk with him about that because it angered him... he didn’t want to hear that I have greatness in me. No, no, he wanted everything to stay the same. Our children are all children of the first period, the children of a high priest. In the second period, we were husband and wife, lovers, good friends, and I had important and great spiritual offspring, and everything I created belonged to the two of us. For me there was greatness, beauty and grace in both periods. But Ben-Yehuda acknowledged only one period, and I wasn’t allowed to even think of the other one. Perhaps it is because of this that he insisted I would write his biography during his lifetime, because he was convinced that he would influence me to keep silent when I get to this place, if I see that it distresses him, or that I

forget about it, change my mind and believe as he did that there was only one period in our lives. (ZA A/73 -74)⁷⁴

This depiction of Hemda and Eliezer's married life is, of course, highly enigmatic. How could a period of equality and partnership take place without Eliezer acknowledging it? How could the couple be "husband and wife, lovers, friends," while she is forbidden to speak or even think of this state of affairs? And how could Eliezer expect that she would "forget about it" or "change her mind," as she did with regards to the unknown infuriating event, given that, presumably, the second period replaced the first period, meaning, it is the period lived while writing? It seems as if there is an irresolvable tension in this passage between its linear temporality – one period is followed by another – and the mode of consciousness in which the couple supposedly lives, where two narratives persist at once. This brings us back to "Havat bney Rechav," and to the incongruity of women's and men's stories.

The gendered complexity of the relations between the writer and her editor emerge once again as significant. I have mentioned at the beginning of this chapter how the editor and husband pressured his wife to write. We also know that for the same reasons he wanted her to write his memoir, claiming that:

You will write it better. And it wasn't just a compliment to my writing talent... he felt that... in the woman writer, if she is educated, there is warmth, there is soul, softness, beauty, while in men's writing – there is wisdom, of course, and sometimes they set up values – but, the writing is cold as if it does not come

⁷⁴ ובאמת הייתה בימי חיי תקופה שהיה בן יהודה בשבילי כהן גדול ואני הווסטלית ששירתה אותו. ואחרי תקופה זו התחילה תקופה חדשה של שני אנשים שווים, בשר ודם שניהם, עובדים בעבודה משותפת, באהבה ובהערצה איש לרעהו... אך בן יהודה לא רצה ולא יכול להסכים להשלב הזה ביחסים עד יומו האחרון, וכמעט שאי אפשר היה מעולם לדבר איתו על זה כי הדבר הכעיס את ליבו... ולא רצה לשמוע כי גם בחיים האלה יש בי גדלות. לא, לא, הוא רצה שהכול ישאר כמו שהיה. ילדינו כולם ילדי התקופה הראשונה, ילדי כוהן גדול. בתקופה השנייה היינו בעל ואישה, אהוב ואהובה, מכרים טובים, ידידים, חברים, והיו לי ילדי רוח גדולים וחשובים, וכל מה שעשיתי ופעלתי ויצרתי שייך לשנינו. בשבילי בשתי התקופות הייתה גדלות רבה וגם יופי וחן. בן יהודה לא הכיר אלא תקופה אחת ואסור היה לי אפילו לחשוב על השנייה. ועל כמה וכמה לא לדבר. אך הוא ידע כי בהזכרונות לא אעבור בשתיקה על התקופה השנייה. ואולי מפני זה כל כך עמד על הדבר שאכתוב הזכרונות בחייו, כי היה משוכנע שישפיע עלי לשים יד לפה, כשאגיע להמקום, אם אראה שזה מצער אותו, או שקיווה שאשכח בכלל, אחליף דעתי ואחשוב כמוהו כי רק תקופה אחת הייתה בחיינו.

from his heart and therefore does not go into the heart of the reader. (ZA A43/95)⁷⁵

At the same time he insists that she will write the memoir during his lifetime. The woman writer's heartfelt writing has to be supervised and contained. With regards to "Havat bney Rechav" specifically, after the publication of one of the installments, she writes to Eliezer (she is visiting Russia at the time) – "so you did not reject my writing. You did not praise it, but in any case you published it" (ZA A43/14). The nervousness and insecurity of the writer before her silent editor, who has printed but has not praised, is evident. She desires reassurance from him, and yet, as we have seen, she dares to defy his expectations, sending Ephraim away from the politics of the colonies, bringing in the New Hebrew Woman and her others, choosing silence over speech. Writing the unspeakable "second period" after the death of Ben-Yehuda is another such act of rebellion, the woman writer's assertion of her uncontrollable writing. And still, in her personal – not for publication – diary, she writes:

I write with a bleeding heart, writing destroys me, but I feel obligated to write, write, because I will not live very long, I cannot live, and these things should be written. This is my gift for the next generation; that they shall know who Ben Yehuda was, not as the reviver of language, but as a man, a husband, a father, a friend, and a Jew.⁷⁶ (ZA A43/74)

Perhaps this is the contribution of Hemda Ben-Yehuda as the first Zionist feminist writer of the Yishuv period: She shows us the wound, the pain of Zionist women's love for a nation and for men, who do not acknowledge them as partners, as writers, as subjects of the national journey. The pain of trying to speak for Zionism, while also speaking for

⁷⁵ את תכתבי זה יותר טוב. ולא הייתה סתם מחמאה לכתיבתי או כשרוני, חש כי...בכותבת האישה, אם היא משכלת ומחונכת, יש חום, יש נפש, רוך, יופי, בעת שהזכר כותב - מובן חכמה, קובע ערכים לפעמים, ואך... קר, כאילו הדברים אינם יוצאים מליבו וע"כ גם לא נכנסים ללב.

⁷⁶ בדם ליבי, הכתיבה הורסת אותי, אך אני מרגישה חובה לכתוב, לכתוב, כי לא אאריך ימים, אינני יכולה לחיות וטוב שהדברים האלו ייכתבו. זו מתנתי לדור הבא, שיידעו מי היה בן יהודה, לא מחייה הלשון, אלא בתור אדם, בעל, אב וידיד, ויהודי.

women, the pain of women's deep alienation within the home-land, a pain as deep as the sea where she wishes she could have stayed.

CHAPTER III

Entering the Records: The New Jew and the New Woman in the Autobiography of Sara Azaryahu

Introduction: The New Jew, the New Woman, and the Other Woman

The one points to the history of the universal subject and the hard nut of its normative (masculine) individuality. It speaks as well of the tyranny of the arid “I,” which obscures through a gray and shapeless mist everything colorful that lies within its vision. And it implicitly issues a challenge to the woman who, in entering the textual space of that “I,” would appropriate the position of the autobiographical subject. For there may be as many costs as benefits to surrendering to the “I” that she finds installed there. And there are certainly histories of the subject to be negotiated in that “I” space, histories that make trouble for her as she takes up that autobiographical “I.” Those histories may press her to silence or they may encourage her to cross, crisscross, doublecross that “I” in order to move from silence into self-narrative. (Smith, Subjectivity 2-3)

The Zionist enterprise is often depicted in terms of the construction of a new self, a New Hebrew, grounded in the land, speaker of the Hebrew language, subject of freedom and productivity (Conforti 63-96; Almog 124-135; Zerubavel 26-35). Much has been said about the essential manliness of this image (For example, Boyarin 271-312). Indeed, given that the New Hebrew was born by breaking away from the “femininity” of exile, how could he not be a man? “Alongside the New Hebrew Man,” claims Rachel Elboim-Dror in her study of Zionist utopias, “we would not find a New Hebrew Woman . . . for Zionist authors envisioned the Zionist woman as a traditional woman – a woman made out of the rib of a man in order to serve him” (114). Even in Hertzl’s fantasy of a completely modern Jewish state in the utopist novel *Altneuland*, Elboim-Dror shows,

while women are given equal rights, the perfect Zionist woman, would not make use of her political rights, for she would prefer to stick to the traditional role of caring for the home (99-100). What Elboim-Dror identifies is that while the erasure of the feminine-exilic was part of the quest of the New Hebrew Man, in representing Hebrew women, Zionist imagination celebrates the most stereotypical and traditional forms of femininity; for women, once again, there is no newness in Zionism.

And yet, at the same time as the image New Jew was contemplated and disseminated, Eastern European Jewish women, including those who were part of the Zionist circles, were exposed to another moment of birth, for the same period, the turn of the 20th century, was also the time in which the New Woman emerged.⁷⁷ This figure did not go unnoticed in Modern Hebrew culture, as Shachar Pinsker remarks in his study of Modernist Hebrew fiction (240). Pinsker provides a useful discussion of the representation of the New Jewish Woman in Hebrew literature of early 20th century, analyzing the ways in which the mostly male-dominated modernist Hebrew canon negotiates men's desires and anxieties surrounding this new figure (237-274).⁷⁸ My concern here, however, is with women's desires and anxieties and the ways in which women wrote their new emancipating selves into the Zionist vision of Jewish emancipation. In this context, I turn away from the Hebrew canon to look at the marginal genre of the autobiography, and at an almost forgotten Zionist woman, who was not a writer of literature, but who took part in imagining the New Hebrew Woman.

Notably, the New Jew is not one unified image (Conforti 63-96). This figure oscillates between visions that cast him as the New Hebrew, a biblical style native, and

⁷⁷ On the New Woman, see note 46.

⁷⁸ The one exception in this context is the writing of woman author Dvora Baron, which is the focus of Chapter Six of this dissertation.

ones that make him an agent of modernity. The previous chapter has engaged with the first vision of the New Hebrew self. In my analysis of Hēmda Ben-Yehuda's writings, I have shown how the dream of women's liberation through the nation produces a dissonance within the fantasy of the Jewish return to the land as a site of nativeness. This chapter explores the efforts of Zionist suffragist Sara Azaryahu to figure the nation as a modern space of women's liberation, and to construe the New Hebrew Woman as New (Western) Woman. These efforts, I argue, are laced with self-contradictions and self-erasures, but also with the marking of Orientalist dichotomies. While in the previous chapter the Orientalized woman was constructed as an idealized replacement of the failing Jewish woman, here Orientalist discourse serves so as to construct the New Hebrew Woman against her Others.

The autobiography of one new Jewish woman, Zionist suffragist Sara Azaryahu, seems a particularly fruitful site for this inquiry. While during the 1970s, as part of the revival of Israeli feminism, Azaryahu's figure was rediscovered, and a short documentary text she has written about Zionist women's suffrage struggle was republished, hardly any attention was paid to her autobiography.⁷⁹ And apart from a very brief discussion in Tamar Hess' dissertation on the autobiographical writings of women of the second Zionist immigration wave (216-224), no scholarly study has addressed the autobiography. Published in 1956, depicting Azaryahu's life from childhood in the late nineteenth century to adulthood as a Zionist and a feminist suffragist in Palestine of the late 1920s,

⁷⁹Marcia Freedman, one of the leaders of the feminist movement in Israel, republished the text *Hitahadut nashim 'Ivriot le-shivuy zkhuyot be-Eretz-Yisrael: prakim le-toldot ha-Isha ba-aretz 1900-1947* (Hebrew women's union for equal rights: history of women in the land 1900-1947), which for her represented the origins of Israeli feminism. She also translated the text to English.

this text may be read as a detailed survey of the turbulent process of making the New Hebrew Woman.

Born in 1873 to a bourgeois family in the Latvian city of Dvinsk and descended from a famous rabbi, Azaryahu received both a Jewish and a general education. In her youth, she became a passionate Zionist and was active in the circles of *Hibat Zion*. In 1901, she married Yosef Ozerkowsky (Azaryahu, 1872–1945), and the couple moved to Bern, Switzerland, to study education. During their time in Switzerland, Sara and Yosef Azaryahu also participated together in the Fifth Zionist Congress, held in Basel in 1901. From 1902 to 1905, after returning to Russia, they taught at a school for girls in the town of Golatha, near Odessa. In 1905, Yosef Azaryahu immigrated to Palestine to take up a teaching position in the colony of Rehovot. Sara stayed in Russia for another year before joining him in Palestine. As of 1906, the couple worked together at girls' school in Jaffa. They participated in the founding of Tel Aviv in 1909, but at the beginning of World War I they moved to Haifa to work at the Reali High School. From 1924 on, the family lived in Jerusalem, where Yosef Azaryahu held the position of director of the Teachers' Union. After his death in 1945, Sara Azaryahu spent the last years of her life in *kibbutz* Afikim, where she passed away in 1962 (Shilo, "Jewish Women Archive"; Safran 52-53).

As of 1919, when Zionist women's suffrage rights were unexpectedly threatened, Azaryahu played an important role in the Zionist feminist movement. The Yishuv, Palestine's Jewish community, was divided between the Zionist New Yishuv and the veteran, mainly Orthodox, Old Yishuv. With the constitution of the British Mandate in Palestine, the leaders of the New Yishuv aspired to organize the entire Jewish community under one representative institution, the National Assembly. However, the representatives

of the Old Yishuv threatened to withdraw from the Assembly if women were given the right to vote. In response, Zionist women launched a long suffrage campaign that achieved conclusive success only in 1926, with the Assembly's final resolution to give women active and passive electoral rights. As a major activist in "Hebrew Women's Equal Rights Association" (HWERA), Azaryahu was one of the leaders of this struggle (Safran 56-68; Herzog 113-116; Fogiel-Bigau 262-284; Abrams 121-137). While her autobiography celebrates this period in her life, it also marks it as a point of crisis where the Zionist self splits from the feminist self.

Once again, we shall see, where the Hebrew woman is in crisis, an-Other woman is summoned to her rescue, but the imagined encounter between the two only exposes and accentuates the dilemmas of the split Zionist feminine self. To explicate this point, let us take as a point of departure another new woman's thoughts about Zionist women's entry into the public political sphere:

I speak here of the Jewish women, and the Jewish women only. The Moslem and Christian Arab women are politically unborn, and are, especially among the Moslem population, treated as slaves and beasts of burden . . . I understand, however, that these poor Arab sisters of ours are taking courage from their Jewish compatriots, and I hear that many an Arab woman refuses to put up with the treatment handed down through countless generations to her husband, father and brother, and looks to the Jewish women for inspiration. (163)

These lines, written in 1920, in the midst of Zionist women's suffragist struggle (1919-1926), are part of an open letter sent by Rosa Welt Straus, chairwoman of the "Hebrew Women's Equal Rights Association" (HWERA), to the "International Woman Suffrage Alliance" (IWSA). In this letter, Welt Straus describes the establishment of the new Zionist suffragist organization, and asks that it would be accepted into the IWSA as representative of Palestine's "Jewish women only." The participation of Hebrew women in the international alliance reminds us that the Jewish women's suffrage struggle in

Palestine in the 1920s occurred within a larger feminist context of suffrage campaigns all over the world. However, Welt Straus's letter also illuminates another "international frame" in which, I would suggest, Zionist feminism of the first decades of the twentieth century should be understood: namely, the self-constitution of Western feminism through the discourse of the "Other woman." In Straus's address to the IWSA, the distinctiveness of the Hebrew woman is imagined against Arab women. Indeed, it seems that for Welt Straus, in order for the Hebrew woman to have her own voice, the Arab woman has to be conjured as her "poor sister."⁸⁰

In a study of British women and imperialism, for example, Antoinette Burton shows how British feminist writers employ images of Indian women as "graphic 'proof' of women's fate in cultures where female emancipation went unrecognized" (63). Burton further claims that imagining the feminine colonial Other was an invaluable gesture for British feminism, for it provided British women with a foil against which they could validate their own emancipatory demands and advancements. Similarly, discussing the encounters between British and Egyptian women in the context of the British colonization of Egypt, Mervat Hatem has demonstrated that "by thinking themselves as all powerful and free *vis-à-vis* Egyptian women, Western women could avoid confronting their own powerlessness and gender oppression at home" (36). Theorizing this notion further, Meyda Yeğenoğlu has analyzed the employment of the "lifting the veil" discourse to establish Western feminists' lives as "democratic, advanced, emancipated, in

⁸⁰ See also: Abrams 132; Safran 33. Both Abrams and Safran refer to Welt Staus's attitude toward Arab women as patronizing and condescending. My discussion, however, aims to go beyond this critique and interrogate the place of Zionist feminism's "poor sisters" in making the identity of the New Hebrew Woman. Also, in reference to Welt Straus's claim that Arab women are "politically unborn," see: Ellen Fleischmann's pioneering historical analysis of Arab women's political involvement, *The Nation and Its "New" Women: The Arab Women's Movement, 1920–1948*.

short as the *norm*,” thus enabling them to posit “a universal subject status for themselves” (101). Welt Straus’ constitution of Hebrew women against Arab women not only was written in English, but, read in this light, it seems also to echo other feminist voices heard in the space of British dominance.⁸¹ In this respect, I would argue, Hebrew women are no different from British women, or from other Western women encountering the Orient; the Zionist feminist subject, too, demands its Others, its dark side, its “poor sisters,” to be itself.

In her groundbreaking work on women’s autobiography and the body, Sidonie Smith has theorized how the exclusion of “the Other Woman in white women’s autobiographies ties with an erasure of the autobiographer’s own femininity.⁸² Smith suggests that the autobiographical subject “positions on its border all that is termed the ‘colorful,’ that is, that which becomes identified culturally as other, exotic, unruly, irrational, uncivilized, regional, or paradoxically unnatural” (*Subjectivity* 9). For Smith, the feminine body is in fact the quintessential metonym for all that is “colorful.” Thus, insofar as disembodiment is crucial for the constitution of the universal (masculine-like) autobiographical subject, those marked as the Others of this subject are situated in the same place as the body. Of particular relevance to our discussion is Smith’s reading of the autobiography of American suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902), where she draws an analogy between women’s transgression of the limited posture of the feminine “embodied subject” for the sake of appropriating the universalized position of the autobiographical “I,” and women’s need to “unsex” themselves in order to legitimize

⁸¹ On women and the British Empire, see also Margaret Strobel’s study on *European Women and the Second British Empire*.

⁸² Apart from Sidonie Smith’s important work on this issue, which is discussed below, see also in the same collection Nancy L. Paxton’s article, “Disembodied Subjects: English Women’s Autobiography under the Raj” 387–409.

their struggle for equal political rights (“Elizabeth Cady Stanton” 33). In forging a sharp split between her subjectivity and her body so as to produce herself as a democratic subject equal to men, Stanton thus expanded the boundaries of the universal subject to include bourgeois women. At the same time, Smith argues, she also consolidated those boundaries to leave other women outside, for “after all, with all those bourgeois women leaving the family for the territories of the universal subject, who is left to do the work of the family but domestic servants, including ex-slave women”(Ibid).

Reading autobiographies by women colonialists in Kenya, Smith makes an even more direct connection between symbolic violence toward the Other – the Other Woman in particular – and the demands of the autobiographical genre (“The Other Woman” 410-435). For example, the autobiography of Beryl Markham (1902–1986), the British women adventurer and aviatrix, inextricably intertwines racism toward Kenyan women, rejection of motherhood and femininity, and the construction of a masculinized autobiographical voice. As the autobiographical “I” is quintessentially modeled after the figure of the white Western man, “to acknowledge the other (woman, African),” Smith claims, “would be to contaminate ‘the white continent’ of Western subjectivity and its autobiographical practices” (421). In other words, as Smith’s diverse work shows, “to acknowledge the other woman” is to recall white women’s own otherness within the “white continent,” which traditionally belongs to men, or, better, to remind the writing white woman of how she herself contaminates that masculine space. The juxtaposition of Sara Azaryahu’s autobiography with insights drawn in colonial and racial settings remarks her trajectory in a peculiar way. Viewed through this lens, Azaryahu is not only a Jewish Zionist feminist working within an androcentric ideological framework, but also a

white western woman traveling eastward, constructing herself as the New Woman against the image of the native Orientalized woman (Mills 27-66).⁸³

At the same time, similar to what Smith finds in the writings of other white women, the exclusion of Hebrew women's "poor sisters" from Zionist feminist projects, as phrased by the Zionist suffragists of the 1920s, parallels the self-erasure of "everything feminine," an erasure that was instrumental in ushering the Hebrew Woman's entry into the "white continent" of autobiographical subjectivity. Reading Azaryahu's autobiography in relation to colonial narratives also demands that we address the complex relations between Jewishness, Zionism and colonialism. Indeed, as part and parcel of her feminist trajectory, Azaryahu is also invested in what Daniel Boyarin has termed the "Colonial Drag," namely, the constitution of the Jew as a white modern masculine subject through a (self-) "civilizing mission," by which the feminized diasporic Jew was transformed into the New Hebrew Man (271-312). In this context, any notion of fixed gender, ethnic and national difference must be further complicated, as diasporic Jews are also placed in the position of the "feminine." Thus, although Boyarin's conceptualization of the New Jew does not include women, we must bear in mind in the present framework that not only Azaryahu's femininity is marked as that which to be negated in order to validate the autobiographical voice, but also her Jewishness. Without suggesting an easy equivalence between Ashkenazi Jews' self-identity suppression and the oppression of Palestinians and Mizrahim by Zionist hegemony, I would like to

⁸³ Indeed, as a Jewish woman, Azaryahu arguably has more complicated relations to the "Orient" than the white European women Smith discusses. On the fraught position of Jews *vis-à-vis* the Orient, see Gil Anidjar's groundbreaking study *The Jew, The Arab: A History of the Enemy*; Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin's illuminating discussion of the connections between Hebraism and Orientalism, "The Zionist Return to the West and the Mizrahi Jewish Perspective," 162–181; and Gil Hochberg's literary study of the relation between Hebrew and Arab textualities, *In Spite of Partition: Jews, Arabs and the Limits of Separatist Imagination*.

highlight the similar gestures Azaryahu's text performs in distancing the New Hebrew Woman from, respectively, old Ashkenazi Jewishness, Mizrahi and Arab women, and the "feminine" as corporeal, private and "colorful." Read in this light, I would argue, the making of the New (modern) Hebrew Woman emerges as a complicated process of erasures and rewriting of self and other.

Hide and Seek: Feminine Difference and the Text

Two male representatives and one female representative were chosen as members of the secretariat. I was that female representative. Places were prepared for us at the end of the long presidential table. However, when those on the platform learned that a woman was to sit in the same row with them, a very "grave situation" ensued, and the chief rabbi announced his refusal to open the National Assembly. After some time, a solution for this "crisis" was found. The members of the honorary secretariat were seated at a table at the foot of the high platform. My gray head was concealed from the presidency's sight, and everything was now all right. This event, *which of course did not enter the records*, is well etched in my memory. Such curious events as these still occurred in our public life only three decades ago. (Azaryahu, *Life Chapters* 53; my emphasis)⁸⁴

Events such as these, "which of course did not enter the records" (ibid), may be the object of the reader's desire as she approaches the autobiography of a woman. Is this not what the reader looks for in a woman's autobiography – these personal moments that did not enter official history, but can now perhaps reveal to her history's secrets, its "behind the scenes"? Read by itself, the episode at the opening of the National Assembly may count as an example of how the desire for history's muted stories is satisfied by Azaryahu's

⁸⁴ כחברי המזכירות הזאת נבחרו שני צירים וצירה אחת. אני הייתי אותה צירה, ומקומות נקבעו לנו בקצה שולחן הנשיאות הארוך. אולם כשנודע לעומדים על הבמה שעתידה אשה לשבת בשורה אחת איתם, נוצר "מצב חמור" והרב הראשי הודיע שהוא מסרב לפתוח את אסיפת הנבחרים. לאחר זמן מה נמצא פתרון גם ל"משבר" הזה. את חברי מזכירות הכבוד הושיבו ליד שולחן שעמד לרגלי הבמה הגבוהה. ראש השיבה שלי נסתר כליל מעיני חברי הנשיאות והכל בא על מקומו בשלום. (183)

The translations of the excerpts from the autobiography are taken from a forthcoming English translation edited by Hannah Hertzog and Pnina Steinberg. The translation was commissioned by Azaryahu's great-grandson Keith Newman in 1994 as a birthday present for his mother. The identity of the translator of the autobiography is unknown to the editors, but they have kindly given me permission to use the translation.

autobiographical voice. I would like, however, to read the aborted crisis at the 1920 National Assembly as a point of departure for an investigation of the overall “workings” of this text, that is, of how it frustrates some expectations associated with the autobiographical mode but fulfills others. As in the readings of Western women’s autobiographies presented above, the way Azaryahu’s text “works” toward consolidating its subject speaks to the complicated position this subject occupies within intersecting hierarchies of power.

“I was that female representative,” Azaryahu asserts in reference to the “curious event” at the opening of the first National Assembly. At first glance, nothing about this statement seems remarkable. However, tracing the ways in which the “I” of the female representative is introduced – or rather, concealed – in other parts of the text, charges this declaration with further significance. Notably, only here, at the moment of “crisis” that disturbs the opening of the National Assembly, does the reader learn that Azaryahu was elected as a representative – even though she had told the story of the election in the previous chapter. Documenting the struggle for women’s right to vote and be elected and the dramatic decision of the HWERA to participate in the elections as a separate women’s party, Azaryahu had offered only a dry, anonymous account of the results: “Five female representatives were elected” (52). Where the “I” finally appears, in the next chapter, it is only to have its presence contested and concealed.

Indeed, throughout large parts of the autobiography, we readers occupy a similar position to that of “the presidency” of the National Assembly, as the feminine “I” whose story we elected to read conceals itself from our gaze through several sophisticated discursive strategies. It hides beneath various collective “we’s”: We Zionists, we the

marital couple, we teachers, and, eventually, we women. It digresses through the stories of other men and women; and, as in the quotation above, it erases itself at high points of its story. What kind of “crisis,” the reader may ask, does the autobiographer wish to avoid through this play of hide and seek? Is it in any way similar to the “crisis” troubling the National Assembly at its festive opening session? Azaryahu’s subtle remark regarding the concealment of “my gray head,” which makes everything “all right” (*ba ‘al mekomo be-shalom*, lit. “found its place peaceably”; *Pirkey hayim* 183), may serve as a preliminary clue. The remark, of course, is ironic, as while for the chief rabbi it is the proximity of the feminine body as a sexualized body that is disturbing, we are made aware of Azaryahu’s body in its specificity as the body of an unsexualized aging woman (although Azaryahu was only 47 in 1920). More significant, however, is the surprisingly vivid image this remark creates of feminine corporeality in comparison to the rest of the text, in which, as a rule, the author refrains from making her body known to the readers, as if indeed only by absenting it can the text, too, like the National Assembly, find peace, be “all right.”

In the episode at the National Assembly, Azaryahu’s rare reference to the feminine body challenges the old rabbi’s objection to women’s presence in the public sphere. Her entire text, however, struggles with the visibility of feminine difference and its ramifications. Notwithstanding her protests against the employment of orthodox rules of modesty at the National Assembly, at times it seems that some kind of law prohibiting the exposure of the feminine body governs her own text. A few other moments in the autobiography, in which the presence of the body of the autobiographer is insinuated, are, like the episode at the National Assembly, instances of trouble to be resolved through subtle negotiation of concealment and exposure. Such, for example, is an episode that

occurs while she is still in Russia in 1898, in the process of Azaryahu's attempts to enter a higher school for teachers in St. Petersburg. Having missed a train after a day of errands, she is left wandering alone at night in the city streets, without the permit required of her, as a Jew, to stay in the capital:

There was only one way: to walk around the city streets all night. A shiver went through me as I considered the fate of a young woman wandering by herself in the middle of the night in a large city. The blackest of black thoughts whirled around in my mind while I hurried through the city streets. Without even noticing it, my feet led me to the street where my friend lived. I was soon standing on the sidewalk opposite the house. It was one of this northern city's "white nights," light enough to read a book. Everything around looked brighter than usual. (11)⁸⁵

In attempting to move to the capital to complete her studies, Azaryahu takes part in a double transgression of boundaries. First, she participates in the widespread social phenomenon, around the turn of the century, of Jewish youth leaving their small Jewish hometowns and relocating themselves in urban settings.⁸⁶ As a woman, however, Azaryahu's move to the city carries with it additional complications. At the beginning of the chapter, she recounts that the establishment of institutions of higher education for women (who were not admitted to the general universities) in St. Petersburg at the end of the nineteenth century enabled her to overcome the problem of "how to realize my ambition for a broad education and the necessary training to be a teacher and an educator" (10), stressing the not-to-be-taken-for-granted novelty of the idea of an

⁸⁵ נותרה לי רק ברירה אחת: להתהלך כל שעות הלילה בחוצות העיר. רעד עבר בגופי כשעמדתי לרגע על גורלה של נערה המשוטטת לבדה באמצע הלילה בכרך הגדול. רעיונות שחורים משחור התרוצצו במוחי שעה שרצתי בחוצות הבירה. מבלי שארגיש בדבר הביאוני רגלי אל הרחוב בו עמד ביתה של ידידתי. מצאתי את עצמי עומדת על המדרכה שממול הבית. זה היה אחד הלילות "הלבנים" של עיר צפונית זו, עד כדי קריאה בספר. הכל מסביב נראה בבהירות יוצאת מגדר הרגיל. (37-38)

⁸⁶ On Jewish migration to St. Petersburg at the turn of the 20th century, see Nathans 83–200. On the changing landscape of the Jewish world of Eastern Europe, including Jewish migration from the *shtetls* to the cities, see: Harshav 3–80; Miron, *Bodedim be-mo'adam* 296–332; and Pinsker, *Literary Passports* 29–146.

educated professional woman.⁸⁷ The double predicament of coming to the capital as a Jew and as a woman, reminds us that Azaryahu is part of two social shifts: the modernization of Jewish society and the emergence of the New Woman in the public sphere.

While the establishment of schools for women offered Azaryahu a solution to “the feminine problem,” gaining a permit to live in the capital as a Jew required more subtle manipulations of the system. Azaryahu’s efforts to obtain the permit had seemed to be well on their way to succeeding when her nocturnal experience brought both projects of enlightenment, the feminine and the Jewish, to a point of crisis. The identities of both the new emancipated woman and the assimilating modernized Jew are troubled in Azaryahu’s night in St. Petersburg. The vulnerabilities of the body of the Jew, as an illegal alien, and that of the feminine body, alone at night in the city, are conflated into one sense of terror, a terror produced by the tension between the “blackness” of Azaryahu’s thoughts and the “whiteness” of the northern night. Below we shall contemplate further the significance of blackness and whiteness, darkness and light, night and day, for Azaryahu’s journey to the East, but for now, suffice to note how, already in St. Petersburg, these oppositions lose their “normative,” stable meaning *vis-à-vis* the feminine body: Though it is “night,” the body is “overexposed” in its light; though the night is bright as day, its light is a “false light”; its whiteness signifies a horrifying metaphoric “blackness” of “the fate of a woman alone at night.”⁸⁸

⁸⁷ See also: Christine Johnson’s *Women’s Struggle for Higher Education in Russia, 1855–1900*.

⁸⁸ There may be another instability here, only subtly insinuated. A woman walking alone at night in public may be assumed to be “working,” and a reader familiar with the setting of imperial St. Petersburg may recall the stories about Jewish women registering as prostitutes in order to receive the “yellow ticket” allowing them to stay in the capital. Benjamin Nathans stresses that this is a “myth,” probably based on very few real cases, but he also notes the prevalence of this myth, which is why we may assume that

Azaryahu is “led” by her feet, “without noticing it,” into a place of hiding. It is as if the body itself knows the law of the public space, which is the law of the National Assembly, and the law of the text: The feminine body must be “in its place” (*‘al mekomo*). Curiously, however, perhaps because the threat for a woman in a public space at night is too naturalized to be observed as conspicuous, it is not the sense of gendered danger that leaves its traumatic mark on Azaryahu. Rather, it is the recognition that the “poisoned atmosphere” of “damaging discrimination” against Jews would not allow her to “work and study comfortably” that leads her temporarily to forsake her ambition for an academic education (11). In this instance, then, Jewish victimhood overshadows potential feminine victimhood. However, there is a way, I would suggest, in which the text responds to both kinds of victimizations as it proceeds to evolve as a Zionist narrative of nationalist activism, immigration and settlement in the Palestine.

It seems all too clear how the Zionist narrative responds to the sense of humiliation of the exilic Jew, of the sort Azaryahu describes after her night in St. Petersburg. Indeed, after the 1905 pogroms,⁸⁹ the emotions of “shame and disgrace of our humiliation and our helplessness to react to the tortures” are depicted as crucial factors enhancing her efforts to obtain a passport and immigrate to Palestine (17). However, in the midst of her attempts to overcome the bureaucratic obstacles, we receive, in passing, a piece of information that hints at another narrative: “And when I realized that getting a passport was a very exhaustive business and it perhaps would take another few months, I

Azaryahu, at least, was familiar with it (105–106). In general, St. Petersburg was a site where many Jews lived under false identities (ibid 104), but a Jewish woman walking alone at night is an image that may make the lie seem true, thus loading her body with meanings beyond her control.

⁸⁹ Following the 1905 revolution, in which the Tzar was forced to endow the People with some civil rights, reactionary forces connected with the church and the military have taken violent revenge on the Jews. Throughout 1905-1906 many Jewish towns were hit by militia groups called the Black Hundreds and hundreds of Jews were killed.

left my large house, and to save money I moved with *my three year old son* to a very modest house in a suburb some ways from the town” (16; my emphasis). This is the first time we learn that Azaryahu had a child.⁹⁰ In fact, her marriage, too, is mentioned only in passing a few pages earlier: “At the end of the summer in 1901, I tied my fate to that of my life companion – Y. Ozerkovsky (Azaryahu), and we decided to travel to Western Europe to study at one of the universities there” (12). Between the marriage and the first mention of her son’s existence, we find extended accounts of the political climate among the Jewish students in Switzerland, the turbulent experience of the Fifth Zionist Congress, the couple’s return to Russia and their work in a Jewish school in Golatha, and the circumstances leading to their immigration to Palestine. Nothing about Azaryahu’s birthing, her new experiences of motherhood, her love-relations or her married life “enters the records.”

As Alan Mintz remarks, Zionist autobiographies in general tend to focus on the collective rather than the personal story (204). A review of several such texts, however, only further underscores the extremity of Azaryahu’s suppression of the private sphere. In the autobiographies of such Zionist public figures as Golda Meir, Shmaryahu Levin, Chaim Weizmann and Arthur Ruppin, the story of their family life is marginal, but it does appear, sometimes in a special chapter dedicated to the domestic sphere and sometimes woven into relevant moments in the text. Figures of wives and husbands are always portrayed in a way that gives the reader at least a sense of their personality and

⁹⁰ Tamar Hess in her groundbreaking work on the autobiographical writings of women of the second immigration wave also observes Azaryahu’s suppression of motherhood and of the private sphere in general (216–224). Hess cites Azaryahu’s case as typical of a wider phenomenon to be found in these writings, deriving from women’s commitment to the collective story of Zionism. As explained in the introduction to this chapter, my aim here is to go beyond Hess’s brief analysis of Azaryahu’s autobiography to tie the suppression of femininity in this text to the intersection of the Zionist feminist project of suffrage, the demands of the autobiographical genre, and attitudes toward “the Other Woman.”

significance for the author. Often their portrayal is accompanied by the author's expression of his or her deep appreciation of the sacrifices the spouse had to make because of the author's public life (Meir 37, 48-49, 50, 72-75, 82-83; Levin 197-198, 211-213; Weizman 76-79, 117-119; Ruppin 200-215).

In Azaryahu's text, by contrast, even her spouse's first name is never pronounced. He is almost always referred to as Azaryahu or Y. Azaryahu, sometimes in an impersonal way, as if there were no personal relationship between them ("One morning, the school was surrounded and all its teachers were arrested, as was the headmaster, Y. Azaryahu" – 37). Although Yosef and Sara Azaryahu in fact worked side by side as teachers throughout most of their lives, scarcely any information about him as a person is given, and that only when it can be directly subordinated to Azaryahu's own story. Furthermore, unlike in the texts mentioned above, the couple's relationship is never discussed. We never know, for example, how Y. Azaryahu reacted to Sara's public activism (an issue that Golda Meir, for example, discusses at length regarding her husband). Perhaps there was indeed nothing to tell; perhaps it was a case of a "boring" happy family, as in the Tolstoyian cliché (although some hints regarding their financial difficulties suggest otherwise), but the fact remains that the almost total absence of Azaryahu's husband and children as significant figures in her life is conspicuous even in comparison to other texts written in the same Zionist culture, which privileges the collective.

I contend that the suppression of private life and self in Azaryahu's case cannot be detached from the politics of Zionist feminism, in which she was so invested. To my mind, her play of hide and seek with feminine particularity mirrors Zionist women's anticipation that the Zionist story would somehow conceal a feminine story of

vulnerability, like that of the feminine body alone at night. There was a hope that, for women, Zionism would be a space of “real light,” where women’s vulnerable identity would be exchanged for a new, liberated identity, whose feminine difference would become irrelevant within the equality-based modern nation. As we shall see in the next section, when the setting of the autobiography transfers to the Middle East, the oppositions between light and darkness, concealment and exposure, become loaded with further political significance. Indeed, when these oppositions are reenacted in Palestine, they become part of the autobiography’s subtle play of differentiations *vis-à-vis* its Others, a play which, I propose, underlies the constitution of the Zionist feminist self.

Oriental Architectures and False Lights

Years after the episode in St. Petersburg, at the height of the NILI espionage affair that unsettled the Yishuv toward the end of World War I, Azaryahu once again finds herself alone at night in what she perceives to be a hostile urban setting.⁹¹ This time she is in Nazareth, where she arrives to assist her husband and some of their colleagues after their imprisonment by the Ottoman authorities on suspicion of involvement with the NILI underground. As in the St. Petersburg instance, the narration of the Nazareth episode ambivalently invokes the feminine body only insofar as it needs to be suppressed once again. As she prepares to go to Nazareth, for example, Azaryahu’s motherhood is once more remarked upon in passing:

⁹¹ NILI was an underground organization established in 1915 intended to assist the British in taking control over Palestine. The organization included approximately 30 members, and engaged in transmitting information to the British concerning the state of the Turkish forces in Palestine. NILI was exposed in 1917. Many of its members were arrested, and some were executed or committed suicide under investigation. In the wake of the affair, many other members of the Jewish settlement who were suspected of being involved were also arrested and investigated.

The moment the detainees were sent to this city of blood, I determinedly decided to travel to Nazareth, first of all to rescue my “people” from starvation ... However, following this decision another thought suddenly struck my mind: What about my baby, who was not yet weaned? With whom could I leave him, if I had no one in Haifa who could take care of him? A heavy confusion descended on me. The morning’s shocking event had made me forget the rest of the world, and had even briefly distracted me from my little son. (38)⁹²

The parallels between this episode and the earlier instance with the older son seem clear. Here, too, the baby’s birth was never mentioned as an event worthy of autobiographical documentation. His existence is first evoked through Azaryahu’s forgetfulness of his presence. Notably, it is not only the baby himself that is forgotten but also his corporeal need of the mother’s nursing body. The private bodily feeding of the baby is forsaken in favor of the collective “rescue [of] my ‘people’ from starvation.”⁹³ Another moment of forgetfulness, however, turns this transgression into a risky endeavor, as in the evening, after a long day of traveling and prison visits, Azaryahu recounts: “This was the first moment I had free time to ask myself: Where will I find shelter for myself tonight?” (39) Like the mother-baby dyad forgotten earlier, so is the feminine body “forgotten” in the streets of Nazareth, “with no other way out, but to spend the night in the streets where drunken soldiers roam” (ibid.). Despite the distance of time and space and the great difference between the Russian capital and the Arab town, the nighttime scene in Nazareth seems to echo the St. Petersburg episode. In this instance, too, the New Woman pushes the limits of gender roles but is eventually thrown back to a feminine position of

⁹² ברגע שהאסירים נשלחו לעיר הדמים גמלה בליבי החלטה נחושה מתוך שאיפה להציל, קודם כל, את “אנשי” מסבלות הרעב. ידוע היה, שהשלטונות אינם נוהגים לדאוג לכלכלת העצורים בבתי הכלא. מנת חלקם היומית היתה לרוב “פיתה” (מצת לחם עבה) ומים. היה איפוא הכרח חיוני להגיש לאסירים שלי מזון מבריא, כדי לשמור על כוחותיהם הפיסיים ועל שיווי המשקל הפנימי. אולם בעקבות החלטה זו פלחה פתאום את מוחי מחשבה אחרת: ומה יהיה על תינוקי הפעוט שטרם נגמל? על מי אעזוב אותו, אם אין עמי בחיפה שום אדם קרוב ומתאים שיטפל בו? מבוכה כבדה ירדה עלי. המאורע המדהים של הבוקר השכיח מלבי עולם ומלואו ואף הסיח את דעתי לשעה קלה מבני הקטן (130-131).

⁹³ The English translation here is, in fact, more suggestive than the original Hebrew, which has *anashai*, the plural of “person” (Azaryahu, *Pirkey hayim* 130), where the English has “people,” with its nationalist overtone. Nevertheless, I believe my emphasis on the exchange of the private body with the rescuing of the collective still stands.

vulnerability. Here, too, her feminine vulnerability is intertwined with her alienation as a Jew in a non-Jewish space.

In St. Petersburg, walking outside had provoked “the blackest of black thoughts” (11). In Nazareth, entering the unknown domestic space of the Arab family where Azaryahu eventually does find shelter for the night is no less terrifying in its description:

He [an Arab elderly man] immediately expressed his agreement, pointed to an entry of the dark room – according to him, his entire family slept there – and invited me to enter. I followed him, although following a Nazareth Arab in a completely strange place and in total darkness, was not the easiest of things. After a few steps, the Arab suddenly stopped and a moment later went back towards the entrance, continuing across his wide courtyard bathed in the light of the full moon and I of course behind him, although my knees were shaking, for my imagination worked very quickly and brought terrifying pictures into my mind’s eye. And suddenly, just like a fairy tale, a tiny, pretty house appeared in the depths of the courtyard. The Arab opened the door with a key from his pocket. We both went inside and he turned up the light of a lamp that stood on a table covered with a cloth. I saw a pleasant room furnished in European style. Concern and amazement [*deaga u-tmiha – Pirkey hayim 137*] were mingled in my heart. (38)⁹⁴

We may note how the architecture of the Arab home forces upon Azaryahu sudden transitions between light and darkness, inside and outside, Eastern and Western spaces. Her frightening journey begins with an entry into a “strangely” structured private space – “the dark room ... [where] his entire family slept ... a completely strange place and in total darkness.” In the Oriental space, moreover, darkness is never just that; it is always also a metaphor for the mystery, strangeness and backwardness associated with the

⁹⁴ הוא הביע מיד את הסכמתו לכך, הצביע על פתח פתוח אל חדר חשוך – שם ישנו לדבריו כל בני משפחתו – והזמיניני להיכנס פנימה. הלכתי אחריו, אולם הליכה זו בעקבות ערבי מנצרת בחלל שטח זר לגמרי ובתוך חשיכה גמורה לא היתה מן הדברים הפשוטים והקלים. כשצעדנו מספר פסיעות, עמד הערבי לפתע מלכת ולאחר הפסקה קצרה מאד חזר בכיוון הפתח והמשיך לצעוד על פני חצרו הנרחבת שטופת או הירח המלא ואני כמובן אחריו, אמנם בפיק ברכיים, כי דמיוני עבד במהירות רבה והעביר לפני עיני רוחי תמונות מחרידות. ופתאום כמו באגדת קסמים, נזדקר בעומק החצר בניין קטן ונאה. הערבי פתח את הדלת במפתח שהוציא מכיסו. נכנסנו שנינו פנימה והוא העלה אור במנורה שעמדה על שולחן מכוסה מפה, לעיני נגלה חדר נעים מרהט בסגנון אירופי. דאגה ותמיהה שימשו בערבוביה בלבי... (136-137)

“Orient.”⁹⁵ Thus, the room Azaryahu enters, which is indeed “objectively” dark and strange, may also be read as metaphorically dark for the Western woman entering it. The darkness allows the family to sleep, but it is also created by the strangeness of an “entire family” sleeping together, that is, by the disruption of the Western perception of the private space marked by this non-modern sleeping arrangement, which is in fact a disruption of the old familiar boundaries between private and public that are necessary for light to be separated from darkness.

This may be compared with Azaryahu’s earlier depiction of the construction of the new city of Tel Aviv as a departure from the old city of Jaffa, “this dirty city, with its dark, overcrowded quarters, for the wide open spaces, to build a small house for each family, surrounded by trees and flowers, with plenty of light and air” (26). She complained in frustration when the difference between the two cities was not sufficiently accentuated for her taste:

Presumably, many of the “settlers” came from large cities in the West, and it might have been expected that they would use the beauty and efficiency of European architecture of the day; for example, to choose the corridor style with direct entry into each room. However, for lack of money or other reasons, most adopted the Oriental style found in most of the “first edition” houses in Tel Aviv: Entry to the house was directly from the porch, which was as always open to sun and rain. (Ibid)⁹⁶

The difference between Eastern and Western architectures, and its implications for the relations between public and private, already carry some considerable emotional baggage for Azaryahu as she drifts between the different spaces of the Nazareth home.

⁹⁵ See also Anne McClintock’s critique of the image of the “dark continent” and of the rhetoric of darkness and mystery, used in speaking both of femininity and of the colonized space of the native, in *Imperial Leather* 193–194.

⁹⁶ לכאורה, רבים מקבוצת “המשתכנים” מערים גדולות שבמערב באו ואפשר היה לשער שישתמשו בנאה ומועיל שבסגנון הבניה האירופאי של הזמן ההוא. למשל: ימצאו לנכון לבחור בשיטת הפרוזדורים עם גישה בלתי אמצעית אל כל חדר וחדר לחוד. אולם מפאת חוסר אמצעים או מטעמים אחרים נתפסו רובם לסגנון “מזרחי”, וברוח זו נבנו רוב הבתים של “המהדורה הראשונה” של תלאביב: את הכניסה אל הבתים קבעו ישר מהמרפסת, שהיתה כרגיל פתוחה לשמש ולגשם.

Notably, when the Arab host suddenly leads Azaryahu “[to] his wide courtyard bathed in the light of the full moon,” the fear is only heightened, and the young woman’s imagination brings “terrifying pictures” into her mind. Like in the “white night” of St. Petersburg, here, too, light marks no safety, as it is a light-within-darkness, “a false light” so to speak (like the “northern light”) – not the light of day or enlightenment, but a light that only exposes the feminine-Jewish body further to the dangers of night or of the Orient. The oscillation between light and darkness, inside and outside, reality and fantasy, expresses the unstable relationship forged in this scene between the Western New Woman and the Oriental space. The adventure’s resolution, when “suddenly, just like a fairy tale, a tiny, pretty house appeared in the depths of the courtyard,” culminates the sense of disorientation: “Concern and amazement were mingled in my heart.” The “sudden” light “in the depths” of the Oriental space, the sudden appearance of a seemingly secure European private space,⁹⁷ where the Western woman may sleep separately from the Arab communal sleeping space, causes a crisis of interpretation, for it is unclear what “light,” or a European-style room, might mean in the midst of the “strange dark space.” A secure place within the darkness seems implausible: This again may be “a false light.” The solution for the mystery of the European room is soon to emerge, as Azaryahu’s host explains that he rents the room to people from the nearby commune of Merḥavya when they come to Nazareth to run errands. The fairytale thus has a concrete practical explanation that demystifies the melodrama of transgression of boundaries produced by the text’s sharp darkness-light and east-west oppositions.

⁹⁷ This spatial arrangement also calls to mind the Zionist dream of forging a secure European enclave in the midst of the threatening East.

Later in the text, Azaryahu remarks about Arab women: “It goes without saying that there was nothing to learn from nearby nations. In our neighbors’ dwellings in the country itself, as well as in neighboring states, the regime was one of slavery for women” (50). Of Mizrahi women, she says: “It was no wonder that they did not understand us [the suffragists] About forty years ago, I saw Jewish women of the Oriental communities go out veiled in the Haifa streets as did their Arab women neighbors” (45). It seems that the self-perceived rift between herself, a Zionist feminist, and the women of the East could not be sharper and clearer. However, in the context of the Nazareth episode, let us recall Reina Lewis’s observation that:

The representation of the Orientalized other is never one of a secure and absolute difference, although it may evidence a will to be just that. It is precisely this desire to assuage the splits and instabilities of the imperial subject that is revealed by women’s problematic and partial (but not necessarily oppositional) access to colonial representation. (43)

After her nightmarish first night in Nazareth, Azaryahu is forced to stay for awhile in the Arab town in order to arrange her husband’s release. She moves out of the European room (which is needed for other purposes) and rents “a small wretched room in the house of an Arab woman” (40). In a sense, she is forced to integrate into the Arab surrounding, which ends up being not as threatening and alienating as she had expected, as she becomes friends with the family whose house initially frightened her so much.⁹⁸ Notably, the final moment of the Nazareth story is an attempt to reconstitute the boundaries blurred by the Western woman’s temporary residence in the Arab surrounding. When Azaryahu’s husband is released from prison, she recounts, “the Arab women-neighbors

⁹⁸ While the Jewish families of Nazareth refuse to have any contact with her, because of her association with the prisoners, her new Arab acquaintances assist her in taking care of the prisoners. “And the Arab – my host, a wise and courtly man, became my chief ‘supplier’ and took it upon himself to cook food for the prisoners. And his nice son became my right hand and was my patron and guide in the alleys of the market where I went to buy food for my trio” (40).

came to give me the news that ‘my ‘*hodja*,’ my husband-master, had been released” (41). The very scene of the Arab women-neighbors breaking the news of Y. Azaryahu’s release may be indicative of a certain intimacy between them and Azaryahu, which the text, to a large extent, mutes. The ironic tone of Azaryahu’s invocation of the Arabic word *hodja*, with its Hebrew translation, reconstructs the Hebrew woman as an active agent saving her men, thus distancing her from her Arab women-neighbors, who speak the language of subordination to their husbands-masters. The poignancy of Azaryahu’s irony, however, is mitigated by the similar connotations of the Hebrew word *ba’al*, owner, which Azaryahu curiously makes sure to invoke (*ha-ba’al adon sheli; Pirkey ḥayim* 142). This seemingly unintentional ambiguity concludes the Nazareth episode by underscoring the fragility of the difference between the New Hebrew Woman and her Orientalized others. It is precisely at the moment when differences are blurred that the Western woman’s position within the Eastern space once again becomes vulnerable. Indeed, it is precisely then that she is once again in need of a secure room or text in which to hide.

How to Ask: Suffrage and the Limits of Conversation

In the fall of 1897, we find Azaryahu in the city of Odessa on her way to making her first visit to Palestine. While only in 1905 Azaryahu will immigrate to Palestine with her family, the 1897 is an emergency trip to bring back her sister, who fell ill with malaria, back to Russia. We will come back to the ill sister at the end of this chapter, but for now we shall dwell on her stop in Odessa. This is just a few months (and a few pages in the text) after the First Zionist Congress, which had greatly moved the young Azaryahu. As

she put it, “at a time when women's struggle for suffrage was at its height worldwide, Dr. Herzl called for full equality for the Jewish woman in the World Zionist Federation” (4). In Odessa, Azaryahu is excited by the opportunity to meet and converse with Moshe Leib Lilienblum, another long-admired Zionist leader.⁹⁹ When she finally sees Lilienblum, however, she finds that he works for *hevrah kadisha*, the orthodox organization in charge of handling Jewish funerals, which causes her to renounce her intention to speak with him:

One morning, I went to see him during an hour free from running around government offices. Lilienblum divided his work into two parts: in the morning, he worked in the community organization at the *hevrah kadisha* offices, and during the remaining time until midnight, he worked at the offices of the Odessa Committee on behalf of “Hovevey Zion.” When I entered his office at the community headquarters and asked for Mr. Lilienblum, one of the clerks pointed to a man in the far corner of the room. He was a middle aged man with a long red beard, wearing a hat and a quite long black coat. This is Lilienblum? I asked myself. Surrounded by typical *hevrah kadisha* workers, he did not fit the picture of the revolutionary, courageous fighter I had imagined based on his important publicist activity. *What would I talk to him about in these surroundings?* I thought to myself, *and almost without noticing it*, I slowly left the office. (5; my emphasis)¹⁰⁰

As in the night in St. Petersburg, Azaryahu's body moves “without noticing it” (*mibli lehargish ba-davar*; *Pirkey hayim* 20), as if, once again, some kind of unspoken law dictates its movements, this time determining that the conversation with Lilienblum is futile “in these surroundings.” The odd contrast between his Zionist activism and his paid job with *hevrah kadisha* is addressed by Lilienblum himself in a letter to Ussishkin from 1890, where he writes:

⁹⁹ Moshe Leib Lilienblum (1843-1910) was a prominent writer and thinker of the Jewish Haskala, who, after 1881 pogroms, turned to Zionism and became one of the leaders of “Hovevey Tziyon.”

¹⁰⁰ כשמצאתי לי באחד הבקרים שעה פנויה מהתרוצצות במשרדי הממשלה, הלכתי לראותו. לילינבלום היה כידוע מחלק את עבודת יומו לשניים: בשעות שלפני הצהריים היה עובד בוועד הקהילה, במשרדי “חברה קדישא”, ואת כל זמנו הנותר עד לאחר חצות הלילה היה מקדיש לעבודתו במשרדי הוועד האודיסאי לחובבי ציון” ומחוצה להם למען תחיית העם והארץ. כשעברתי את סף משרדו בוועד הקהילה, ושאלת על מר לילינבלום הצביע אחד הפקידים על אדם שעמד אותה שעה בפניה המרוחקת של החדר. זה היה איש בשנות עמידה, בעל זקן אדום ארוך, חבוש כובע לראשו ולבוש בגד שחור ודי ארוך. הוזהו לילינבלום? שאלתי את עצמי. דמותו של האיש המוקף אנשי חברה קדישא טיפוסיים, לא עלתה בקנה אחד עם דמות המהפכן והלוחם האמיץ שנצטיירה בדמיוני על סמך פעלו הפובליציסטי החשוב. על מה אשוחח עמו בסביבה זו? חשבתי בלבי, ומבלי להרגיש כמעט בדבר עזבתי לאיטי את המשרד. (20)

Even if you give me 2,000 rubles a year, I will not leave my post in the *hevrah kadisha*. ... I doubt that the movement [Hovevey Tziyon] will last through the year, and with all my nerves and anger, I cannot risk my fate and my family's fate, as I am already close to old age, and I'm tired of the struggles of life. (186)

The letter appears in Lilienblum's collected autobiographical writings under the title "Ein batuah meha-mavet" (Nothing Safer than Death). With Lilienblum's strange double engagement with Zionism and with *hevrah kadisha*, the opposition between life and death seems to be destabilized in the same way that the opposition between light and darkness is troubled through Azaryahu's experiences in St. Petersburg and Nazareth. The new life that the "Hovevey Tziyon" promises appears as "false light," while the orthodox burial company sustains the life of Lilienblum and his family. The encounter between Azaryahu and Lilienblum's split figure fleshes out the disparity between the investments of East European Jewish men and women in Zionism as a project of modernization and secularization. Indeed, much has been said about how traditional Judaism was construed as feminine in the Zionist imagination. However, within the concrete male exclusive surrounding of *hevra kadisha*, what we reveal is how male privilege allows the Zionist man to sustain double affiliation, both with Zionism and with Orthodox Judaism, in ways which the young Zionist woman cannot afford. For her it has to be, either light or darkness, either life or death.

It seems significant that, apart from being a central figure in the Hovevey Tziyon movement, Lilienblum, as Alan Mintz notes, was also "the author of the most important autobiography of the Haskalah period" (5). His *Hatot ne'urim* (Sins of Youth), published in 1876, was widely read among the young Jewish intelligentsia of Eastern Europe and thus most likely known to Azaryahu. The temporal proximity between her enthusiasm regarding Herzl's support of women's equality and the silence of the feminine

autobiographer in the face of the famous masculine autobiographer juxtaposes again the two “rights” this text reclaims: the right to write autobiographically and the right to participate in the public sphere as an equal legal subject. What Herzl promised seems to be put at risk by Lilienblum’s “*Hevra Kadisha*” appearance, in that Zionism, supposedly a setting for new secular life, is ominously tied to the offices of an orthodox burial association.

A double rift thus seems to block the feminine speech: An unknown woman, later to become an autobiographer, is silent in the presence of a Zionist leader, already a famous autobiographer; and a New Woman, later to become a suffragist, is muted by the pious appearance of an old Jewish man. Yet the encounter between young Azaryahu and Lilienblum is charged by even more complicated tensions than those emanating from the clear-cut gender hierarchy between them. To unpack this complexity, I would like briefly to attend to how gender relations constitute speech and muteness in Lilienblum’s own autobiography.

Given that *Ḥatot ne‘urim* is a story of apostasy, of the sort deemed by Mintz as typical of Jewish autobiographical writing of the period, it is curious that Azaryahu is driven away by Lilienblum’s Orthodox appearance (3-24). The issue of conversing with women as represented in the autobiography is, in fact, quite central to Lilienblum’s transition from the traditional Jewish world into the modern secular society. At several points, the young Jewish intellectual’s inhibitions in speaking with women serve as an explanatory framework for the aloofness of the uprooted Jewish man. On the one hand, now that he has been “thrown” into the practical world, his muteness *vis-à-vis* “maidens” appears repeatedly as a sign of his incompetence: “A man unfit to the matters of the

world who does not know how to speak with a maiden” (408). On the other hand, it marks his intellectual superiority: “I am not such an interlocutor that I can speak with a maiden for even half an hour, given that our thoughts do not even touch each other, as she is occupied with . . . idle chatting, while my heart is occupied with intellectual matters concerning the People” (302). Toward the end of the autobiography, in a letter to his wife that constitutes, for him, the first real conversation with her after twelve years of marriage, Lilienblum frames the problematics of Jewish marriage through the impossibility of conversation: “A man works all day and when he comes home at night he needs a friend to talk to”; he needs a wife who has “a mouth . . . not in order to swear, but so that she can talk nicely at parties . . . and talk intelligently to her husband when they are alone” (371-372). His own uneducated wife, whom he was forced to marry at the age of 15, would never be able to become a worthy conversation partner, in his view. As Lilienblum’s autobiography is not the focus of this chapter, I will not go into a detailed analysis of the predicament of the *maskil*, trapped between the “primitiveness” of the Jewish arranged marriage and the “matters” of the modern world.¹⁰¹ Suffice it to say that, for Lilienblum, the possibility or impossibility of conversation with women seems to be a crucial marker of precisely this crisis of masculine subjectivity, and that the *maskilic* autobiographical voice is thus shaped through the gendered distinctions between those he can or cannot speak to. By 1897, however, Lilienblum is supposed to be over the crisis, as he has already adopted Zionism as a remedy for the failures of the Haskalah.¹⁰² Azaryahu’s avoidance of conversing with him thus curiously pushes him back into the masculine incompetence that haunts the 1870s text of *Ḥatot ne’urim*, or, even “worse,”

¹⁰¹ For further discussion of Lilienblum’s autobiography, see: Mintz. 30–54; and Moseley 368–376.

¹⁰² This process is recounted in *Derekh tshuvah* (Path of Repentance), the third part of Lilienblum’s autobiography, published separately a few years after *Ḥatot ne’urim*.

posits the masculine autobiographer himself in the same place women occupy in his text, as an impossible interlocutor. In this sense, it is the New Hebrew Woman on her way to Palestine who feminizes and silences the seemingly old pious Jew: “What would I talk to him about?”¹⁰³

The aborted encounter between Azaryahu and Lilienblum encapsulates the gendered paradox marking the relations between Zionism and Orthodox Judaism. Insofar as Zionism is a modern movement, it presumes to liberate women from their disenfranchised position in traditional Jewish society. However, as a gendered endeavor, Zionism reinforces the hierarchy between “femininity” and “masculinity,” correlating it with the dichotomies between the Diaspora and the Land, the Old and the New, emphatically foregrounding the New Hebrew virile male as its locus of desire, designating femininity as a diasporic feature to be overcome. From her position as an aspiring New Woman, however, Azaryahu does not see this rift within Zionism. Judith Baskin, in her analysis of the autobiography of Pauline Epstein Wengeroff (1833–1916), a Jewish woman of an earlier generation, highlights Wengeroff’s frustration with the modernization of Russian society, which, while opening the way to women’s education and personal fulfillment, entailed the dissolution of the Jewish family as a site of women’s empowerment:

When I look at the young Jewish women of Russia today, crowding the university lecture halls and clinics . . . there arises in my mind the memory of that matron of Konotop. The sphere granted to her was so small. And yet within its limits, what a wide domain she was able to create for her generosity. (83-84)

¹⁰³ On the contradictory tensions that charge the literature of the *Haskalah vis-à-vis* the Oriental, the feminine and the Jewish, see also Benbaji 95–130. Benbaji associates Lilienblum with the radical *maskilim*, for whom “‘modernity’ cannot be ‘Jewish’ in any profound way” (100). From the young Azaryahu’s perspective, however, Lilienblum’s orthodox appearance seems to have embodied the unresolved conflict between “the secular” and “the sacred,” which Benbaji interrogates, through the representations of the Orient, in the works of Euchel, Löwisohn and Mapu. From her position as a woman invested both in Jewish modernization and in women’s rights, Azaryahu is unable to accommodate this unresolved tension.

A generation later, Azaryahu sees potential neither in Orthodox Judaism nor in the private sphere for the assertion of feminine agency. Instead, she is invested in emancipation as the solution to the plights of both Jews and women; or, better, she is set on tying together the two emancipatory narratives, that of women and that of the Jews, into one. In this sense, at the level of the storytelling, it is not coincidental that Lilienblum appears as an agent of the Jewish burial association. For Azaryahu the old Orthodox Jewish man is indeed the diametrical antagonist of the life story she is trying to tell, its Angel of Death, so to speak.

The turning point in the autobiography is the moment in 1919 when Zionist women's suffrage rights are threatened during the establishment of the first official organizations of the Yishuv, following the Balfour Declaration. From this point on, where Hebrew women's dream of conflating women's liberation story with the Zionist story is contested, the Zionist gender-neutral collective self constructed by the autobiographical text is exchanged for "the women of the Yishuv" – "the Hebrew Woman" – who becomes the collective protagonist of the latter chapters. Indeed, the feminist effort, as Azaryahu describes it in the context of the suffrage campaign, is an effort to rise above the private self. Thus, for example, campaigning within the Haifa religious community entailed attempting "to briefly take the women we came into contact with, away from the narrow confines of their private lives and give them a chance to look – though not without some coaxing – into a world of wider interests and aspirations" (46).

Notably, the efforts of Azaryahu and her Haifa group to convince women to open themselves to concerns beyond those of the private home are directed only at the

Ashkenazi women. The Mizrahi women, she declares, “did not yet know how to ask (*she-lo yad’u ‘adayin lishol; Pirkey hayim 157*) and . . . submissively gave up the most basic human rights” (*Life Chapters 45*). The phrase “did not know how to ask,” taken, of course, from the Passover Haggadah, has an ironic significance: In the Haggadah, the father is commanded to start a conversation (*at ptaḥ lo*) with the son who “does not know how to ask.” Azaryahu, however, recounts: “Obviously, *there was no point in talking about eliminating women’s right to vote to this group of women . . . We turned to other parts of town. We went to the Ashkenazi neighborhoods where we found more receptive ears*” (46; my emphasis).

Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin proposes that in the context of Zionism, “the ‘negation of exile’ can be interpreted as the negation of all that was considered ‘Oriental’ in the Jews, and at the same time demonstrates the desire to integrate the Jews and their history into the narrative of the West” (167). By the “Oriental in the Jews” Raz-Krakotzkin refers to everything that had to do with exilic Jewishness as religious, passive, stagnant. With Azaryahu, the impossibility of conversation with the diasporic Jew, on her way to the land, is reiterated by the impossibility of talking to the Oriental women of Haifa. These women, “who do not know how to ask,” are not invited to join the collective self, as they are not deemed capable of transcending the boundaries of the private and inhabiting the universal subject entailed by the struggle for equal rights. Just as the religious Jew cannot, for Azaryahu, be the Zionist leader, the famous autobiographer to whom she longed to speak, so the Mizrahi women of Haifa cannot be the addressees of the universalizing discourse necessary for suffrage and autobiography; they both mark the negation of speech, the impossibility of “entering the records.”

Porous Speech

In the context of our discussion, everything that is “Oriental in the Jews” is tantamount to everything that is considered “feminine in the Jews,” as both categories are associated with the same markers of exilic otherness – religiosity, passivity, distorted sexuality – and both are opposed in Zionist imagination to the New Hebrew masculinity. That religious Jewishness was deemed feminine has been noted in a number of gendered readings of Zionism. With Azaryahu, the feminization of the old Jew and the Orientalization of Mizrahi women, we have observed, are tied together through the limits of conversation. The repeated gestures of concealment and silencing that constitute her as the subject of the text, however, eventually leave Azaryahu’s own speech, the speech of the New Hebrew Woman, checkered by patches of silence:

I remember well that in those days, when I appeared on the platform of the first sitting of the National Assembly with an energetic demand for women's right to vote, I would try to keep to the limits of that particular problem without touching on other *painful questions of women's life*: for among the progressive sector and the workers, there was a tendency to go straight to the solution of the problem of elections and avoid, as far as possible, all other problems connected with it, apparently, a result of a wish not to add fuel to the flames. (56; my emphasis)

In her capacity as the “female representative,” Azaryahu herself becomes a woman who *does not know how to ask* “other painful questions of women's life,” as she obeys the strict divisions between public and private that structure the Zionist space. Notably, when the private sphere returns to play a crucial role in the story of Hebrew feminism, it is associated in Azaryahu’s text with Mizrahi gender and family relations; thus, for example, the problems of bigamy and early marriage are marked mostly as Mizrahi problems and depicted as central issues that the Zionist feminist movement must address

after achieving women's voting rights (60-61).¹⁰⁴ Thus, the division between public and private, apart from having gendered implications, is also assigned disparate ethnicities. While the struggle for suffrage demands a collective self that may only include Ashkenazi women, the eruption of the flammable questions of the private sphere inevitably reincorporates the women who "do not know how to ask" into the Zionist-feminist discourse, albeit only as its problematic objects, its unpronounced questions.

The autobiography ends in the late 1920s with the final resolution of the National Assembly regarding women's equality in all areas of public life. Notably, it does not continue to narrate the last decades of Azaryahu's life, which she devoted to working in HWERA's legal aid clinics, assisting women in the process of Jewish divorce.¹⁰⁵ The autobiography thus comes to a halt when the central locus of Azaryahu's life becomes the same unpronounced questions that the linear liberatory story cannot resolve. Writing in the 1950s, she knows that the State of Israel will in a way replicate the 1919 "betrayal," prioritizing cooperation with the Orthodox political parties over women's rights, with the famous "status quo" ensuring that the laws of marriage and divorce in Israel will remain under the sole authority of the Rabbinical Court. Indeed, up until now the Israeli law in all matters of marriage and divorce is subjugated to religious law. This means that various patriarchal laws are imposed on Israeli woman by the modern Israeli state.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ See also Azaryahu's essay *Nashim be-asefat ha-nivharim* (Women in the National Assembly), in which she describes the shift that occurred after the women's suffrage issue was settled: "With the entry of women representatives into the National Assembly, an era filled with action and interest for the women's liberation movement in the land has been concluded. . . . A chapter of harsh battles and grave attacks has ended, and another era has begun . . . an era of in-depth internal deliberation, of figuring out the state of women in the entire social field, and of shifting the center of gravity in our efforts to the issues concerning women's position within the family" (YTA 15/1/2).

¹⁰⁵ Documents and correspondence regarding Azaryahu's work at the legal aid clinics may be found in the Sara Azaryahu Collection, YTA 15/2, 15/3.

¹⁰⁶ For example, for a Jewish woman to divorce she has to receive a *gett* from her husband (according to the Jewish Halakha, the husband gives the *gett* and the wife receives it); if the husband refuses to give the *gett*,

Azaryahu's feminist work from the 1930s thus intervenes in a much more complicated and fraught struggle than the suffrage struggle of the 1920s, a struggle with no clear endpoint, whose ramifications affect the private lives of numerous Israeli women in diverse ways. Through the same logic by which the text suppresses feminine and Jewish difference and insists on the dichotomy between East and West, we may understand why it ends at the moment when liberal feminist speech encounters questions it does not know how to ask.

If "the return to Western history" is, as Raz-Krakovitzkin argues, a core project of Zionism (167), Reading Azaryahu's autobiography, we may recognize how, for women, this entails a complicated process of negotiation of the gendered terms of that return, and, to a large extent, the suppression of feminine difference. Moreover, when these processes take place within the Zionist journey from West to East, the politics of gender relations intersect with the politics of national and ethnic power-relations. Darkness and light, speech and silence, public and private, universal and personal, all the gendered oppositions this text enacts and, at times, destabilizes, cannot be grasped outside the context of Zionist politics of self and other.

What makes Azaryahu's autobiography such a fruitful text for critical feminist inquiry is that, while it does not easily meet the reader's desire for history's "behind the scenes," we may read through it the erasures that stand "behind the scenes" of the constitution of the Zionist feminist self: erasures of the private, the personal, the bodily, but also of other bodies, voices and stories deemed unsuitable to "enter the records." Thus, even as the New Hebrew Woman is constructed in contrast to Mizrahi women who

or is unavailable to give it (in case of a husband who is missing or is mentally incompetent), the wife will remain *'aguna* and would not be able to marry again. Because the *halakhic* laws regarding men's remarriage are much less strict, in an opposite case the husband would be able to get permission to remarry.

“do not know how to ask,” or to Arab women and their *hodjas*, we may note how the textual efforts to conceal the body, the private, the “I was that female representative,” her own questions, create certain intimacies between her story and the stories of her Others.

Returning to Rosa Welt Straus’s letter with which we opened this discussion, one may easily find in the depiction of the “poor Arab sisters” who are looking to “the Jewish women for inspiration” (163) the type of colonial ambivalence read by Homi Bhabha in instances of colonial mimicry. According to Bhabha, the colonial condition entails the desire of the colonized to become like the colonizer, but also enforces the impossibility of ever fully satisfying such desire, as a difference between the colonizer and the colonized has to be maintained for the hierarchical system to keep functioning. As part of her attempt to incorporate Zionist feminism into international liberal feminism, Welt Straus needs simultaneously to construct Zionist feminism against its “poor sisters” and, at the same time, to mark the Arab women of Palestine as unfortunate mimics of Zionist women, always on their way toward being *like* Jewish women, but never really *quite* reaching there.

For Bhabha, the paradox of colonial mimicry is the setting for possible destabilization of the colonial power structure. The unsettling potential of Azaryahu’s autobiography, however, derives not from the play between difference and in-difference inherent to colonial mimicry, but rather from the juxtaposition between colonial difference(s) and feminine and Jewish differences. That is to say, while there is hardly any ambivalence in Azaryahu’s fixation of the difference between her and her Others, she herself, in fact, engages in gendered mimicry while trying to occupy both the autobiographical subject and the universal democratic subject; she herself is trespassing

into masculine grounds, never *quite* reaching. At the intersections her mimicry fleshes for us, I argue, we may retrace the voices, bodies and stories of Others that the surface of her narrative conceals.

Found What You Were Looking For? The New Hebrew Woman and her Sick Sister

How frustrating it is for the woman looking through the files in Azaryahu's "personal" archive. Indeed, it is almost as frustrating as reading her autobiography. No "behind the scenes" here as well, no "hidden life" come into the light. Instead, endless professional correspondence, page after page of protocols, of "records," dry to the point that when finally a letter is found in which Azaryahu apologizes for being ill and thus having to "neglect all our businesses" (*lehazniah et kol 'inyaneinu* YTA 15/2/7), the reader is thrilled to finally re-view her body, just as she was when encountering Azaryahu's "gray head" when it suddenly appears in the autobiography. And so at the end of the day, when the nice archivist asks his usual question, "found what you were looking for?" What can she tell him? What was she looking for? Illness?

I am reminded of the sick sister, whom Azaryahu brings back from Palestine to Russia in 1897. This trip turns out to be nightmarish in a way that reminds me of the two nocturnal experiences discussed earlier in this chapter, where Azaryahu is stranded alone at night in St. Petersburg and Nazareth. During the visit, obliged to care for her sick sister, Azaryahu is precluded from visiting the colonies of the Galilee or going to Jerusalem to meet with Eliezer Ben-Yehuda as she wishes, and has little opportunity to leave Jaffa, a city that she finds, "a shabby little Oriental settlement, typical in every way" (6). When the two sisters finally make their way back to Russia, they find

themselves stranded in Constantinople for two days, accompanied by a Turkish tour guide, “as required by Oriental customs”(9), who arouses Azaryahu’s suspicion, when upon passing by “a large house he suddenly said, with a curious expression on his face: ‘I could sell you here’” (9). But the most frightening point of the trip occurs when the “shady” escort deserts them at the port on a small boat, leaving them unable to locate the right ship going to Odessa:

The boat set out for the high seas. Many ships were visible on the horizon, far from the shore. The boatman began to hail ships both large and small, and I climbed their ladders, tickets in hand, with the question burning in my eyes: "Is this my ship?" I received the answer to my mute question with a negative shake of the head. The worst thing was that no one had yet been found to show me, even at a distance, where my ship was anchored. A dreadful idea entered my brain – "Perhaps it doesn't exist at all?" For a long time, we wandered from ship to ship, all flying flags unknown to me – and without positive results: I had not yet found the ship whose name was inscribed on my ticket. The sun began to set and twilight covered the face of the water. And again, as on the deck of the ship that brought us to Constantinople, my sister and I left alone and friendless, at the mercy of the Turkish boatman, who knew no other language save his own – and this time, in the middle of the sea. What could we do? How could I save the remaining days of my poor sister? To return to the city, without a penny in my pocket, and especially without the protection of a loyal man – this was unthinkable. Seized with bitter despair, I saw only one way out - to plunge into the depths. . . .(9)¹⁰⁷

As in St. Petersburg and in Nazareth, Azaryahu is lost in a foreign surrounding, feeling frightened and disoriented both as a Jew and as a woman. The language of “I saw only one way out - to plunge into the depths” is similar to that of the night in St. Petersburg, where “there was only one way: to walk around the city streets all night” (11), and in Nazareth, where she is left “with no other way out, but to spend the night in the streets

¹⁰⁷ הסירה הפליגה למרחבי ים. באופק, במרחק ניכר מהחוף, נראו במפוזר דמויות אניות רבות. ספן הסירה החל להיעצר על יד אניות גדולות וקטנות ואני הייתי עולה על גבי הסולמות כרטיס הנסיעה בידי ושאלה בוערת בעיני: "הזוהי ספינתי?" אולם תשובה על פנייתי האילמת ניתנה לי בנענוע-ראש שלילי. הדבר המחריד ביותר היה שטרם נמצא איש שיראה לי ולו מרחוק את מקום עגינת ספינתי. "אוולי היא איננה קיימת?" מחץ רעיון איום את מוחי. זמן רב תעינו מאניה לאניה, שדגלי עמים שונים וזרים לי התנופפו מעל תורניהן – וללא תוצאות חיוביות. ספינה זו ששמה היה רשום על כרטיסי טרם מצאתי. השמש החלה שוקעת וחשכת מדדומי ערב כסתה את פני הים. ושוב כמו על סיפון האניה שהביאה אותנו לקושטא נותרנו שתינו – אני ואחותי – בודדות וגלמודות, נתנות לחסדו של ספן תורכי, שאינו שומע שום שפה אחרת מלבד שפתו הוא – והפעם בלב ים. מה לעשות? כיצד להציל את שארית ימיה של אחותי האומללה? לחזור אל העיר, בלי פרוטה בכיס, והעיקר בלי הגנה מצד איש נאמן לא נתקבל על הדעת. בייאוש המר שתקף אותי ראיתי לפנינו רק מוצא אחד – קפיצה אל המצללות... (32-33)

where drunken soldiers roam” (38). Notably, the event in Constantinople is the first of these three events. I have postponed the discussion of this episode to the end of the chapter, however, because of the way it encapsulates all that has to be left behind in order for the feminist subject of the autobiography to be constituted. In all three cases, after the exclamation that “there is no other way,” another way is miraculously found, but the setup of the Zionist feminist subject as fighting against horrible darkness, in which Anti-Semitism, Orientalness and male violence are meshed together, substantiates the racist and Orientalist discourse that, as we have seen, marks the construction of this subject, for, “there is no other way.”

After the return of the sisters to Russia, at the beginning of the following chapter, the sister dies:

With the first breath of spring, her wick of life was extinguished. All that night before her passing I sat with her. We were alone in the room. My sister was serene and awake, and we spoke intermittently. We both sensed that this was the last night before our parting forever. All night long, she uttered not one word of rebellion or anger at her cruel fate. In her eyes, I saw that she was not afraid of the Angel of Death already waiting for her. With supreme courage, she approached the end of her young life. The following morning, she closed her eyes forever, her lips clearly pronouncing my name. In this way, I lost a very dear person, a symbol of truth, justice, and spiritual heroism. (10)¹⁰⁸

Notwithstanding her being “a symbol of truth, justice, and spiritual heroism,” the sister appears in the autobiography only in connection with her illness and death. The construction of this figure is reminiscent of the construction of the Dvora Ben-Yehuda, Hemda Ben-Yehuda’s older sister, in Hemda’s various biographical writings. Both women are sick and frail, unable to sustain life in the Middle-Eastern land. Both are not

¹⁰⁸ עם נשיבת רוח אביב ראשונה נפסק פתיל חייה. בכל אותו לילה שלפני פטירתה ישבתי על ידה. לבדנו היינו שתינו בחדר. אחותי הייתה שקטה וערה. בהפסקות שוחחנו. לשתינו היתה הרגשה עמוקה שזהו הלילה האחרון לפני הפרדה הנצחית. מפיה לא נעתקה כל אותן השעות אף מילה אחת של מרד או זעם נגד גורלה האכזרי. במבט עיניה לא ראיתי אף הבעה כלשהי של פלצות או פחד בפני מלאך המוות שכבר עמד למראשותיה. בגבורה עילאית היא התקרב אל קצה של דרך חייה הצעירים. למחרתו בשעות הבוקר עצמה את עיניה, כשפתיה מדובבות בהירות את שמי. הלך ממני אדם יקר מאד שהיה לי לסמל של אמת, צדק וגבורה נפשית. (34)

as devoted Zionist as their sisters, Sara and Hemda; Dvora follows Eliezer to the land but never really dedicates herself to his Zionist exploits; Azaryahu's sister comes to the land, not for Zionist reasons, but rather because the doctors believe the warm climate would be beneficial for her health. Both Dvora Ben-Yehuda and Azaryahu's sister, however, are also described as saints, too pure to live, and, perhaps, too pure for the politics of the Zionist project. A certain version of the figure of "the sick sister" will, notably, appear in all the chapters of this dissertation. She will, in fact, emerge as a crucial term in the vocabulary of the Zionist feminine narrative as told by Zionist women authors, as a foil against which the story of the New Hebrew Woman is imagined. It does not seem coincidental that the journey to bring back the sick sister is construed as a journey into the depth of the frightening Orient. Indeed, on the scheme of things unfolded in *Pirkey ḥayim*, the sick sister is the other idealized side of the "poor Arab sister," with which I opened this chapter; both are helpless women, "politically unborn," as Rosa Welt Straus phrases it, but while one is pure and fragile, the other is backward and incompetent. With the New Hebrew Woman's need of the shadows of both her sisters for her contours to be clear, the concept of "sisterhood," which is so central to Western feminism, transmutes into a mechanism of differentiation between those who can and cannot be the feminist subject.

The chapter following the death of the sister is the one depicting Azaryahu's night at St. Petersburg. It begins, however, with Azaryahu's own sickness: "throughout the summer of 1898, I suffered from severe illnesses and was near death. Only in the autumn did I recover my strength, and I went straight back to studying" (10). Azaryahu then recovers from her illness, and becomes a Zionist, a feminist and an autobiographer. But

while she claims she has “recovered” by autumn, her entire autobiographical text may be read as an effort to “recover,” to leave the “sick sister” behind, to sustain the sharp oppositions between life and death, sickness and health light and darkness, speech and silence, the West and the Orient. In this context my work as a close reader of the autobiography, is to “recover” the “sick sister(s),” to highlight the shadows, underscore the patches of silence, and expose the text’s efforts to re-cover them.

CHAPTER IV

Gluing the Pages: The Body of the New Hebrew Woman in the Writings of Rivka Alper

Introduction: Unchosen Bodies

This masculine, Jewish, Ashkenazi, perfect, and wholesome trope is what I call, for short, the chosen body. It is an ideal type by which concrete Israeli bodies are screened and molded from their birth to their death. (Weiss 4)

At best mournful pleasure seems in store. Sadly repetitive, painstaking, or indefinitely fragmenting things, rambling on with pauses only for explosions. Pleasure (?) full of histories but no possible historiography. (Irigaray, *Speculum* 61)

The changing body of the Jewish man has become in the last couple of decades an intense locus of investigation for studies in gender and Zionism. Several scholars have shown that the Zionist vision of national revival, as figured in the writings of major Zionist ideologues such as Theodor Herzl and Max Nordau, is inextricably bound with the fantasy of rebuilding the Jewish masculine body, that is, with the transformation of the delicate diasporic student of the Torah into the rooted and bodily-able “muscular Jew” (Boyrain 271-312; Gluzman 11-33). Placed at the core of the troubled encounter between Judaism, nationalism and modernity, masculine corporeality forms what Dan Miron has named a national metonym. Miron, we recall, claims that: “In Hebrew literature of the beginning of the 20th century the life-experience of the young Jewish woman is interpreted as private-personal experience, while the life-experience of the new Jewish

man is presented as metonymic of the national experience” (*Imahot* 67). Grappling with the masculine body, male authors may be understood as grappling with issues of national significance such as strength and weakness, independence and dependence, stability and fluidity, rootedness and uprootedness.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the same cultural-historical moment in which new Jewish manhood began to emerge, was also marked by the appearance of new bodies in the public sphere; feminine bodies baring a new mixed sense of mobility and vulnerability at once. It was a time where issues such as sexual liberation, prostitution and abortion came to the fore of the public discourse, arousing social anxiety about the uncontrollable potential of the feminine body (Englestein 128-164, 334-358; Showalter 38-58). As the Zionist story goes, however, changing perceptions of female bodies were never assigned the same significance as those of male bodies. While Hebrew authors often encoded the land and the nation through feminine archetypes such as the mother, the bride, or the beloved (Pinsker, “Imagining the Beloved” 110-113; Katz 82-94), the transitions in the social and cultural significations of feminine bodies at the beginning of the 20th century were not marked as vital components of the narrative of the reviving nation. Feminine bodies were not “chosen” as metaphorical sites where nation comes to be. The pains, pleasures and complexes they bore were not construed as illustrative of the pains, pleasures and complexes of the nation.

The previous chapter has shown how the process of constituting a Zionist feminine/feminist subject is intermingled with the erasure of the feminine body, which is designated as the bearer of “colorful” particularity and fragility that inhibits the entry of the New Hebrew Woman into the “white” realm of the universal subject. This chapter,

conversely, highlights the ways in which author Rivka Alper inscribes the national narrative onto the feminine body, by construing issues that mark the cultural construction of feminine corporeality – sexual trauma, beauty, ugliness and beautification – as national dilemmas.

The life story of Rivka Alper, like that of other authors discussed here, coincides both with the advent of Zionism and with emergence of the New Woman. She was born in the small Lithuanian town of Kurintz in 1902 to a middle class family that moved to the city of Harkov in Ukraine in 1916. When she was 19 year old her mother passed away and she was left to take care of her father and four younger brothers and sisters. It was around that time that she became an aspiring novelist, and wrote her first novel *Pirpurey mahapekhah* (Quivers of Revolution), which would be published in 1930 by the Eretz-Yisraeli publication house Mitzpe.¹⁰⁹ In 1922 she left the family home and embarked on a three year journey to Palestine. Arriving at the land in 1925, she worked for a short while as an orange-packer in a *kvutza* (commune) situated in Petah Tikva, but left it after a couple of years and worked in various odd jobs in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. During the 1940s she became a journalist in *Dvar ha-po'elet* (The Woman-Worker's Word),¹¹⁰ the monthly publication of the women-workers' movement. While during Alper's first few years in the land she published several stories in various literary journals alongside the novel *Pirpurey mahapekhah*, by the early 1940s, she has stopped publishing fiction, and instead focused upon her work as a journalist and a biographer of other women. In 1944

¹⁰⁹ Several aspects of *Pirpurey mahapekhah* are autobiographical, including: the death of the mother, leaving the young protagonist having to take care of the household, the arrest of the father for illegal trade, and the historical background of the Russian revolution. It is unclear to what extent other aspects, such as the sexual and gendered violence that are central to my chapter, are based on Alper's experience.

¹¹⁰ *Dvar ha-po'elet* came out in the years 1934-1977. It features articles about women's issues, reviews on women's literature, personal testimonies by women, as well as works of fiction and poetry by women. Rachel Katzanelson, a prominent leader of the Woman-Workers' movement, and a close friend of Alper, was the publication's editor for 20 years. See also: Margalit-Stern 156-171.

she published her first biographical work *Ha-mitnaḥalim ba-har* (The Settlers in the Mountain), a biography of Lea Cohen, one of the women-founders on the colony of Motza. In 1956 she published another biography, *Korot mishpaḥah aḥat* (A Tale of One Family), the story of Rachal Danin, a woman of the Jerusalemite Old Yishuv. Alper passed away in 1958. Her last piece, *Anshey Peki'in* (The People of Peki'in), about the ancient Jewish settlement in the village of Peki'in, was published in 1960, two years after her death.¹¹¹

Positing the feminine body, rather than the masculine body, at the junction of Judaism, modernity and Zionism, Alper, I suggest, re-narrates the Zionist story of the body. In the following pages, reading her first novel *Pirpurey mahapekhah* and her biographical project *Ha-mitnaḥalim ba-har*, I recover the alternative she offers: Beginning with a reality of sexual and gendered abuse in the Diaspora, continuing with the desire to secure the boundaries of the victimized body in the land, and ending with the image of the excessively adorned feminine body as metonym for the degeneration of the Zionist project. Eventually, my reading shows, the narrative Alper provides entails thinking the Zionist project of body formation, not in terms of building, growing muscles and phalluses, but rather in terms of undressing the body of adornments and ornaments, and producing a functional ascetic form whose simple contours are clearly defined.

¹¹¹ This biographical account is best on the Alper's obituary in *Dvar hapo'elet*, written by her brother-in-law Arye Hetzroni ("Shnot hayeha" 202). Hetzroni has also published a biography of Alper titled *Keesh 'atzura* (Restrained Fire) in 1978.

“Should She be Commended for This?": The Illegible Body

In 1970, in a used book store near the old central bus station in Tel Aviv, author Ehud Ben-Ezer recovers “an ancient failure” – Rivka Alper’s first novel *Pirpurey mahapekhah* (1930). “I wonder,” Ben-Ezer asks himself:

if I had been looking at a book just published, and while browsing through its first few pages I would have noticed that there’s no great literature there, would I have not just set it aside... forever... does my sentimental attitude towards this book derive only from it being an ancient failure? (6)¹¹²

In a way, sentimentality toward “ancient failures” is the issue at hand as I write about Rivka Alper and other women authors. I too wonder, whether my enthusiasm is really just the pleasure of picking at old wounds? I would grant myself the benefit of the doubt though (should I?) that a feminist reader’s pleasure is different from that of the male bibliomaniac who has found “a *kuryoz*¹¹³ . . . at the central bus-station, bought it with half a lira...” and spent an hour re-gluing together its falling pages; “and what sensual pleasure I derived from this labor,” Ben-Ezer confesses, “more than reading the book.” And yet, there is a way in which I too am gluing together something torn when writing of Alper; what is the pleasure that I derive from this labor?

Although “out of style” questions of the sort Ben-Ezer raises regarding literary quality often haunt the discussion of unknown women’s texts, not so much in published papers anymore, but most definitely in private conversations, in readers’ comments on drafts, in questions following a conference presentation. Indeed, the discovery of a non-canonical text often instigates a defensive discussion of the boundaries of the canon,

¹¹² נניה שהספר שאני קורא בו היה יוצא לאור עכשיו, וכבר בעמודים הראשונים הייתי מרגיש שספרות גדולה אין פה האם לא הייתי פוטר בכמה דילוגי קריאה, מסיים את הדפדפוף באנחת רווחה, ומניחו הצידה, לתמיד? האם אין לי יחס סנטימנטלי אל הספר דווקא משום שהוא כשלון עתיק? מפני שהוא קוריוז, בעיני. ומצאתיו בתחתנה המרכזית, שבמחצית הלירה, והשקעתי שעה של עבודה בחיתוך והדבקת דפיו הנושרים? (ומה גדולה היתה ההנאה הזאת שהביא לי הספר, הנאה חושנית ממש, אולי יותר מן הקריאה בו)

¹¹³ A gimmicky object, something odd but meaningless.

including subtle insinuations that the feminist enthusiasm about the forgotten text has to do more with her interest in “ancient failures,” that is, in the unacknowledged histories of women, than with the literary text; as if there is or should be a sharp hierarchical distinction between the two. I am not here to argue against Ben-Ezer or others and prove that *Pirpurey mahapekhah* merits a literary discussion; how can such endeavors be accomplished anyway? Instead, before I begin my close reading of the novel, I shall interrogate a few previous readings of this text, in an attempt to flesh out the gendered assumptions underlying their “literary” judgments and to highlight the particular gendered stakes involved in any discussion of “literary quality” in the Zionist context.

* * *

In her literary memorial essay on Alper published in 1958, in the wake of Alper’s death, Rachel Katzanelson mentions that Alper herself did not include her first novel *Pirpurey mahapekhah* in the account of her publications submitted to the Gnazim Institute, the archive of the Hebrew Writers Association. “We may never know,” Katzanelson proclaims, “the reasons that led her to disown this book, but today the reader may find great interest in it” (201). What the 1950s reader would find interesting, according to Katzanelson, is Alper’s astute depiction of the miseries of Jewish life at the wake of the October revolution:

At the center of *Pirpurey mahapekhah* stands, not the glory of life, not the overcoming of difficulties, as in her historical Eretz-Yisraeli stories written later. Against the backdrop of the Soviet Union after the October Revolution, she describes the lay person with his troubles and weaknesses, and *the drives that haunt him – at his fault or not*. There is a cruel reality here, there is a widower, father of children, who is *tormented as a man, there are women who are willing to sacrifice and to be humiliated for a glimpse of feminine happiness*. (201; my emphasis)¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ במרכז של "פרפורי המהפכה" עומד לא ההוד שבחיים, לא הייעוד וההתרוממות על קשיים, כמו בסיפוריה ההיסטוריים הארצישראליים שנכתבו בתקופה מאוחרת יותר. על הרקע של ברית-המועצות לאחרי מהפכת אוקטובר תואר פה האדם הממוצע,

This careful account of Alper's novel by Katzanelson from 1958 is consistent with the critiques of the novel published around the time of its publication in 1930 by dint of its uneasy engagement with what seems to be the most striking feature of the novel for a contemporary feminist reader: the emphasis on sexual and gendered violence.¹¹⁵ *Pirpurey mahapekhah* narrates the story of Batya, a young Jewish woman, vacillating between the traditional Jewish home and the dramatic social and political changes around the time of the October Revolution. One of the novel's most dramatic turning points occurs when Arye, Batya's father, sexually abuses her (Katzanelson writes: "the drives that haunt him - at his fault or not . . . [he is] tormented as a man"), an event which drives Batya out of the family home. The story then follows Arye's attempts to find a new wife, after the death of Batya's mother, and his abusive relations with other women (Katzanelson: "women who are willing to sacrifice and to be humiliated for a glimpse of feminine happiness"). A parallel storyline depicts Batya's relationship with her boyfriend Boria up to the point where Boria tries to rape Batya, driving her back into the family home, where once again she is sexually threatened by her father, and therefore, finally, resolves to immigrate to Palestine to start a new life.

While the novel is to be completely forgotten in years to come, at the time of its publication it did receive some critical attention, beginning with a complimentary brief review, published in June 1930 in *Moznayim*, the literary magazine of the Hebrew

הנתון למועקת צרותיו, חולשותיו ויצריו, הרודפים אותו - באשמתו ושלא באשמתו. יש כאן מציאות אכזרית, יש אלמן אבי-ילדים המתענה כגבר, יש נשים המוכנות לקרבן ולהשפלה למען קורטוב של אושר נשי.

¹¹⁵ This is curious not only because Katzanelson is known to be a brilliant reader and critic, but also because in her own autobiographical writings, she describes the diasporic space as a hyper-sexualized alarming space for a young girl. See: Katzanelson-Shazar, *Adam kmo she-hu* (The Person that She Was) 27-48; Miron, *Imahot meyasdot* 249-271.

Writers Association, by Yaakov Rabinowitz, a prominent literary critic and editor. Notably, Rabinowitz is closely connected with Asher Barash, the editor of Alper's novel, and head of Mitzpe publication house, which published the book. In fact, Rabinowitz's novel, *Mas'ot 'Amsai ha-shomer* (The Travels of Amsai the Guard), was published in very same year with Mitzpe. Rabinowitz and Barash also collaborated in editing together the literary journal *Hedim*,¹¹⁶ and the two served as kind of literary father-figures for Alper.¹¹⁷ Like Katznelson, Rabinowitz utterly disregards the sexual violence that recurs in the novel. "The story," Rabinowitz remarks,

is mundane, it doesn't have the sanctification of revolution of Yevin or the storms and crises of Hazaz . . . it fits the measurements of the storyteller, her size and height, no more no less, simple, straightforward. The narrator, like Batya, the protagonist, has healthy senses. She is not sickly or nervous, and not sentimental, but has natural, simple, emotions. (15)¹¹⁸

Alper writes:

At night Batya woke up from her sleep. Somebody touched her neck, her breast. She opened her eyes. Something white crossed the room and disappeared. Now it was clear, it was father, it was father all along. The certainty was horrifying. She trembled with pain and disgust. From the black air something horrible was watching. She wanted to depart from the ground, to rise, to fly away from here or hang from the ceiling with a rope, like she had seen awhile ago in the big square, on an electric-pole. The body vacillated, its hands despairingly down, the tongue was stuck out into the world, and the white teeth were giggling threateningly. (*Pirpurey mahapekhah* 26)¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ A literary magazine that came out in Palestine in the years 1922-1930.

¹¹⁷ As evident from the reading a letter from Alper to Barash and Rabinowitz from the late 1920s, while she was working as an orange-packer in Petah Tikva. The letter seems to be a response to the two editors' request for materials to be published in *Hedim*, and its confessional mode attests to the intimacy between Alper, Barash and Rabinowitz: "It's been three years since I held a pen in my hand. I may not be a hero. I most definitely am not a hero, but the fact is that after a day's work I cannot create... all this is known to you and is not new, but the fact is I did not write anything all this time. Usually I accept this but when I hear from you [in the plural, meaning, you and Barash] my heart aches" (GI 472/88894/1)

¹¹⁸ הסיפור הוא פרוזאי, יומיומי, בלי קידוש המהפכה של ייבין, ובלי הסערות והפרובלמות של הזו... הסיפור הוא לפי גודלה, גבהה, לא פחות ולא יותר, פשוט, ישר. ולמספרת כמו לבתיה – חושים בריאים, אינה חולנית ולא עצבנית, וגם לא רגשנית, כי אם בת רגש פשוט, טבעי.

¹¹⁹ כולה רעדה מכאב, מגועל. מחלל האוויר השחור השקיף משהו איום. היה רצון לפרוש מהקרקע, להתרומם, לעוף מכאן, או להתלות בתקרה בחבל, כמו שראתה לפני זמן מה על המגרש הגדול, על עמוד החשמל. הגוף התנועע, ידיו מורדות בייאוש, הלשון הושטה כלפי העולם והשיניים הלבנות מצטחקות ומאיימות . . .

Note the startling dissonance between the critic's praise of the modest and healthy "measurements" of the story and the novel's expressive and dramatic depiction of the incestuous moment, featuring Batya's suicidal thoughts and the shocking image of the hanged man. You can almost hear him talking her back to sleep: "you are healthy and natural; you are straightforward and simple; don't be sentimental; don't be nervous and sickly." Rabinowitz further writes: "One feels in the novel the traces of an editor's hand, weeding and cleaning, but careful and restrained, as the novice self is usually fragile, and the tending hand should be gentle" (15).¹²⁰ Reading Rabinowitz's homage to his friend Barash's "gentle hand," I cannot but recall Arye's "gentle" hand on Batya's body at night. Indeed, the incestuous scene is somehow reproduced here as the text of a woman quivers between the gentle hands of one father-figure and the normalizing-soothing words of the other: "you are healthy, you are straight and simple, go back to sleep."

Approximately three months after Rabinowitz' paternalistic but flattering introduction of the novel to the Hebrew reader, in August 1930, a more thorough review of the novel is published in *Moznayim*, signed by an anonymous writer under the pseudonym of V. Tomer.¹²¹ While much less positive about the novel than Rabinowitz, Tomer does acknowledge the violent reality it describes, but with severe resentment toward what he calls Alper's excessive realism:

I said that there are quivers. And this is indeed – the gist of the story. In a very realistic way – and I mean to say: *too realistic* – lay before us in all their nakedness [*be-khol 'eryatam*] the quivers of the body and soul of Arye Perlman. Indeed, not exactly the "soul," – I mean not the quivers of soul of Arye are

¹²⁰ ניכרת יד עורך מנקה ומנקשת, ואך זהירה ושומרת. עצמיותם של מתחילים רופפת היא לרוב ורכיכה, ועל היד המטפלת לגשת ברוך.

¹²¹ Despite much effort, I was not able to find out who that is.

revealed here, but only insofar as the soul is connected with the body, but the quivers of the body – which are really horrifying. (14; my emphasis)¹²²

Positing Arye as the one whose nakedness (*'eryah*) is exposed, Tomer inverts of the act of *giluy 'erayot* (incest),¹²³ foreshadowing the overall thrust of the critique, which by and large implicates the author as the perpetrator who abuses both Arye and the reader, her victims:

And the reader is very much ready for a break, to move to another issue, to digest slowly the poignancy of the event, and perhaps to forget. But the author would not allow that. *She is cruel not only towards Arye but also toward me . . .* the stream of the events, one after the other, and with growing poignancy – it seems that she means to astound us and to captivate us with action, *the physical fact that one cannot change and cannot shape according to will*. And when you reach the most subtle scene: the way he looked at her, and meant to look at her breast etc., and you wonder about the way she joins together the suspected thought with the deed, you are even willing to challenge this subtle psychologism amidst a realistic story – and even then all your thoughts are overcome by this one feeling: it could be. *There is no artistic "lie" [kahal u-srak] here but an ugly painful reality: this is poor Arye...* And now an even larger affair begins. *With unprecedented cruelty – except the cruelty of reality itself – the author holds Arye, crumbles him and tosses him like a ball to be played by physical desires.* (Ibid; my emphasis)¹²⁴

It is remarkable that by blaming Alper for being “too realistic,” Tomer in fact combines a critique at the level of the text’s poetics with an acknowledgement of the text’s “truthfulness.” His prudishness seems to play out the ambivalence embedded in the term

¹²² בראשית הדברים נאמר: אכן יש כאן פרפורים. וזה – עיקר הסיפור, באופן ריאליסטי מאוד – רצוני לומר: ריאליסטי מדי – פרושים לפנינו בכל ערייתם פרפורי הגוף והנפש של אריה פרלמן, אמנם “והנפש” לאו דווקא. בכל אופן – לא פרפורי הנפש של אריה מתגלים בעיקר כאן, אלא במידה שהנפש קשורה לגוף, אבל פרפורי הגוף – מזעזעים הם באמת.

¹²³ In Hebrew incest is termed *giluy 'erayot* – literally, to reveal the nakedness of a body that is forbidden (such as that of daughter or a parent).

¹²⁴ והקורא מוכן מאוד למנוחה פורתא, לעבור קצת לעניין אחר, לעכל לאט לאט את חריפות המאורע, ואולי גם לשכוח קצת. אבל לא כן המחברת עמדי הקורא. אכזרית היא לא רק לגבי האב אריה אלא גם לגבי דידי, ואחרי שלוש ארבע שורות – המשך. ומנה חריפה יותר. דרגה רחוקה יותר. “בלילה נגעו שפתי מי ברגלה החשופה” . . . ואדהכי והכי – שוב: בלילה התעוררה בתיה משנתה. מישוהו נגע בצווארה, בשדה. — שטף מאורעות בזה אחר זה, ובחריפות עולה ומתגברת – אין זאת כי להדהימו היא אומרת ולשבותנו כליל בשבי המעשה, העובדה הפיזית שאין לשנותה ושאינן לכוונה לפי אמות נפשך. וזו, הריאליות והאמונה במציאות הדברים יש בה כדי לכפר גם על ההגזמה וציפוף התמונות. ואף כשאתה מגיעה לתמונה דקה מן הדקה: איך הוא הביט עליה, התכוון לשלוח את עינו בשדיה וכדומה, ואתה תמה על הרצון לצרף חשש-מחשבה למעשה, להגדי את החשבון גם בדברים שבמופשט, או שאתה מוכן לקרוא תגר על פסיכולוגיזם דקיק זה הרצוף תוך סיפור ריאליסטי – הרי גם אז יוכרעו כל הרהוריך בכוח ההרגשה האחת: יתכן ויתכן, כחל ושרק אמנות אין כאן אבל מציאות כעורה וכאובה יש כאן. כזה הוא אריה המסכן... ועכשיו מתחילה פרשה רחבה הרבה יותר, באכזריות שאין דוגמתה – מלבד אכזריות המרה בכבודה ובעצמה – תאחו המחברת באב אריה פרלמן, תצנפנו ותלטלנו תלטלה ככדור משחק בידי התאוות הגופניות.

“realism,” which designates both a literary style and a commitment to the “truth” (Jakobson 39). The novel’s distortion of the realistic style, for Tomer, coincides with the “real” it exposes (“there is no artistic ‘lie’ [*kahal u-srak*] here but an ugly painful reality”). Rather than “style,” realism becomes a weapon at the hand of the author for torturing her helpless male reader and male protagonist, who “cannot change the physical fact” of male desire. For the feminist reader, this response by Tomer is both disturbing and familiar at once. The critic’s gesture of blaming the victim, the curious empathy with the perpetrator (“poor Arye”), the implication that this is in fact *his* tragedy and not *hers*, all these are painfully legible, as the most common misogynist responses to stories of sexual abuse.

What is even more interesting to me, however, is the way Tomer’s misogyny eventually ties into the question of women’s place within Zionism:

But this toughness that the author showed toward the father Arye – is surely related to a literary-social problem. We have seen here in the land the effort of the woman pioneer to be “like him,” we have seen her working like a man in physical hard labour, we have seen her spiritual and ideological masculinisation [*hitgabruta (mi-lshon gever)*]. The woman of our time is a pioneer of a future generation of women, and she should be commended for this. But in this book we reveal a form to literary pioneering [*halutziyut sifrutit*] that we have not seen yet in such an excessive way, this dissecting and picking into the body and soul of a close person, this realism full of sexual descriptions – is this also a kind of Eretz-Yisraeli pioneering [*halutziyut*] for generations to come? Should she be commended for this as well? I doubt it.¹²⁵ (15)

The invocation of the Zionist term *halutziyut* (pioneering) situates Tomer’s fraught response to the novel in the context of Zionist gender politics. The danger women’s writing seems to hold for Tomer is that it enables *halutziyut* that transgresses the

¹²⁵ אבל חוזק מפליא זה שגילתה המחברת כלפיה האב אריה – וודאי שהוא עניין לבעיה ספרותית-חברתית. ראינו פה בארץ את התאמצות האישה החלוצה “להיות כמוהו,” ראינו אותה כגבר בעבודות הגוף המפרכות, ידענו גם התגברותה (מלשון גבר) הנפשית והרעיונית. חלוצה היא בחזרת תקופתנו בא”י לדור נשים יבוא, ועל כן תבורך. אולם בספר זה מתגלה חלוציות ספרותית שלא ראינו עוד במידה מופרזת כזו. זו החטטנות הנתחנית בגוף ונפש אדם קרוב, זה הריאליזם הגדוש בתיאורי מין – הגם זוהי חלוציות נשית. ארצישראלית לדור יבוא, והגם על כך תבורך? ספק.

boundaries which keep it useful for nationalism. Women's *ḥalutzīyut* is manageable, as far as Tomer is concerned, as long it mimics the male model of the *ḥalutz*, who is, in fact, the quintessential New Hebrew Man, and thus the core of the Zionist project. Women's literary *ḥalutzīyut*, in contrast, may be a venue for the infiltration of "the feminine Other" into the space of the nation. This for Tomer seems odd and excessive, shameless and cruel, as if indeed destabilizing the very grounds the *ḥalutz* stands on. Women's writing emerges as a place of trouble within the culture of *ḥalutzīyut* since it has the potential to re-tell the story of the *ḥalutza* not as a mirror image of the *ḥalutz*, but differently, threateningly, "genderously," highlighting difference instead of obscuring it.

Another review of the novel, published about a month later, in September 1930, seems to respond to Tomer's critique. Contrary to Tomer, who denounces the author's "lack of shame" and overbearing "realism," Moshe Kleinman, in the literary section of *Ha-'olam*,¹²⁶ compliments Alper for:

Restraining her desire for expression, never revealing this sentiment [Batya's depression and horror about the incest], keeping it under deep cover, and never offending our moral or aesthetic sensitivities. Arye remains throughout the novel an observant and educated Jew, cordial and honest, and committed to his strict and absolute moral obligation to himself and toward others, especially his children.¹²⁷ (720)

It is unclear whether Kleinman had read Tomer's review in *Moznayim* from a month before (it seems plausible), but the contrast between the two is striking. It is almost as though Kleinman, another prominent cultural figure of the period as editor of *Ha-'olam*, sets out to defend the woman-writer-in-distress against Tomer's attack. In order to do

¹²⁶ The official publication of the Zionist movement.

¹²⁷ ושבת הוא למספרת, שידעה לכבוש את עצמה ולשים רסן ברצון הביטוי שלה, ואף פעם אחת לא הוציאה את הרחש הזה מכיסווי הכי עמוק ובשום פנים לא פגעה ברגשנו המוסרי ואסתטי. אריה נשאר כל הזמן יהודי תורני ומשכיל, נעים הליכות וישר לב ואיש החובה המוסרית, המחוסנת והמוחלטת, כלפי עצמו כלפי אחרים, ובייחוד כלפי ילדיו.

that, however, he too needs to rewrite the story of incest, this time exonerating both the daughter and the father, thus dulling the critical feminist edge of the novel. In his account, instead of a blamed victim and an innocent perpetrator, we find neither a perpetrator nor a victim, only a praiseworthy daughter-storyteller who does not expose her father's nakedness.

L.A., another anonymous critic, remarks in the literary section of *Davar* how curious it is that of the two storylines that compose the novel, that of Arye and that of Batya, the first reveals "sound descriptive talent and vitality of narration," while the second (Batya's story) is "weak," "shameless" and shows "lack of culture" (4). Tomer too notably concludes his review saying: "all this [other aspects of the novel] is *parperaot* [inessential anecdotes]. The main thing is *pirpurey Arye* [Arye's quivers]" (15). For the Zionist critics, it seems, the male protagonist's storyline in itself is legible, as it speaks to the masculine "dilemmas of desire," to borrow David Biale's term (1-10), standing at the core of the diasporic sexual predicament, metonymic of the entire diasporic condition marked as castrated and perverse. The story of a woman's abuse, in contrast, cannot be framed. Thus, it is *parperaot*, a term which in the Zionist literary vocabulary stands for a random anecdote on the margins of literature. Not a "national metonym," the story of the abused woman must remain a private story, the revelation of which is spiteful and incomprehensible act of transgression.

Between one form of denial and another I am reminded of Freud via Luce Irigaray:

Let us add this other revelation, which "caused me [Freud] many distressing hours." "In the period in which the main interest was directed to discovering infantile sexual traumas, almost all my women patients told me that they had been seduced by their father. I was driven to recognize in the end that these reports were untrue and so came to understand that hysterical symptoms are

derived from phantasies and not from real occurrences.” (Freud qtd in Irigaray *Speculum* 37)

Indeed, from Freud himself we have learned, the story of incest must always be rewritten. The Zionist literary critics know it too: incest may only be a feminine fantasy; the daughter is a storyteller just like Freud’s hysterical women; the storyteller is a daughter, whose story, if heard, would distress her reader, analyst, and father, so she must go back to sleep; her father-reader-analyst must be exonerated at all costs; he must go back to sleep; we all must go back to sleep. Nonetheless, the following pages interrogate the story that the critics are unable to read, a story which, I contend, challenges the limits of the national vocabulary by mapping it onto the illegible of feminine body.

Beds of Pain

The opening moment of *Pirpurey mahapekhah* is one of great intensity surrounding the body of a woman. Sheine, Batya’s mother, is found out to be pregnant for the thirteenth time and is ashamed to admit it to her adult children. The mother’s shame is multilayered: it is the shame of an old woman for still being sexually active; or, it may be the shame of a rape victim, for, as we shall see, Sheine’s husband Arye is often violent toward women and girls; it is the shame of an old woman at being old in a world that is rapidly changing; it the shame of the mother at being a mother, of desiring a child, when it does not make sense either physically or financially; it is the shame of the quintessential diasporic Jewish mother, a symbol for everything that has become obsolete in modernity.¹²⁸ But shame is revealed as unnecessary, for the daughter, Batya, tenderly embraces her

¹²⁸ See Naomi Seidman about Jewish mothers as an emblem for “the despised diaspora ‘femininity’” (115); see also Biale on the *maskilic* critique on the Jewish traditional family life (149-175).

mother's news. As the mother lies in bed agonizing with the pains of a pregnancy too difficult for the old body, "Batya approaches her, sits next to her, leans towards her, touches her hair gently and asks softly: mother why didn't you tell me?" (6). If the mother's shame articulates her out-of-placeness in the new world, then the daughter's acceptance of her pregnancy resists this rift. In this sense, the daughter's acceptance of her mother is a refusal. It is a refusal to reject what needs to be rejected and embrace that which ought to be embraced at the time of revolution; a refusal to make the modern distinction between past and present, old and young.

Reading the scene of the mother dying a slow painful death in labor, I am reminded of Hélène Cixous who writes: "the voyage of . . . Everywoman [is]: a bed of pain on which the mother is never done with dying" ("Sorties" 66). I read "the mother is never done with dying" as a twofold image marking both the constant killing of the mother as the condition for moving from the past to the future, and the persistent presence of a trace, a reminder of the mother. In *Pirpurey mahapekhah*, the scene of the mother's death and the incestuous scene read as two parallel women's "beds of pain":

Her [Sheine] eyelids widened as if looking at one horrible spot. She was shoved into the depth of the bed, pressing her daughter's hand to her body, and for a second as if shoving something forward. Her face seemed horrified, her lips were stuck forward. Then the middle part of her body rose and when it was flattened again, it was as if an electric stream went through it. (14)¹²⁹

She [Batya] trembled with pain and disgust. From the black air something horrible was watching. She wanted to depart from the ground, to rise, to fly away from here or hang from the ceiling with a rope, like she had seen awhile ago in the big square, on an electric-pole. The body vacillated, its hands despairingly down, the tongue was stuck out into the world, and the white teeth were giggling threateningly. (26)¹³⁰

¹²⁹ רחבו עפעפיה וקמו. כאילו הביטו בנקודה אחת איומה. היא נדחפה לעומק המיטה, את יד בתה להצה לגופה, בשניה דחפה מה . . . מלפניה. פניה הביעו זועה, שפתיה נשתרבו. אחר כך התרומם החלק האמצעי של גופה ובהתישרו הושלך תחתיו, כאילו עברו זרם חשמלי.

¹³⁰ כולה רעדה מכאב, מגועל. מחלל האוויר השחור השקיף משהו איום. היה רצון לפרוש מהקרקע, להתרומם, לעוף מכאן, או להתלות בתקרה בחבל, כמו שראתה לפני זמן מה על המגרש הגדול, על עמוד החשמל. הגוף התנועע, ידיו מורדות בייאוש, הלשון הושטה כלפי העולם והשיניים הלבנות מצטחקות ומאיימות. . . .

The mother is gazing at some horrible spot in space; for the daughter “something horrible” watches from the black air. The mother’s body rises momentarily, before it finally sinks down; the daughter wishes to rise, to depart from the ground, in order to reach a painful death. Something like an electric stream passes through the body of the dying mother; the daughter is fantasizing about being hanged from an electric-pole. With the mother, however, every gesture is corporeal, material, real – she is really gazing, rising, trembling and dying – while the daughter has only fantasies and wishes – she imagines something watching in the dark, she wishes she could rise, wishes she could die. The mother’s physical death is mirrored by the daughter’s psychic death. Through the textual intimacy between the two beds of pain, Alper enacts, at the moment of incest, the mother-daughter bond of identification against the father’s desire to replace the mother with the daughter. The resemblance between the two scenes also re-constructs the relations between the mother and father as sexually violent, hinting at the plausible possibility that the mother’s multiple pregnancies were a result of multiple rapes.

In both moments, notably, electricity evokes the harsh encounter between modernity and the Jewish feminine body. The mother’s death appears as if an electric stream passes through her body; the incest scene is sealed with the daughter’s imagined body hanging from the electric pole, an enormous phallus signing modernity, violence and death. Note that Arye’s assault on his daughter is motivated by the desire to possess a younger modern woman, a woman with whom he wishes to “go to the theatre and visit friends” (33), that is, to participate in the modern social space beyond the limits of the

Jewish home. One of the first times Batya notices Arye's attraction to her is when she gets ready to go to the theatre:

When she wore the velvet dress to go to the theatre, he ran his hand on her bare shoulder: I removed a black dot. She shuddered, and throughout the entire play she could not get past her disgust. It was as if cold ants were crawling on her body. (24)¹³¹

Arye's desire to participate in modernity then coincides with his incestuous desire. He wants a wife, he proclaims to the match-maker, with whom he can leave the past behind, "*ma she-haya kodem – haya*" (what was before – is over; 33). The moment of incest, in this context, may be understood as an attempt to make an "easy" switch from the old to the young. Thus, it is significant that Alper makes the mother and daughter coalesce at the very same moment. The equivalencies between the scene of the mother's death and the scene of incest construe the mother-daughter bond against the phallic modern economy which splits the past from the future, the old from the young, and makes women exchangeable.

Exile as the place of women's rape and abuse is not a new trope in Jewish literature – from the metaphoric rape of the woman-nation articulated by the biblical prophets to the iconic representation of Jewish women raped in the Kishinev pogrom in Bialik's "Be-'ir ha-harega" (In the City of Slaughter; Gluzman 67-95). With Alper, however, Jewish women are abused not by strangers, but within the home by Jewish men. The dissolution of the Jewish home derives not, as with Bialik, from the traditional weakness of Jewish men, but from violence associated with the modernization and masculinization of the Jewish man. The Zionist conclusion of the novel with Batya's

¹³¹ בלבשה בערב את שמלת הקטיפה ללכת לתיאטרון, החליק בידו את כתפה החשופה: הסירותי נקודה שחורה. צמרמורת עברה בגופה, ובמשך כל המחזה לא יכלה להשתחרר מהגעול שתקף אותה, כאילו נמלים צונגות זוחלות על גופה.

immigration to Palestine appears in this context as the modernizing woman's escape from the violence of modernizing men.

Pirpurey mahapekhah, like several other Hebrew stories about the October Revolution, is the story of its protagonist's disillusionment with socialism and her transition to Zionism.¹³² I read the novel in light of Batya's eventual Zionist immigration and ask: What happens if a Zionist story begins with a double point of departure, two feminine "beds of pain," that of the mother who never stops dying and that of the abused daughter? What happens if Zionism is entrusted to heal the violated feminine body rather than the castrated masculine body? Indeed, what happens to a Zionist narrative if castration anxiety is exchanged for concerns about gendered violence? How should we read a story of a would-be Zionist woman whose mother and trauma would not stop dying? What happens to a Zionist story when it is inscribed on the bodies of women, told in women's voices and silences?

***Pirpurim*, Parties and "National Sentiments"**

Let my hair down, Sonya. I want to dance, dance I am exhausted . . . Batya was not as usual that day. She danced wildly and incessantly. Late at night, in the middle of the dance, she withdrew to the corner of the room and covered her head with her hands. As much as her friends beseeched her, she would not respond, and she asked them to leave her alone. And so she sat motionless with her head leaned on her arms. (37)¹³³

At the night of Arye's wedding to his second wife, Batya gathers her friends and holds a party of her own, which quickly turns into an ecstatic "celebration" of her agony. Insofar

¹³² On such other stories, see Nurith Govrin's "Mahapekhat October bi-rei ha-sifrut ha-'Ivrit" (The October Revolution in Hebrew Literature); on Hebrew culture at the time of the Russian Revolution, see Kenneth Moss' study *Jewish Renaissance in the Russian Revolution*.

¹³³ תפזרי לי, סונייה, את שערוטי. אני רוצה היום לרקוד, לרקוד עד שיאפסו כוחותיי... בתיה היתה לא-רגילה הערב. היא השתוללה ורקדה בלי-הרף. בשעה מאוחרת בלילה, באמצע הרקוד, פרשה פתאום לפנה והסתירה את ראשה בזרועותיה. כמה ששדלוה חבריה, היא לא נענתה להם, ובקשה אותם לעזובה לנפשה. וכה ישבה נשענת בראשה על זרועותיה בלי-נוע.

as *Pirpurim* are a condition in which the body's boundary-lines are contested, it seems that the turbulent title of the novel *Pirpurey mahapekhah* becomes a predicate of the feminine body. In the scene quoted above, Batya oscillates between uncontrollable drunken dancing to a withdrawn crumbled position. Her body moves from total disruption of the body's limits to complete guardedness. Wavering between disintegration and collectedness she once again refuses the father's attempt to suture the wound, replace one woman by marrying another, and make the past obsolete. Letting her hair fall down, dancing wildly, binge drinking, Batya's quivers conjure the corporeal traumatic memory of the bodily limits breached by incest. Not long after the night of the wedding, another party is held. Batya and a group of young Russian socialists meet at the home of Tamara, an Armenian woman, to celebrate their newly found political ideals. This occasion constitutes a crucial turning point in the novel, for it is the first time in which Batya's nationalism emerges. My reading in the following pages traces the ways in which – in between the two parties – the quivers of the private feminine body are replaced by the turmoil of the nation.

The Armenian room in which the second party take place is described in great detail (52-53).¹³⁴ Its aesthetics are overflowing and excessive, mixing sexuality and violence. It is engorged with soft colourful fabrics, ornamented weapons, exotic toys, and most conspicuously it features an erotically suggestive sculpture of a man and a woman, with their bodies partially exposed, touching each other while leaning over the fantastical

¹³⁴ שלחנות, כסאות נמוכים, ספה רחבה, ועליה יורד מהקיר שטיח יקר, עבה ומשתרע הלאה על הרצפה. על הספה המון כרים מרוקמים: מארכים, עגולים, מרובעים משולשים. על הקיר מעל לרצפה תלויים כלי-זינו של אלכסי אחיה: חנית קטנה, ידיתה משובצת פיתחוי כסף מעשה מחשבת. רובה ציד עתיק, מקטרת יקרה, חגורת עור קווקזית וממנה יורדות לשונות עור מצופות זהב בקציהן. על שלחן נמוך על יד הספה צעצועי כל קווקז. בפינה אקווריון של זכוכית, דגי זהב שטים בו, ומעליו פסל זוג צעיר אחוזים באצבעותיהם. מכנסיים מופשלים מעל לברכיו, קצה שמלתה מורם מעט, גופיהם מורכנים מעל לאקווריון והם מסתכלים בו. כשלוחצים בכפתור מודלק מאור מבפנים וכל האקווריון והפסל מקבלים צורה חיה, פנטסטית.

aquarium. Edward Said speaks of the way Orientalist narration produces the Orient as an aesthetic object pleasurable for the reader and writer (113-200; see also, Kabbani 112-138). To an extent, in furnishing Tamara's magnificent room Alper is participating in this kind of enterprise, notably setting up an Orientalized space for Batya to recover her national sentiments in. Notwithstanding the wildness of space, the party begins on a distinct restrained socialist note, with the group collectively deciding not to buy wine – “the wine that has served and still serves reactionary governments . . . to blur the consciousness of the people” (55). The masculinist ideals of discipline and self-control contrast both with the ornamentality of Tamara's space and with the memory of a previous party. Yet, despite the banning of alcohol at the second party, women's overwhelming pain would eventually submerge this evening too, only this time it would emanate from a different kind of injury.

At one point in the evening, Tamara sits at the piano and begins playing an Armenian national song:

Ringling like a distant deem echo of a wandering camel's bell . . . in her foreign language trilling in quarters of tones, she sang longingly about high mountains . . . burning sun, boiling blood, rushing through the veins. . . and about overflowing pain, enslavement and the desire for freedom” (58).¹³⁵

When she finishes the song, Batya asks Tamara whether she would accompany her in a Jewish song. As if standing-in for absent wine, Batya's voice and Tamara's playing drive the group to a state of exuberance with men and women ecstatically singing and dancing

¹³⁵ כמו הד רחוק, עמום של פעמון צוואר גמל תועה בערבה. היא שרה בקולה הטנורי הטהור, בשפתה הזרה, הארמנית הצלילית, המסתלסלת ברבעי טונים, ספרה בגעגועים על הרים גבוהים... על דם רותח, סוער בעורקים. ספרה בהשתפכות כאב, בצלילי ככי וניגון, על דכאון, שעבוד, על השאיפה לחופש.

together.¹³⁶ If the initial motivation for banning wine was that “our enthusiasm should come naturally,” women’s singing seems to have the same effect as alcohol of setting bodies and emotions free. “National sentiments,” one socialist friend complains listening the women’s music (58), and, indeed, as women’s singing substitutes for the missing alcohol, “national sentiments” of yearning for a lost land, the national home, take the place of the pain of the incestuous bed that ruined the family home. Between the first and the second party, the pain of the feminine body is exchanged for national suffering, and Batya’s earlier solitary cathartic breakdown is exchanged for collective ecstasy.

Note that there is a difference between the Armenian and the Jewish song. While Tamara sings with great pathos of her longing for a land, Batya’s Yiddish folk song goes: “There once was a little Jew/ he had a little violin.” The Jewish song sparks “national sentiments” only by association with the Armenian song. The words of the Yiddish song seem to lose their original meaning. What matters is the song’s invocation immediately after the Armenian song and the fact that Tamara is accompanying Batya’s song with the piano. With the musical infusion between the two women, language as sound, rather than as denotative structure, becomes the vehicle of meaning, in a way that is reminiscent of what Julia Kristeva terms “the semiotic,” a modality of language associated with the rhythms and drives flowing between mother and child at the pre-oedipal stage (17-100). On this level of language – where sharp distinctions between meanings are blurred – the two women musically interact with each other. The oedipal father as agent of the symbolic order is not there to separate between them except in the socialist man’s bitter

¹³⁶ This scene is reminiscent of Dvora Baron’s early story “Tiyul ‘Ivri” (Hebrew Stroll), where a female Jewish narrator experiences national longings for the “mother-land” upon hearing the singing of gentile women-peasants (369). Alper, it should be noted, admired Baron’s writing and eventually became her close friend.

remark, “national sentiments.” The orgiastic ambiance of the scene corresponds with an “ecstasy” on the level of signification, where, through women’s musical bond, meanings uncontrollably travel from song to song, from one woman to another, from one national narrative to the other. And still, reading the words “*a kleine yidelle . . . a kleine fidele*” – “a little Jew... a little violin” sung by Batya, I cannot resist extracting a subtle gesture of revenge, a faint echo of feminine mockery diminishing the masculinity that has wounded her. Thus, at the same time as the women’s music inundates the entire space, delivering nationalism to the story as a wild orgy of sounds and meanings, it also mockingly tells a pointed little tale on a very personal level: “there once was a little Jew/ he had a little. . .” Castration anxiety becomes a joke. Women’s pains and pleasures make the national drama. “National sentiments” emerge in this novel in a space marked by trauma, where women’s bodies and voices oscillate between rowdy ecstasy and tender women’s intimacy. Nothing, it seems, is more different than the story of the body of the New Hebrew whose shape should become clearer and more solid the more it is immersed in the national idea.

* * *

Before leaving behind the singing women, I feel I should make two anachronistic comments. One is that there is something chilling about the merging of the Armenian and the Jewish voices. It is likely that the novel was written during, or just a few years after, the Armenian genocide,¹³⁷ and it is, of course, certain that it was written years before the Jewish Holocaust. It is unclear whether Alper knew about the Armenian genocide and, it is, of course, certain that she did not know what lies ahead for European Jews. Yet, the

¹³⁷ While *Pirpurey mahpekhah* was published in 1930, her biography makes clear that it was written in Russia, that is, before 1922, which is when Alper began her journey to Palestine (Hetzroni 19). The genocide of the Armenian by the Turks is dated from 1915 to 1923.

intersection of the two catastrophes resonates through a double feminine voice, as if the feminine gesture of pushing the process of signification to its limits is further accentuated through the tragic meaning retroactively attached to the two women's musical merger, as if the text has become, over the years, a commentary on the impossibility of ever controlling the production of meaning. My second anachronistic comment concerns the Armenian national anthem. The speaker of the anthem "Mer Harenik," is, notably, a woman presenting to a male addressee a flag that she has sewn for him:

Here is a flag for you, my brother,
That I have sewn
Over the sleepless nights,
And bathed in my tears.

Over the sleepless nights,
And bathed in my tears.

Look at it, tricolored,
A valuable symbol for us.
Let it shine against the enemy,
Let you, Armenia, be glorious forever.

As women's ventures of possessing the national voice, through tears, labour, and the Other woman, are central here, it seems pertinent to stretch further the stream of associations that the singing Armenian woman sparks to include the significance of the feminine voice in the context of Armenian nationalism.¹³⁸ "Mer Harenik" indeed raises some crucial questions that are of great relevance to my work: Is it really a woman's song? Does she possess it? Or does the song possess her, like the flag she has sewn, like the brother to whom she is speaking?

* * *

We are luminous. Neither one nor two. I've never known how to count. Up to you. In their calculations, we make two. Really two? Doesn't that make you

¹³⁸ For an analogy between Jewish and Armenian nationalisms, see: Slezkine 4-39.

laugh? An odd sort of two. And yet not one. Especially not one. Let's leave one to them... (Irigaray, *This Sex* 207)

The scene before the final one in *Pirpurey mahapekhah* presents two women on a train: Batya, who is embarking on her long journey to Palestine, and her friend Yona who has decided to accompany her till the next train stop. We are not told exactly why Yona accompanies Batya, except that they “thought that they would speak much on the way. They had so much to talk about, but they did not speak at all” (169). Yona’s story resembles that of Batya to a large extent. She too has lost her beloved mother, who has committed suicide, and has suffered abuse by her perverse and sadistic step-grandfather (84). With Yona as an alter-ego shadowing Batya’s embark toward Palestine, something is added to the Zionist conclusion. Again “a sick sister” is constituted for the New Hebrew Woman to leave behind. Here, however, as opposed to what we have seen with Azaryahu and, to an extent, with the Ben-Yehuda, traumatic memory makes the separation between the “sick” and “healthy” women more difficult. The “sick sister” travels part of the way with the Zionist woman before she is left behind. Yona’s presence on the train confounds the narrative of Zionist immigration, as it fuses it with other stories: The mother who would not stop dying, the father’s infraction, male violence, woman’s trauma, the wounded feminine body.

Batya’s and Yona’s silence on the train is not the last scene of the novel. The novel, surprisingly, does not end with the Zionist act of immigration to Palestine. Rather, the final scene of the novel depicts Mira, Batya’s father’s new wife, having found out that she cannot have children of her own, crying over the picture of Batya’s mother, “Please let me be a mother to your children” (174). The last line of the novel has her collapse on

the floor in tears. The home, like the train, becomes a place “neither one nor two” women inhabit, as the living and dead mothers meet each other. This story which begins with the body of the mother concludes with her supplements, the picture, the second wife, gazing at each other. Indeed, the endpoint of the novel is not the Zionist act of immigration, but rather the trace of the mother. The story that began with the excessive embarrassing presence of the mother’s body concludes with her absence as an overwhelming presence that makes another woman collapse.

V. Tomer, in his harsh critique introduced earlier, calls this final scene “a scant redundancy,” for it strays from the main issue of the novel, which is, according to him, “*pirpurey Arye*.” In my reading, however, the main thing is women’s quivering bodies as they escape men’s “gentle hands,” disintegrating in ecstatic scenes of pains and pleasures, and women’s quivering voices as they tremble with each other, making rooms for each other’s grief and longings, all of which would be *parperaot*, according to Tomer. If *pirpurim* is an occurrence that challenges the limits of the body, *parperaot* stand for the limits of a meal (it literally translates “dessert”), but also and the limits of literature, the marginal unimportant anecdote that has no significance for the public sphere; an addition, a flavour that does not have to be there. Perhaps I should conclude the discussion of *Pirpurey mahapekhah* with such *parpera* – the poet Zelda’s account of Alper’s own quivers of death:

In her last days, she almost scarred me. In those horrible, dark, abysmal hours, her face smiled at me full of tears. When death stabbed its knives in her flesh, she guessed as always what my soul needs most of all, and her lost beauty articulated words that were like a lifesaving cure for me. In the hour of her death, she maintained her enormous talent to be truly attentive to the other . . . because this was her most, inner point, her living point. (169)¹³⁹

¹³⁹ בימים האחרונים עוררה בי פחד כמעט. בשעות האיומות, האפלות, התהומיות, כאשר ייסוריה עצמו עד מאוד, כשהמוות נעץ את סכיניו בבשרה – חייכו אלי פניה הבוכים. לבה הגווע ניחש כמו תמיד את החשוב מכל לנשמתו שלי, ויפיה האובד ביטא מילים

The forgotten anecdote about a forgotten woman I find in an old magazine captures her body a moment just before death, where she, who is dying, offers “a lifesaving cure” for another woman. Her body quivers not only between her own life and death, but also between her life-and-death and the life-and-death of another woman. As with Batya, her mother, Tamra, and Yona, women’s intimacy emerges as a space of blurry lines where the limits of the body do not match the contours of the subject.

Pirpurey mahapekhhah recounts the emergence of the Zionist feminine body as a cycle of trauma and recovery, in which boundaries are repetitively troubled and repaired. It takes (back) the national trope of the raped Jewish woman, and makes it into a concrete story whose significance no longer lies in the humiliation and incompetence of Jewish men, but rather in women’s traumatic memory and the way it shapes their national trajectories. After Alper’s immigration to Palestine, as she became more and more invested in activism for the women-workers movement,¹⁴⁰ her mode of writing transformed from fiction to biographical writing. The following sections probe her first biographical project, in which, I suggest, the Zionist feminine body is delineated once again, this time in the context of the Zionist settlement in Palestine, that is, in relation to the project of “building and being rebuilt” on the land.

Patient Pure Poverty

Why didn’t the writer continue with realistic, social writing – despite her rich personal experience, and her ability to empathize with “the little people”? Perhaps she was not encouraged to proceed in that direction; but mainly it seems that in the land, the world appeared before her in a different light. She revealed

שהיו לי כסם חיים. בשעות צלמוות עוד נשתמר בה הכשרון הנדיר של תשומת-נפש אמיתית אל הזולת. בשעות שנושרות החכמות הקניות והנימוסים נמסים בדמעות – היא נשארה טובה ומיטיבה כשמש. כי זו היתה נקודתה הפנימית ביותר, נקודתה החיה.

¹⁴⁰ She has worked as a teacher of literature classes for women offered by the women-workers movement, was active in the project of the women’s farms (see Introduction), and was a writer and an assistant editor in *Dvar ha-po‘elet*.

the profound guiding force of the history of the People, which leads to the return to the homeland; she revealed the force of the family as corner-stone in nation-building and she revealed the courage of woman. (Katzanelson 210)¹⁴¹

Two reasons account for the change in Alper's writing, according to Rachel Katzanelson: "Perhaps she was not encouraged," or perhaps she revealed the force of the national narrative. I have engaged with the first possibility earlier reading the critiques of the novel. Perhaps, indeed, she "was not encouraged" to continue with her fiction insofar as it was perceived as an attack on men's sensitivities (recall Tomer's harsh critique). But the second option – that nationalism was some kind of a regenerating force for her writing – is also to be considered (and of course it is not really either/or). What Katzanelson describes in the passage quoted above is a process of healing at the level of storytelling. Fragmented stories about human suffering are rescued from their wretchedness as they are woven into the grand national narrative. The chaotic senseless agony of the first novel becomes heroic self-sacrifice through *toldot ha-'am*, the history of the People, a tale with meaning and destination, like glue to her pages. Notably, what Katzanelson discerns at the level of writing corresponds with the transformation Alper depicts with regards to the female body. The appearance of Sara, the protagonist of *Hamitnaḥalim ba-har*, changes so much when she is in the land, that her acquaintances, at one point, fail to recognize her, for "The land has given her a sense of life she never knew before . . . she blossomed and her body straightened. No more of the misery, wretchedness and agony of exile, but rather abundance of sunlight and freedom" (62).¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ מדוע לא המשיכה הסופרת בכתיבה שנימה סוציאלית, מציאותית, בולטת בה – על אף נסיונה האישי הרב, ויכולתה להזדהות עם גורלו של "האדם הקטן"? ייתכן שלא מצאה עידוד בדרך זו. ובעיקר נראה שבארץ נגלה לפניה העולם באור אחר. נגלה כוחם הטמיר המנחה של תולדות העם, המצויים שיבה למולדת. נתגלה כוחה של המשפחה כגורם בונה-עם והופיעה האישה בגבורתה. הארץ הטעימה אותה טעמי חיים לא ידעתם עד כה. כוחות חיים חדשים הוצקו בה, פרחו כולה וקומתה הזדקפה עוד. לא עוד ¹⁴² מועקת הגלות חיי הדחקות והצער, אלא שפע של אור, אור שמש ודרור...הלכה, אחרי שנעדרה כמה כחדשים, למושבה. לא הכירוה -- כל כך הבריאה ויפתה.

The body, like writing, takes shape through its connection with the land. Both are healed – their quivers calm down – and both are endowed with new “forces of life,” new meaning, “sunlight and freedom.”

Of course, all this is not uniquely women’s. At the level of writing, what Katzanelon describes resonates with Yosef Hayim Brenner’s famous critique of the “Eretz-Yisraeli genre” that sutures fragments of reality into a seemingly coherent fantasy (9-11). Notably, what Brenner criticizes in 1911 as an artificial of the venture to create Eretz-Yisraeli literature, Katzanelson views as an actual process of healing.¹⁴³ With regards to the Jewish body I have already mentioned the recent scholarly discussions about the regeneration, or, rather, normalization of the Jewish masculine body through Zionism. And yet, close reading of Katzanelson’s may reveal hints of different story, one which is more specific to women’s writings and bodies. Alper, Katzanelson further comments, did not stop representing “mundane human struggling . . . but all is overshadowed by the glory of the pioneers’ life. Even poverty appears as pure patient poverty [*dalut savlanit u-varah*]” (ibid). Katzanelson’s choice of phrasing here, “*dalut savlanit u-varah*,” brings in another woman, whose story, in a sense, epitomizes the problematic intersection of women’s writing and the feminine body in the Zionist space. “*Dalut savlanit u-varah*” is a quote from Rachel Bluwstein’s poem “Bikur” (A visit; 59). Bluwstein’s well known life-story may be regarded as the quintessential Zionist feminine tragedy. The poet was expelled from the commune of Dganya because of her tuberculosis for fear that she would infect the other members. The 1929 poem “Bikur,” like many of her other poems, was written during her time of solitary “exile” in Tel Aviv, and

¹⁴³ Here too as with Tomer’s discussion of Alper’s novel, the gendering of issues of style could be a fascinating question for a comparative discussion of Katzanelson and Brenner, but this again is beyond the scope of my investigation here.

articulates her longing for the cherished life in the commune. “Bikur” depicts a feminine speaker who visits a workers’ shed. Observing the meagerness of the place, the visitor is filled with yearnings for the “stubborn labor and purpose” (*‘amal ‘akshani ve-tohelet*) of the workers’ life, exclaiming, “I am yours, pure patient poverty,” (*shelakh anokhi, dalut savlanit u-varah*). The poem concludes with an image of children approaching the speaker, “to see what saddened the strange ‘aunt’” (*‘al ma ze n’eetzvah ha-dodah hazarah*). “Pure patient poverty” is the object of the speaker’s yearning in “Bikur.” It is also the setting for her sense of foreignness; a reminder of the ideological space that has repudiated her. It is curious that in order to capture the healing effect of Zionism on Alper’s writing, Katzanelson cites the words of a sick woman, a stranger in the Zionist space. However, Rachel, of course, has a mythical standing in the canon of Hebrew literature, in contrast with Alper. Therefore, invoking Rachel’s deficient body, Katzanelson also elevates the forgotten writer by associating her with Zionist literature’s dearest daughter. As Dan Miron demonstrates in his study of Hebrew women-poets, purity, modesty and humility, *dalut savlanit u-varah* so to speak, are the ideal qualities expected of Hebrew women’s writing, which Rachel’s poetry exemplifies perfectly (*Imahot* 96-102). In this sense, *dalut savlanit u-varah* is a marker of women’s ambivalent position within the Zionist space; even at the center of the canon, she is a stranger. Even if she is cured, her words are the words of a sick woman. To be heard she has to speak softly. To have her story remembered she has to be expelled. Rachel, if you will, is the quintessential sick sister of Hebrew culture. The association that Katzanelson forms between Rachel and the “healing” of Rivka Alper’s writing in the land points toward an ambivalence with regards to sickness and health that haunts the Zionist feminine body.

While with Zionist men, the move from sickness to health is a clear metaphor of the move from the Diaspora to the land, the ideal women-figure both heals in the land (like Sara) *and* maintains the delicacy of the innocent sick victim (like Rachel).

The following pages bring into our discussion Alper's second book, *Ha-mitnaḥalim ba-har* (1944; Settlers in the Mountain), the biography of Lea Cohen (named Sara in the first edition of the text),¹⁴⁴ one of the women-founders of the colony of Motza.¹⁴⁵ However, while reading the biography, we cannot leave the novel *Pirpurey mahapekhah* completely behind. For the way the female figures of *Ha-mitnaḥalim ba-har* mirror, echo and contrast the women of *Pirpurey mahapekhah* create complex intertextual network tying together the novel and the biography. And while *Ha-mitnaḥalim ba-har* is, officially, the biography of Lea/Sara, other women constantly shadow the heroic protagonist, forming, like the intertextual interjection within Katzanelson's praise, sites of instability within the seemingly straightforward Zionist story, breaching the text by ushering the infiltration of troubled/troubling feminine bodies. Eventually, however, it is through the play of mirrors between women that the coordinates for the body of New Hebrew Women are set.

Sounds of the Night: the Woman Friend

Two women boarded a train at the end of *Pirpurey mahapekhah*, and two women arrive in Palestine in *Ha-mitnaḥalim ba-har*.¹⁴⁶ These are not the same two women, or are they?

How many women are there in this story? Reading the biography in juxtaposition with

¹⁴⁴ In later editions Alper changes the name back to Lea.

¹⁴⁵ Motza is an agriculture colony (*moshava*) located west of Jerusalem, which was founded in 1894. As of 1993, it is part of the municipality of Jerusalem.

¹⁴⁶ Notably, however, the immigration scene is not the opening of the novel but appears a few chapters into it.

the novel, I recall Irigaray's dream of a place without counting for women-among-themselves: "without identifiable terms, without accounts, without end . . . without additions and accumulations, one plus one, woman after woman . . . without sequence or number" (*This sex* 196-197). In any case, in 1895, Sara, a young Jewish Lithuanian woman, a member of Hovevey Tziyon,¹⁴⁷ is travelling to Palestine, accompanied by Malka, her old teacher. Throughout the text, the story of Malka contrasts with that of Sara. Whereas Sara is a strong young woman who adapts instantly to the work of the land and becomes the epitome of a stubborn clinging to the soil, Malka – old, sick and almost blind, is unable to work the land – and thus eventually moves from Motza to Jerusalem, where she establishes a school for Jewish girls like the one she had in Russia. Malka is the antagonist, so to speak, of the feminine Zionist success story embodied by Sara. She is another incarnation of "the sick sister," the woman whose Zionist journey is a failure. She is also, however, a mother-figure for Sara, summoning into our discussion once again the mother, "who is never done with dying."

Notwithstanding their differences, the women are inextricably attached to each other. On the night of their arrival to Palestine, a moment of intimacy between them is reminiscent of the moment of musical bonding between Tamara and Batya in *Pirpurey mahapekhah*:

"Sara," Malka whispered from her bed, "you are not sleeping? Shall we read *Psalms* together, my sister?" . . . For a long time their troubled whisper trickled into the night. Suddenly out of the darkness outside a clear and loud prayer came. The tune persisted for awhile and then stopped. It was as if the night was anxiously waiting, and the thread of the cantor-like Arab tune rose and descended alternately, and ceased, as if listening to the sound of its own echo. . . and then the silence was torn by the cry of the jackals. The women listened trembling to the prayer of the strange animal. First a single voice, like the representative of the public [*shliah tzibur*], with a long whiney cry, and then a

¹⁴⁷ "Lovers of Zion," a collective name of several Jewish associations, founded in Eastern Europe at the end of the 19th century, which advocated Jewish settlement in Palestine.

choir of voices, their screams whipping the air like hot pins. The choir had in it the weeping of a baby, the scream of a woman, the scream of a man, it had complaint and plea. Upon reaching the high note it stopped. The skin of the women bristled. The darkness was heavy under the weight of the voices. (53)¹⁴⁸

Women's singing voices emerged as significant in my reading of *Pirpurey mahapekhah* as site of intimacy, a medium through which feminine subjectivities merge, but also, arguably, as means by which women become subjects of nationalism. Here too feminine vocals enable women's entry to nationalism. On the first night in the Land, a woman and another woman join voices again. This time the New Hebrew Woman and an old diasporic woman negotiate the alien space through the old form of address – the prayer. The emphasis on voices and sounds in this scene gains further significance given Malka's near-blindness. I am reminded of Cixous' commentary on feminine blindness in the theoretic-poetic text "Veils." For Cixous, the veiled seeing of the myopic is a divergence from the straightforward masculine vision of the world; it is "her own foreigner, her essential foreignness" (10). Malka's blindness marks her as a foreigner in the Zionist space. It is the reason for her eventual removal from the work of the land. On their first night in the Land, however, both women are blind. The scene begins softly; the women absorb each other and their surroundings through sound, not sight. Following Edward Said's *Orientalism*, critics have commented on the way "the masculine gaze" structures the relations of power between east and west as gendered subject-object relations (Kabbani 112-138; Allula 7-16). In this scene, rather than gazing upon the Arab space,

¹⁴⁸ "אינך ישנה? נקרא תהלים, אחותי." קמו חרש, לבשו שמלותן. שעה ארוכה ניגרה לחישתן הסוערת אל חיק הלילה. פתאום הגיעה מן האפלה שבחוץ תפילה קולנית צלולה. הניגון נמשך קמעה ונפסק, הלילה כאילו כבש רוחו בציפייה, והוט הניגון החזני ערבי עלה שוב, עלה וירד חליפות במסולסל ונדם, כמקשיב אל הד קולו. ושוב הסתלסל הניגון. הדממה עצרה נשימתה. והנה פילה את האוויר ילל תנים חד. הצמידו אזנן בקשב רוטט לתפילת החייה המזורה. תחילה תינה קול יחיד, צווחותיהם הלוהטות הצליפו באוויר כשיפודים מלובנים. היה במקלה זו מהתייפחות תינוק, מזעקת שבר של אישה, מזעקת גבר, היתה בהם תלונה ותחינה, התחטאות ומרי. האוויר צלל מצווחותיהם באלפי מיתרים. בצליל הגבוה נאלמה המקלה פתאום. בשרן נעשה חידודין, חידודין. הדממה נפלה כבדה מעומס הדי הקולות הצוללים בקרבה.

the two women dialogue with the sounds of the night around them, sending their Jewish prayer out the window and listening to the response of the Arab *muezzin*.

But as the sounds of the night persist, violence slyly infiltrates this moment of feminine tenderness. The two women are almost overcome by the voices that multiply, become louder, and grow more and more frightening. What seems to be most untameable and threatening, making the women's flesh *hidudin hidudin* (bristle), is the blending of the strange with the familiar within the humming darkness, as the human prayer transforms into an animalistic cry, which in itself, holds a hoard of human-like voices. The meshing together of the animal and human here is reminiscent of Spivak's observation of "the human/animal frontier as acceptably indeterminate" as one of "the axiomatics of imperialism" ("Three Women's Texts" 266). Following Spivak, it seems that one of the questions that sustain the colonialist East-West encounter is the question of the difference between the human and the animal, which, in this scene, the jackal powerfully embodies. This scene foreshadows the disillusionment of the dream of secure boundaries for the body in the land. Instead, in the land differences are frighteningly blurred, and the women's skin which goes *hidudin hidudin* – becomes a contested frontier between the body and its surroundings – a site of anxiety and instability.¹⁴⁹

As the same time as it articulates the women's fear of the multiplicity of voices with their human-animal hybridity, the text creates its own hybrid, ethnocentrically "Judaizing" the sound and space, designating the Arab voice as *hazani* and the jackal as *shliaḥ tzibur* – two terms referring to the Jewish cantor. In this strange world of voices where the two women find themselves almost trapped, the Jew, the Arab, the masculine

¹⁴⁹ The jackal as a diffuse border between the Orientalized human and the animal of Palestine and as a marker of an alienated space will notably appear in Amos Oz's short fiction collection *Artzot ha-tan*.

and the feminine, as well as the human and the animal, all constitute an overbearing choir, whose echo burdens the night – “the darkness was heavy under the weight of the voices.” The diversity is so threatening that it must in the end be muted. Ultimately, this fearsome scene may be read as a metonym for the whole Zionist space, a space that cannot bear the heterogeneity it produces, whose internal frontiers are all *ḥidudin ḥidudin*.

Under the Canopy: Summoning the Other Woman

In those days, every man’s wedding, was a wedding with the land.
(*Ha-mitnaḥalim ba-har* 59)¹⁵⁰

Boaz Neumann speaks of the relations between the *ḥalutzim* and the land as dialectic between two movements of desire: one toward total merger with the land and the other toward building the distinct and unified Jewish body. For Neumann, this opposition is hardly gendered, and desire remains a general explanatory principle for understanding national urge. In Alper’s writing, in contrast, gender difference and gendered violence aggravate the tension between consolidation and disintegration that shapes the Zionist body. In *Ha-mitnaḥalim ba-har*, the depiction of Sara’s wedding to her beloved Yosef in the colony of Rehovot provides an occasion to revisit the construction and the deconstruction of the violated feminine body.

The wedding celebration quickly turns into an orgiastic scene, where collective desire overshadows the romantic union:

The bride and the groom were already forgotten, and now the people danced for the sake of their own souls, in order to unload the hearts that were bursting with

¹⁵⁰ אז, בימים ההם, ימי כלולות לכל איש, כלולות האיש עם הארץ.

yearnings. At times, a ring of people would slip away from the larger circle, and then would tie back to it again. (Ibid)¹⁵¹

The subtle depiction of human *hulyot* (links/rings), presumably couples, slipping away from the larger circle and then rejoining it, fills the air of the scene with erotic tension. As the scene progresses the tension culminates and reaches a point of explosion. Sexual desire and desire for the land merge into one Zionist catharsis, in which the bride and groom are lost:

Everybody's throats was soar from singing, their clothes were soaked with sweat, and they kept on dancing in a circle as if moonstruck, aflame by the beat of the singing, the brotherly arms holding each other, and the stomping of the feet. The circle was going round and round as if by its own . . . and Finkelstein stood at centre of the circle and excited them by singing: "this is how we dance" – and the circle responded: "Hebrews! This is how we work – *hasidim*¹⁵²! This how we conquer – Maccabees!¹⁵³ To death – *hasidim*! This is our prayer – Jews! This our destiny – *hasidim*!" And so it went on and on to no end. (59-60)¹⁵⁴

Pain, sweat, brotherly arms and stomping feet all mark this scene as corporeal and sensual, and, eventually, almost violent, with the circle of dancers "going round and round" on its own, turning into an out-of-control unification of bodies and voices, and the chanting that mixes religious, nationalistic and belligerent rhetoric.

The Eretz-Yisraeli wedding brings to mind another wedding. In *Pirpurey mahapekhah*, Batya and her boyfriend Boria attend a Jewish wedding which deeply moves Batya:

בעלי השמחה כבר נשכחו מלב החוגגים והיה זה ריקוד לצורך נפשם, לפרוק את הלבבות הגדושים כיסופים. חוליה שמטה מן ¹⁵¹ המעגל ונתמלאה ונתקשרה שוב, כולם גרונם ניחר כבר, בגדיהם ספוגים פלגי זיעה, והם סובבים עוד במעגל כסהרורים, משולהבים מקצב הזמרה ומזרועות האחרים השלובות וטפיחות הרגלים.

¹⁵² The term *hasidim* refers to a movement of mystical Judaism which became prominent in the 18th century, and which included components such as going back to nature and worshipping God in song and dance.

¹⁵³ A group of Jews who rebelled against the Hellenist rule in Palestine in the 2nd century BCE. In Zionist culture the Maccabees became a symbol of heroism and power.

¹⁵⁴ כולם גרונם ניחר כבר, בגדיהם ספוגים פלגי זיעה, והם סובבים עוד במעגל כסהרורים, משולהבים מקצב הזמרה ומזרועות האחרים השלובות וטפיחות הרגלים. המעגל סובב כמו מכוה עצמו... פינקלשטיין זה עמד באמצע המעגל והלהיבם בזמר: "ככה רוקדים א-אנו" – והמעגל ענה: "עברים! ככה עובדים אנו – חסידים! ככה כובשים אנו – מכבים! עד כלות הנפש – חסידים! זוהי תפילתנו – יהודים! זהו יעודנו – חסידים" – וכך בלי הרף ובלי סוף.

The groom sipped from the glass of wine, the bride raised her veil, her eyelashes twinkled with tears; she touched the glass with her lips. Break. The bride trembled, the groom's face trembled. Batya trembled too. (112)¹⁵⁵

In the diasporic Jewish wedding every step of the ritual seems to be restrained and measured up to the point, where the breaking of the glass cuts through the tension, making everyone tremble. The shiver shared by the bride, groom and Batya herself at that moment is a sign of a subtle but meaningful breach of boundaries between the different participants of the ceremony. When Boria asks Batya what it was that moved her so much, she explains: "I love symbols, and everything about the Jewish wedding is so symbolic. The breaking of the glass... the seven rounds" (112). The ritualistic gestures Batya mentions situate the romantic union within the collective Jewish memory. The seven rounds are reminiscent of the seven rounds around the walls of Jericho, the first city to be conquered after the exodus from Egypt, and the breaking of the glass invokes the destruction of the temple. Both rituals also enact gender difference through the distinct bodily gestures of the bride and groom – with the gentle feminine rounds and the masculine violent breaking. Batya's eventual transition from socialism to Zionism, I would propose, derives from an insistence upon both ethnic and gendered differences.

After discussing the wedding, the conversation between Batya and Boria turns to the engagement of Boria's sister to a gentile. The conversation discloses Batya's nascent nationalism and foreshadows her eventual immigration to Palestine. Here too the positions of the couple diverge:

[Batya:] And you do not care at all?

- About what?

¹⁵⁵ החתן גמע מהכוס, הכלה הרימה את צעיפה, על ריסייה נוצצות דמעות, נגעה בכוס בשפתייה. שבר. הכלה רעדה, רעד חלף בפני החתן. רעדה גם בתיה.

- That she is engaged to a Russian.
- Of course not, what kind of questions you ask, as if you came from some island. For me the question doesn't exist. I know no differences.
- And... I ... Boria... still feel differently. *It seems to me that there cannot be a full unification, there are still barriers, and one clash can destruct life completely. It seems to me that there cannot be full mutual understanding.* (114)¹⁵⁶

Batya's misgivings regarding the promises of socialism explicitly relate to the differences between Jews and gentiles. However, the context of the Jewish wedding and the engagement of Boria's sister insert gender into the conversation. Her language of "unification" (*hitmazgut*), barriers (*meḥitzot*) and destruction (*lehaḥriv*) echoes the Jewish wedding ceremony, where destruction is recalled at the same moment in which, supposedly, all the *meḥitzot* (barriers) between the bride and groom are removed. In Batya's last sentences – "there cannot be full unification, there are still barriers... there cannot be a full mutual understanding" – it seems as though ethnic distinctions are mapped onto gender difference. It is unclear who the parties never to understand each other are: the gentile and the Jew or the bride and the groom.¹⁵⁷ Batya and Boria themselves separate after Boria tries to rape Batya. Again, sexual violence against the Jewish woman is perpetrated by a Jewish man, as opposed to the national trope of Jewish women raped by gentiles. In fact, as with the father, Boria's attack on Batya derives from his position as a modernizing Jewish man. It is induced by a medical doctor's quasi-

¹⁵⁶ - ולך לא אכפת כלל? ¹⁵⁶

- מה?

- שהיא מתקשרת עם רוסי.

- מובן שלא. איזו שאלות את מעמידה, כאילו באת מאיזה אי. בשבילי השאלה אינה קיימת לגמרי. אינני יודע שום הבדלים.

- ואני... בוריה... מרגישה עוד אחרת. לי נדמה, כי אי אפשר שתהיה התמזגות שלמה, נשארות מחיצות, והתנגשות קלה שתתעורר פעם עלולה להחריב את החיים.

¹⁵⁷ Note that miscegenation between Jews and Christians appears as both alarming and exciting possibility in many of the Hebrew novels and stories written on the Russian revolution (Govrin 97-98). See, for example, Elisheva's novel *Simtaot* (Allies), which revolves around the relationship between a Jewish writer and a Russian poet at the backdrop of the young bohemian intelligentsia of post-revolution Moskva. See also, the relationship between Klara, the Zionist, and Boris the revolutionary in Sara Gluzman's *El ha-gvul* (To the Border).

scientific opinion that it is lack of sex that causes Boria to feel sick. With Batya's immigration, Zionism emerges in Alper's first novel as resistance to men's transgression of a woman's body. The conflation of national difference with gender difference allows the national project to become, rather than a project of masculinization, a mode of protecting the porous boundaries of the feminized body of the victim.

However, an undated story by Alper, which was never published, titled "Shgaga" (Mistake),¹⁵⁸ conjures sexual violence in the Zionist context (GI 472/68508). In this story, the woman-protagonist, a *ḥalutza*, is coerced by her father to arrange a visa for him to come to Palestine. The story opens with her complaint: "Father keeps demanding; in every letter he demands. He wants to come to the land already" (1). On her way to arrange the visa the protagonist loses her way in the city and ends up being raped by a strange man. If Zionist immigration appears at the end of *Pirpurey mahapekhaḥ* as an escape from sexual violence, "Shgaga" marks the dissolution of that dream. The father's demand is omnipresent and omnipotent. It reaches from afar and violates the protagonist in the land of her "refuge." Moreover, the very Zionist act itself, the father's immigration, is linked with the act of sexual assault in this story. The panacea has become a measure of wounding.

Now we may return to the orgiastic wedding scene in *Ha-mitnaḥalim ba-har*. A few chapters after this scene, the reader finds out that Sara and Yosef objected to the dancing of women and men together at their wedding, but their objection was dismissed by the people of the colony (75). Recalling Batya's investment in the persistence of gendered barriers (*meḥitzot*), the Eretz-Yisraeli wedding is implicated with a peculiar

¹⁵⁸ The medium level of proficiency in Hebrew indicates that it may have been in Alper's early years in the land.

kind of sexual violence, in which a couple is forced to accept and participate in a disruption of all boundaries. An instance from another unpublished manuscript by Alper, the *Mi-piv shel Fleisher* (The Story of Fleisher) a biography a Hebrew guard, features sexual humiliation that is reminiscent of the wedding scene in *Ha-mitnaḥalim ba-har*. In this text, protagonist Fleisher the guard locks a young couple in an orange-orchard for an entire night, knowing that young woman's disappearance for a whole night will embarrass her in front of her family (GI 472/19434 7). Like in the unpublished story "Shgaga," sexual violence is reproduced rather than repudiated in the Zionist space. The boundaries of the victimized body are not protected, as hoped, by the constitution of a distinct national identity. Rather sexual violence is transposed to the national setting and becomes part and parcel of the practice of making the nation.

* * *

At one point in *Ha-mitnaḥalim ba-har*, Malka, Sara's old friend, is compelled by the Jerusalemite orthodox community where she lives to marry a man she does not know. In its grotesqueness, Malka's wedding is reminiscent of Arye's wedding to his second wife Pnina in *Pirpurey mahapekhah*.¹⁵⁹ Note the similarities in the descriptions of the two scenes:

Pnina was so delicate, young. She stood beneath the canopy in her white dress pressed to her lean body. The white kerchief, the silk kerchief, on her head added beauty to her pale face. Light blush, covered her cheeks. In her eyes tears twinkled, and she gazed through them far away . . . It was as if she was fainting at the hands of the bride's maids . . . (*Pirpurey mahapekhah* 38)¹⁶⁰

Malka came out from beneath the canopy with the silk kerchief on her head, silk kerchief with long white fringes that gracefully fell on her slim shoulders. The silk kerchief cooled nicely her boiling temples. The righteous women celebrated their victory. The bride and groom themselves wandered around embarrassed.

¹⁵⁹ This is the night in which Batya has her drunken feast discussed above.

¹⁶⁰ פנינה היתה כה עדינה, צעירה. היא עמדה מתחת לחופה בשמלתה הלבנה, שהדקה את גופה הצר. המטפחת הלבנה, מטפחת המשי, שעל ראשה, הוסיפה חן מיוחד לפניה החיוורים. אדם קל, עדין, כיסה את לחייה. בעיניה נוצצו דמעות, והיא השקיפה בעדן הרחק הרחק לעבר הקרוב-הרחוק... כמתעלפת היתה בידי השושבינות...

Two people tied together and still distant from each other, like strangers. And Malka's eyes are dark, she does not see his face, and it seems that she is far away within her self, or within some being that is not she herself. (*Hahmitnahalim ba-har* 160)¹⁶¹

Both weddings celebrate arranged marriage between two people who are devalued in the economy of Jewish match-making. In both, the bride appears graceful, but at the same time weak, out of control and estranged. In both, vision is blurred, and the bride's deficient sight, her "own foreigner" (Cixous 10), carries her far away from the actual moment. The resemblance between the two weddings breaches the Eretz-Yisraeli tale, summoning into it an Other woman, "the sick sister." Under the canopy, Malka is a trace of the Diaspora staining the life-story of a model Zionist woman.

Through the mirroring between Pnina and Malka, fiction infiltrates the Eretz-Yisraeli biography. One may say, only the naïve would be surprised when biography discloses traces of fiction. However, in the context of Alper's writing, fiction is a fraught concept. Alper's own biographer, her brother-in-law Arye Hetzroni, recounts how after living on the *kibbutz* for some time, her passion for writing resurfaces, and she takes out the old manuscript of *Pirpurey mahapekhah* and browses through it at nights. Alper is then tempted to write an Eretz-Yisraeli story, but the story is rejected by the *kibbutz's* newsletter, as "the *kibbutz's* publication is supposed to reflect life on the *kibbutz* and the important questions at hand and not publish *fictional stories*" (*Ke-esh 'atzura* 19; my emphasis). Immediately after the rejection of her writing, according to Hetzroni, Alper becomes too ill to work and decides to leave the *kibbutz* unexpectedly, "without saying goodbye to the other members" (20). Alper's illness seems to coincide with the desire to

¹⁶¹ מלכה יצאה מתחת לחופה ומטפחת משי לראשה, מטפחת משי עם גדילים לבנים ארוכים, שנפלו בחן על כתפיה הצנומות. מטפחת המשי ציננה בנעימות צדעיה הלוהטים. הנשים החסודות חגגו נצחונן. בעלי השמחה עצמם התהלכו תועים-נבוכים. שני אנשים שנקשרו יחד ועדיין רחוקים הם זה מזה, כזרים. ועיני מלכה אפלות הן, אינה רואה פניו, והיא כשרויה הרחק בתוך עצמה, או בתוך ישות שלא היא ולא עצמה.

write fiction rather than document Zionist life, as if in reading through her diasporic fictional work the disease of exile infects her body. Thus, observing fiction sneaking into the biography, I do not mean merely to comment on the fictionality of every narrative. Rather, I am tracing a more disturbing trespass into the seemingly healthy Eretz-Yisraeli narrative. Alper's illness with the return to fiction and the two frail brides who mirror each other, make a connection between fiction (as opposed to biography) and the diasporic frail-blind-ill body (as opposed to healthy Eretz-Yisraeli body). The infiltration of fiction into biography, thus, has ideological implications. It ruptures the firm veneer of healthy national storytelling which, we recall, Katzanelson envisions for Alper.

The limits of the biographic are pushed even further by dint of the conspicuous similarities between Malka and Alper herself. Both women are odd women of letters, unfit for the work of the land. Moreover, both Malka and Alper eventually privilege relationships with women and girls over heterosexual partnerships and motherhood. The sad episode of Malka's marriage ends with Malka's divorce and return to the school for girls. There, one girl, a refugee from the Kishinev pogrom becomes her protégée. Alper, who also remained unmarried throughout her life, adopted at old age a young girl as well, a Holocaust survivor and took care of her for the rest of her life (Katzanelson, "Shnot hayeha" 203). While Sara had five sons, both Malka and Alper can only become adoptive mothers of girls. Whereas Sara describes herself as "partner of the great mother, the land" (101) and her sons as trees rooted in the land (116), the adoptive motherhood of Malka and Alper appears to correlate with both women's distance from the land. Their failure to form a heteronormative home is analogous to their failure as workers of the land. Thus, subtly, a strange circle is closed as the Other woman conjures a spectre of the "First"

woman, the epitome of selfhood, the Author. At the scene of the wedding the story matches “neither one nor two” women. Under the canopy, then, stands an-Other woman who was never married, a woman-friend, a storyteller, a mother, a daughter, a fictional woman and a “real” one.

I Want Rivka, I Need Rivka

The girl came out. Beautiful, eastern beauty, foreign, with no Jewish flair. She was wearing jewellery and make up. She is not a mate for her son. He does not need a woman to look at. (289)¹⁶²

When a Jewish Syrian family from Damascus offers their daughter as bride for Sara’s oldest son, the cross-ethnic match makes sense to Sara, for “this is also something to do for Zion, uniting into one nation communities that were separated in exile” (286). She resolves to go to Damascus to see the girl, in order to decide whether an engagement is suitable. However, as soon as she crosses the border into Syria, “a strange feeling came over Sara suddenly, as if the umbilical cord was cut between her and the land, her land” (287). From this point on, it seems that the fate of the proposed marriage is sealed. Something is torn. Therefore, when the girl turns out to be “not a mate for her son...a woman to look at,” a woman of intolerable excesses, it comes as no surprise.

“It’s a shame,” they said, “we wanted for our daughter, who is very educated, speaks French and English, an Ashkenazi man, to whom we would be very generous.”

“Never mind,” she consoled them, “you’ll find one.”

“But why don’t you want her?”

“*I need Rivka*,” she said to them, “*I want Rivka*, who goes down by herself to fountain with the pitcher, who would be a *fellaha* for my son the *fellah*.” (289-290; my emphasis)¹⁶³

¹⁶² יצאה אליהם הנערה. יפהפיה, יופי מזרחי, זר, ללא חן יהודי. ענודה עדיים, כחל ושרק כולה. אין היא בת זוג לבנה. לא אשה ¹⁶³ להסתכל בה דרושה לו.

Again one woman summons another. The invocation of the biblical Rivka reminds me of another failed matrimony. In *Pirpurey mahapekhhah*, when Arye first meets Pnina,¹⁶⁴ his second wife, he recalls his first meeting with Sheine, his first wife and Batya's mother. Curiously, when he recalls Sheine, Arye too thinks of Rivka. One woman summons another and another:

He has imagined the girl as Rivka the foremother . . . tall, with long dark braids, good eyes, pure . . . they came to the inn. The father of the bride met them – long beard, rabbi-like figure – and let them in. At the table Sheine sat with her mother. Arye felt great disappointment: she was short, with small eyes, blonde . . . (32)¹⁶⁵

In Genesis, “Isaac then brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he took Rebekah [Rivka] as his wife. Isaac loved her, and thus found comfort after his mother's death” (*Genesis* 24.67). Rivka the foremother was the perfect bride, a consolation for the loss of the mother, completely comforting, a perfect replacement. No woman gives such perfect satisfaction in neither of the texts discussed here. Sheine is blonde; Pnina is *nida*¹⁶⁶ on the wedding night; the Syrian bride is too beautiful. In Genesis, a circle is closed with full compensation for the loss of the mother. In *Ha-mitnaḥalim ba-har* too a circle is closed, but differently. Whereas when Sara crosses the border to Syria, she feels as though “the umbilical cord was cut between her and the land” (287), when she boards

¹⁶³ שאלה אם תתרצה לעבוד עבודת אדמה, כי בנה עובד אדמה הוא. הרימה הנערה עיניים תמהות אל הוריה. "ברוך השם," אמרו "אין בתנו צריכה לעבוד, חס ושלום. נדוניה מוכנה לה. יבוא בנך אלינו, יעבוד עמנו בעסק, או לא יעבוד כלל. ימצא, ברוך השם, מזון הרבה ומשרתים רבים." "ואתה זוכר מה שאמר אברהם לאליעזר?" הזכירה להם שרה, "ואם לא תאבה האישה ללכת אחריו ונקית משבועתי, אני שבתי מן הגולה למולדת לא אשיב את בני לגולה." "ברוך השם," אמרו, "גם פה מולדת." היא טוענת להם בחיטים והם עונים לה בשעורים. קמה להיפרד מהם. "חבל," אמרו לה, "רצינו בשביל בתנו, שמלומדת היא הרבה, מדברת צרפתית ואינגליזית, רצינו בשבילה בחור שיכנוי, שנעניק לו טובה הרבה." "אין דבר, ימצא לכם," ניחמתם שרה, "יימצא לכם." "ומדוע את לא רוצה?" "אני רוצה את רבקה," אמרה להם, "את רבקה היורדת בעצמה עם הכד אל העין, שתהיה פלחית עם בני הפלח."

¹⁶⁴ We may also want to recall here Pnina as the Other woman for Hannah in the story about the birth of Samuel (I Samuel 1)

¹⁶⁵ הנערה הצטיירה בדימויו בצורת רבקה אמנו... גבוהה, בעלת צמות שחורות ארוכות, עיניים טובות, זכות... הם באו לפונדק. פגש אותם אבי הכלה, בעל זקן מגודל – דמות רבנית – והכניס אותם פנימה. על יד השולחן ישבה שיינה אצל אמה. לאריה היתה אכזבה גמורה: היא היתה נמוכה, עיניה לא גדולות, בלונדית...

¹⁶⁶ She is menstruating, which according the Jewish law means that a man is forbidden to touch her.

the train on her way back she is anxious to go back “as if something may happen to the land in her absence, as if she has left little babies by themselves” (290). Something is torn but then repaired. The circle of motherly relations between Sara and the land is closed, when the foreign girl, the girl who is not Rivka, is done away with. It does not seem coincidental now that Alper named her protagonist Sara instead of Lea (the real name of the biography’s subject). Was it a matter of keeping her privacy? Probably. Indeed, after Lea Cohen’s death Alper changes back the name for the next edition. Yet, can one avoid the feeling that this is also about Lea’s eyes,¹⁶⁷ about the dangerous intimacy the name produces with the Other woman (recall Malka’s blindness), with the rejected bride?

Not long after the incident of the rejected engagement in Damascus, a series of instances conclude the biography rendering several other women’s bodies superfluous. In the first instance, Sara severely reproaches a teacher for painting her fingernails and lips red: “I have seen how teachers like you teach . . . walking with the girls . . . they lunge at the Geranium bush, pluck the red leaflets of the flower and stick them to their nails and lips” (305).¹⁶⁸ The teacher’s painted fingernails wound the land by seducing girls to pluck geranium bushes. Her hands are malignant like those of a woman-painter whom Sara reproaches in the next page for engaging in “amusement and art” when the People is in need of “hands to work in building and rescuing the nation” (305-306). Women’s useless hands come up in the final scene of the biography as well,¹⁶⁹ where yet another woman is scolded, a writer, who proposes to write a story about the heroic family from the mountain. In response to the idea, Sara is infuriated:

¹⁶⁷ The Biblical Lea has weak eyes which is why Jacob prefers Rachel.

¹⁶⁸ "מורה בשפתיים וציפורניים צבועות?"... "ראיתי איך מהנכות מורות כמוך... בטיילן עם הילדות פה, אין הילדות מתבוננות לא בנוף ולא ביישוב (הרי יצאו ללמוד משהו!) -- אלא עטות אל שיח הגרניום, מורטות את העלעלים האדומים מן הפרח ומדביקות אותן לציפורניהן ולשפתותיהן."

¹⁶⁹ In the first edition. In the next editions a chapter that describes Lea’s death is added.

In a hundred years we would have time to write books. Now we need workers of the land, now we first have to set the ground for the People, and the important books will be written when our lives grow from the ground. First we have to resurrect the body of the People. God too first created the body and then put spirit into it. The People of Israel has written enough books. The spirit of the people needs to rest. The People has been uprooted for two thousands years from the roots of life, it has lost its sense of life. We have to first return it to the origins of creation. (307-308)¹⁷⁰

Sara's tirade reiterates the quintessential Zionist narrative of "the physical rooting of the 'people of the air' (*luftmenschen*) in the soil of Palestine and the reclamation of the body" (Biale 176). But while the resurrected Zionist body in question, as we know, "was always masculine" (Weiss 15; Gluzman 11-33), Sara speaks to women and about women. She proceeds:

In Tel Aviv women walk all painted and adorned. It is disgusting to look at their faces. When I come to Tel Aviv, I walk the streets hastily looking down in shame, because I cannot see these monsters with the plucked painted eyebrows and the horrible outlandish fingernails and lips. These eyes-shadows and the blown up hair, which they leave untied on the nape so that they can look like little girls. And men too. The image of God is erased from the faces of human beings . . . they were supposed to build a home for the People . . . and they are making themselves into dolls. (308)¹⁷¹

Indeed, Sara's fury is first and foremost directed at women, "these monsters" with their painted faces, lips and fingernails. This is not inconsistent with mainstream Zionist culture's emphasis on asceticism (Almog 317-350). However, a notable shift occurs when Zionist discourse of the body targets women's corporeality rather than men's. The inadequacy of the Jewish masculine body is usually depicted in terms of lack. The

¹⁷⁰ בעוד מאה שנה נוכל להתפנות לכתוב ספרים. עתה נחוצים לנו עובדי אדמה, עתה יש ליצור ראשית כל קרקע לעם, והספרים החשובים ייכתבו כאשר יצמחו חיינו מן הקרקע. ראשית יש להקים את גוף העם. גם אלוהים ברא בראשית את הגוף ואחר כך הפיה בו רוח חיים. די ספרים כתב עם ישראל. רוח העם צריך לנוח. העם תלוש זה אלפיים שנה משרשי החיים, אבדו לו חושי החיים. יש להשיב אותו אל היניקה ממקורות היצירה...

¹⁷¹ בתל אביב מתהלכות נשים צבועות ומפורכסות, גועל להביט בפניהן. כשאני מזדמנת לתל אביב, אני עוברת בחפזה את הרחוב בעינים מורדות מבושה, שאיני יכולה לראות מפלצות אלה עם גבות-העינים המרוטות והמצויירות והשפתיים והציפורניים האיומות והצעקניות. הכחל הזה והשער המנופח, המפוזר על העורף כדי להיראות כילדות כולן. וכן גם גברים. נמחה צלם אלוהים מפני האדם.. הוטל עליהם לבנות בית לעם... והם עושים עצמם בובות.

diasporic masculine body is underdeveloped, weak, neglected, deficient, sometimes castrated (Boyarin 81-126, 231-244; Gluzman 34-66; Gilman 49-92). The bad feminine body, in contrast, is over-made-up, overstressed, blown-up, monstrous in its excessiveness. Once more, at stake are the limits of the body, as the fingernails, the hair, the lips and the eyebrows all become noisy and hectic frontiers, over-emphasized, artificial boundary-lines.

It does not seem coincidental that both writing and women are despised in the same speech in the last scene of *Ha-mitnaḥalim ba-har*. Both seem to represent useless adornment in ascetic space of the nation. While it was not uncommon for Zionist men to blame women and femininity for inhibiting the work of the land,¹⁷² here women are not only dangerous elements within Zionist society, but also embody the failure of the People. Men's transgressions appear as secondary in this context (Sara briefly comments: "and men too"); indeed, it is women's excess, and not men's lack, that serves here as a metonym for the failure of the People to transition from texts to land. The Zionist project of body formation is articulated, not in terms of building, growing muscles and phalluses, but rather in terms of undressing the body of adornments and ornaments, producing a functional ascetic form whose boundaries are natural and clear and whose purpose is the work of the land.

The writer, like the bride, the teacher and the painter – and like Shlomit in Ben-Yehuda's story – all engage in expansive ornamentality that cannot be contained within

¹⁷² See, for example, Yaakov Rabinowitz' article "Al ha-sarot ve-ha-sganot" published in the publication of the unaffiliated women *Ha-isha*, in which Rabinowitz scold urban "intelligent" women for not taking part in the revival of the land; for being "educated, musical, theatrical, lean, stylistic. . ." but lacking "simple and ordinary virtues." For Rabinowitz this kind of excessive femininity makes women "strangers" in the Zionist space, while for Sara, as argued above, women are the quintessential sign for the deficiency of the Zionist project.

the Zionist ascetic space. All are in fact not Rivka, the simple, straightforward *fellaha*. But whereas *Pirpurey mahapekhah*, where we have first encountered the fantasy of Rivka, was published under the pseudonym Ella R., *Ha-mitnaḥalim ba-har* is published under the real name of the author, Rivka Alper. If in the first novel Rivka is a fantasmatic distant figure, unattainable in the distorted economy of diasporic gender-relations the novel depicts, in *Ha-mitnaḥalim ba-har* Rivka is present. In fact, the reader easily recognizes the woman-writer in the final chapter as Rivka Alper. We know that Alper hurt her hand, while working as an orange packer (Hetzroni 202). In *Ha-mitnaḥalim ba-har*, the woman writer also blames her damaged hand for making her leave agricultural work, to which Sara responds “forget the hand excuse . . . this is not what keeps you from working, forget it” (309). The actuality of the deficient hand is rejected. Instead, the hand is an excuse, a superfluous signifier, a metonym for the overall failure of the writer to be Rivka, and, in turn, of the failure of the entire People who persist in writing books and dressing up. At the same time, however, it is the hand that makes Rivka known to the reader, the reader who knows Rivka’s biography and knows that she has hurt her hand orange-packing. In other words, recognizing the disabled hand I also recognize the writing hand. I know Rivka the writer who has made herself visible at the very end of the novel only to be shamed, who has conjured her self as the finale point of the biography of another woman, only to be disqualified as a valid authorial voice; or is it to undermine the Zionist myth she has just finished to forge? In any case, the damaged hand is a moment of writing, a site where the act of writing becomes visible; it is a site where what *is* is not; the damaged hand *is* and is not an excuse; Rivka *is* and is not Rivka. The writer,

notably, is not really disabled (castrated?), according to Sara, but she is outrageously engaged with the useless excess of meaning-production – writing and making excuses.

Concluding Notes: A Chaste and Beautiful Bride

Considering the damaged or not damaged hand, am I thrown back into a conversation about phallic images and castration complexes? Should I deem Alper comparable to the male Zionist writers who agonized for not being strong enough to work the land?¹⁷³ I could, but I do not want to. Instead, I contend that what we have here again is an issue of excess, not lack. Enabling a breach between biography, autobiography and fiction, exposing the shame of writing, the writer's damaged hand summons all the Other women, all the failed brides. Here is how it happens. When Sara is reprimanded by her husband for not being hospitable toward the writer, she responds: "this is hospitality too . . . telling one my true feelings toward her. I will not flatter a person and tell her: *you are "a chaste and beautiful bride,"* when she is not chaste in my mind" (207; my emphasis).¹⁷⁴ In the Babylonian Talmud the term "a chaste and beautiful bride," "*kalah naah ve-ḥasudah*," is invoked during a discussion of a case of a bride who is blind or lame (*ḥigeret o suma*; *Ktubot* 2.15). The question then arises whether one is allowed to lie in such case about the bride's appearance, and say that she is *naah ve-ḥasudah* even though she is not. All the bad brides come back to mind with this dilemma: the blind (Malka and Lea), the unchaste (the teacher, the painter, the Syrian bride, the monstrous women of Tel Aviv, the writer), the disabled (Alper). All the brides who will never be

¹⁷³ Such crisis is central, for example, in biography and writing of the prominent second immigration wave writer Yosef Ḥayim Brenner. See: Shapira 169-170; Gluzman 136-181; See also Brenner's *Shkhol ve-kishalon* (Breakdown and Bereavement).

¹⁷⁴ גם זוהי מין מידת הכנסת אורחים... לאמור לאיש את אשר עם לבי עליו, אינני מחניפה לאדם להגיד לו: את "כלה נאה וחסודה", " והיא אינה חסודה בעיני.

Rivka. In the Talmudic tractate Beit Hillel resolves that the words *kalah naah ve-ḥasudah* are allowed, for “a person’s mind should be involved with others,” that is, because the meaning of words is ethically given within the relations between one and others. The words *kalah naah ve-ḥasudah* are signs that gain meaning only through their situatedness within the context of the wedding; meaning is never inherent to words; it is produced when one’s mind is “involved with others”; it is always an excess; and one should not shame a bride.

And so, as the writer “walks down the mountain, stepping easily and bravely, wrapped in heavy thoughts,” in the last line of the biography, perhaps she contemplates the Talmudic grace of generous lie that was not bestowed upon her; she who would never be a bride. This woman’s story ends with an ambiguous moment of self-negation. Her writing has been named useless and yet it is the only way for her to participate in the nation.

Her friend, the poet Zelda wrote about her, a year after her death:

Sometimes I saw her as a “*rusalka*” [mermaid] wandering amidst concrete-walls. In her demeanor there was always the freshness of the sea, the freedom of the ocean, and within her soul pearly pure beauty glowed . . . but for some reason she tried to cover up her traces. She folded neatly her long mermaid-like hair, and made the boldness and the secrecy disappear from her blue eyes . . . she wore a “uniform” of a political activist [*askanit*], a “uniform” of a writer. (169)¹⁷⁵

Zelda boldly writes the out-of-placeness of Alper’s feminine body within the Zionist space. To belong to the Zionist space, she needs to perform a strange transaction. She needs to diminish her hair and eyes and cover herself with the “uniform of the writer,”

¹⁷⁵ פעמים ראיתיה כ"רוסלקה" התועה בין חומות של בטון, כי מהליכותיה נשבה תמיד רעננות של ים, נשבו מרחבי האוקיינוס החופשי, ומנפשה ניצנץ יופי טהור, פניני. היא ניסתה משום-מה לטשטש את סימניה. את שיערה הארוך, שיער בת גלים, קיפלה בקפדנות. מעיניה התכולות העלימה את העזות והסודיות, ולבשה "מדים" של עסקנית, "מדים" של סופרת. Zelda writes similar things to Alper herself, referring to Alper as “*Rusalka*” and “a little mermaid,” in another undated letter (GI 472/21386/4).

drawing clearly the boundary-lines of her body. While feminine excess has been named monstrous, the writer produces herself as *dalut savlanit u-varah*, a uni-form, clear with no excess. Against the mermaid whose disability is a sign of disconnection from the land, the “uniform of a writer” forges a body for Alper. From the 1940s on, we recall, she writes only committed documentation of the work of the land. Writing makes a body for the tortured mermaid, with healthy limbs which can walk the land. The pages of the book, the “uniform of the writer,” may serve as *mehitzot* protecting that damaged feminine body *and* the fragile feminine story. But they, the pages of the book, are tenuous frontiers, for the book, like the body, is “never done with dying,” that is, with being torn and glued over and over.

CHAPTER V

Foreign Hands: Femininity, Racism and the Discourse of Hebrew Labor in the Stories of Neḥama Poḥatchevsky

Introduction: “And Her Name Was Labor”

One of the colonists had a daughter and *her name was Jewish labor* . . . And then the young worker [*Ha-po‘el ha-tza‘ir*]¹⁷⁶ came to his inn, the important, industrious, excellent, spiritual giant young man, born out of a drop of ink . . . and he is armed with many new values . . . He came to the old pioneer, and said to him: . . . give me your daughter . . . I will care for your daughter, “labor,” who is being worked by foreigners . . . With a spear and a lance, I will lawfully marry her . . .” (Rosen 4; my emphasis)¹⁷⁷

The Zionist myth about the struggle for exclusive Hebrew labor in the colonies usually appears in Zionist historiography as an ideological clash between two generations of Zionism: the agricultural bourgeois colonists of the first Zionist immigration wave (1881-1904), who employed cheap Arab labor in their farms, and the passionate youth of the second immigration wave (1905-1914), who strove to regenerate the Jewish people through the work of the land. This idealist account of Hebrew labor has been contested by post-Zionist and Marxist scholars, who have described Hebrew labor as a colonialist enterprise, facilitated by European financial support, and aimed at ensuring Jewish

¹⁷⁶ “Ha-po‘el ha-tza‘ir” was a Zionist non-Marxist labor organization focused on the conquest of labor in Palestine. The organization was established in 1905 in Petah Tikva and in 1930 it merged with “Aḥdut ha-‘avoda” party and became party of “Mapay,” the dominant political party in the Yishuv and later in the State of Israel.

¹⁷⁷ לאחד מחלוצי יסוד המעלה ברשל"צ בת ושמה "עבודה יהודית"... ויזדמן לפונדקו "הפועל הצעיר", הבחור החשוב, החרוץ המעולה, ענק הרוח שנוצר מטיפת הדיו של אהרון הנביא שלכם, והוא מזויין בערכין חדשים רבים... נגש הוא להחלוץ הזקן... ואומר לו בזה"ל... הב לי בתך... אנכי אשגיח על "עבודה" בתך שתעבד ע"י זרים—אנוכי... אקדשה כדת רבותי ב"הפועל הצעיר"...

dominance in the land (Shafir), a project with false socialist pretense covering up nationalistic-imperialist intentions (Sternhell). Yet, gendered analyses of Zionism, such as the ones by Boyarin, Biale and Gluzman, tend to remain within the idealist framework, albeit complicating it, positing as their main site of investigation the project's psychic and erotic baggage. While these critiques, indeed, demystify the romantic veneer of Hebrew labor, they tend to elide or downplay the colonial relations of power that sustain it, construing it as an intra-Jewish complex concerning first and foremost Jewish men who are re-built their bodies through the work of the land (Boyarin 308-309).

The quotation that opens this chapter, taken from an article by Rishon Le-Tziyon colonist Sh.P Rosen published in 1912, may serve as an illustration of the masculinity-centered vision of the struggle for Hebrew labor. It depicts a conflict between an old and weary Jewish father and a young and virile Hebrew man over the body of a woman, whose name is *'avodah* – labor.¹⁷⁸ The idea of the young worker as defending the daughter *'avodah* from the “work” of the foreigners brings to mind two old patriarchal stories: that of the white colonialist man protecting his women from the assaults of the natives (Ware 4-11), and that of Jewish women raped during a pogrom while their emasculated husbands are watching.¹⁷⁹ Rosen's parable opens these tropes up for disruptive readings. Rosen, the colonist, in fact intends to mock the Zionist masculinist myth of labor. Indeed, his article is mostly a tirade against the presumptions of the unskilled and inexperienced “young workers” to “conquer the land.” At the same time,

¹⁷⁸ It is notable that Rosen uses the term “Jewish” which associates the diasporic feminized image of the Jew and not the term Hebrew which connect with the masculinist vision of the New Hebrew.

¹⁷⁹ The canonical representation of that narrative is Ḥayim Nahman Bialik's poem “Be-‘ir ha-haregah” (In the City of Slaughter), which contains a depiction of Jewish men hiding and watching while their women and daughters are being raped. For a female-author's revision of these narratives, see Chapter Four of this dissertation.

however, the parable also displaces the common trope of the land as a woman (Pinsker, “Imagining the Beloved” 110-113; Katz 82-94), by positing as its subject, not the stable land, but the dynamic concept of labor.

The stories of Neḥama Poḥatchevsky, as shown in the following pages, allow us to think further of the possibility that “*her* name” was indeed “Jewish labor”; that is, to think of Hebrew labor as a feminine subject. Poḥatchevsky, in my reading, “feminizes” the Zionist discourse of exclusive Hebrew labor in Palestine, by transforming it from a discourse of masculine body-building and conquest of land into a discourse of charity, sentimentality, and hospitality. Furthermore, reading Hebrew labor through the category of “the feminine” does not permit us to remain in the intra-Jewish mode as in masculinity-centered reading. Rather than postulating the “feminine” as an ethical alternative for the racist framework of the Zionist project of labor, Poḥatchevsky makes racism too into “a feminine thing,” by constructing a fragile feminine subject, whose porous boundaries are the site of passionate hatred of the colonial Other. Through labor, this chapter thus brings together some of the issues discussed in the previous chapters, namely, women’s investment in dilemmas of land, nativeness and rootedness, the feminine body as a national body, and the colonial anxiety of the Zionist feminine subject *vis-à-vis* those marked as the Others of the nation.

Neḥama Poḥatchevsky was born in 1869 in the city of Brisk in Belarus, and moved with her family to the city of Tsaritsyn when she was nine years old. A brilliant student in her youth, Poḥatchevsky was taken out of school, because her father was worried about the influence of Russian culture upon her. From this point on, she received private lessons from a Jewish tutor and consequently developed great devotion for the

Hebrew language and literature. In 1889 she married Yḥiel Michal Poḥatchevsky, who was one of six men chosen by the Baron Rothschild to work as agricultural instructors in the Zionist colonies. Following their marriage, the couple immigrated to Palestine and settled in the colony of Rishon Le-Tziyon. Poḥatchevsky's political and social activism was extraordinary for a woman of the first Zionist immigration wave. She was heavily engaged with the Yemenite community of Rishon Le-Tziyon and devoted a few of her early stories to this community. She founded several philanthropic organizations and was active in the struggle for women's suffrage in the Yishuv (see Chapter Three). While she published short stories and essays in various Hebrew publications as of 1889, her first collection of short fiction *Bi-Yehudah ha-ḥadashah* (In New Judea) came out in 1911. The second collection *Ba-kfar u-ba-'avodah* (In the Village and at Work), which is the focus of this chapter, was published in 1930, but contains stories written throughout the 1910s and 1920s (Govrin, "Nefesh" 114-171). As Nurith Govrin comments, there is a startling contrast between Poḥatchevsky's full creative and engaged public life and the air of melancholia, desperation and disappointment that saturates her stories (Govrin 129-132). Yaffa Berlovitz reads Poḥatchevsky's melancholia as a form of protest against the patriarchal Zionist political system ("Literature" 60-68). While not presuming to resolve what Govrin terms "the enigma" (*ha-ḥidah*) of Poḥatchevsky's life, this chapter reads Poḥatchevsky's literary melancholia as a feature of her version of nationalism, according to which the stakes of the feminine subject in the nation are so high, that any perceived national threat is experienced as a painful narcissistic wound.

In his monumental historical study of modern Hebrew literature from 1880 to 1980, Gershon Shaked briefly refers to Neḥama Poḥatchevsky as a naïve writer whose

work was merely of folklorist and documentary value, “a kind of very selective testimony of the zeitgeist of the period” (153). Although by now Shaked’s work has been contested for its Zionist bias and simplistic mapping of Hebrew literature,¹⁸⁰ overall his distinctions between literary center and periphery are still generally sustained in the field of Hebrew literature. Poḥatchevsky, in this context, remains a marginal Hebrew writer, that is, not a noteworthy participant in the famous revival of Hebrew literature in the early decades of the 20th century. Govrin, another prominent Israeli literary historian, in her comprehensive biographical essay on Poḥatchevsky, suggests that Poḥatchevsky’s marginalization derives from her position as both a First Aliyah [first Zionist immigration wave] agricultural colonist and a woman (114).¹⁸¹ Indeed, by the time Poḥatchevsky published her first collection of short fiction in 1911, and even more so when the second collection came out in 1930, the literary and political elite of the Zionist Yishuv largely consisted of the young intellectuals of the second Zionist immigration wave, who were committed to avant-garde politics and experimental modernist literature. The “under-developed” fragmentary culture and bourgeois politics of the First immigration wave were thus perceived as obsolete in the collective consciousness of the pre-state Zionist community (Berlovitz, *Lehamtzi* 7-14).

Govrin’s attention to Poḥatchevsky’s position as a woman-writer foreshadows the work of later feminist scholars of Hebrew literature, who read her stories as representations of early Zionist feminism. As mentioned above, noting Poḥatchevsky’s

¹⁸⁰ See, for example, Shachar Pinsker’s study *Literary Passport*, which reads the making of modernist Hebrew literature, not in terms of Zionist historiography, but in terms of its relations with European modernism. 17-25

¹⁸¹ The first Zionist immigration wave to Palestine, referred to in Zionist historiography as the First Aliyah, took place in the years 1881-1904. During these years around 29,000 Jews immigrated to Palestine. Most of them settled in the old cities of Jaffa and Jerusalem, but a small number of immigrants established agricultural colonies (*moshavot*), which are now the image most associated in Zionist collective memory with the first immigration wave.

emphasis on the failures and suffering of the settlers, especially of women, Yaffa Berlovitz, for example, claims that Poḥatchevsky makes melancholia a channel for social protest against women's oppression in early Zionist communities ("Literature by Women" 60-68). Orly Lubin's close reading of Poḥatchevsky's story "Bil'adeha" (Without Her) complicates Berlovitz' interpretation, proposing that the subversive locus of the text lies in the concreteness of the diseased feminine body. While within the Zionist cultural vocabulary disease is often a metaphor for the diasporic situation (Gluzman 16-18), in Poḥatchevsky's story, Lubin claims, the illness of the female protagonist cannot be incorporated into the Zionist logic. Lubin further claims that "Bil'adeha" subverts the Zionist narrative by deconstructing gender as an organizing category for nationalism. Whereas as a gendered discourse, Zionism associates exile with femininity and national revival with the regeneration of masculinity, Poḥatchevsky's text destabilizes the Zionist arrangement of gendered identities by marking both male and female figures alternately as feminine-exilic and masculine-Eretz-Yisraeli. "Bil'adeha" is subversive, according to Lubin, for it does not suit the Zionist narrato-logical framework; for it does not make Zionist sense (101-116).

My readings of Poḥatchevsky's stories also highlight her complicated invocations of diseased bodies and fluid gender-markers. However, my interpretation of these elements is different from that of Lubin. Whereas for Lubin, Poḥatchevsky's deconstruction of the category of gender is intertwined with her "intrusive critique" of Zionism and its practices of exclusion and marginalization (115-116), in my reading it is part of Poḥatchevsky's venture of feminizing the tenets of Zionism, not as a way of disrupting them but as way of reclaiming them. Rather than not making Zionist sense, as

Lubin would have it, Poḥatchevsky, in my reading, strives to make Hebrew Labor make feminized sense. Thus, oft-mentioned melancholia that saturates Poḥatchevsky's writing is not a form of protest (Berlovitz) or subversion (Lubin) against patriarchal Zionism, but rather a kind of sediment, a trace of her Sisyphean endeavor of making Zionism her own project. The feminized protagonists of Poḥatchevsky's stories desperately try to become successful workers of the land, but despite all their sacrifices, they repeatedly fail in their ventures. If in the previous chapters we have identified "the sick sister," who is not suitable for the Zionist project, in several of Poḥatchevsky's stories, "sick sisters" in the form of weak, self-sacrificing figures make their best efforts to be proper subjects of the nation. The impossibility of that endeavor accounts for the stories' melancholic tone.

Questions Known to Her: "The Feminine" and Zionist Ethics

Why should we always give and give?
(Neḥama Poḥatchevsky, *Sheelot gluyot* 68; my emphasis)

In 1908 Poḥatchevsky passionately intervenes in a heated discussion that for many marks the first Zionist debate over the question of Jewish-Arab relations in Palestine (Gorni 48-51; Berlovitz 141-148; Oppenheimer 23-24; Ramras Rauch 4-5). This debate begins with the publication of the essay "Sheelah na'alamah" (Hidden Question) by Itzhak Epstein, a Hebrew-teacher from Rosh Pina, which questions the morality of the Jewish settlement in Palestine insofar as it involves deporting Arab peasants from their lands (193-206).¹⁸² Distressed by the expulsion of the *fellaḥin* (Arab peasants) from the lands of the colony of Metula in 1896 (Berlovitz, *Lehamtzi* 141), "Epstein," as Gila Ramras-Rauch puts it,

¹⁸² Epstein presented his essay in 1907 at the 7th Zionist Congress and then published it in *Ha-shiloah* in 1908.

“reminded his listeners and readers that Palestine was not, in any sense, a land without a people” (4). Consequently, he suggested greater consideration of the Arab inhabitants of the land in buying lands for Zionist settlement, as well as Zionist investment in Jewish-Arab cooperation in working the land (Ramras-Rauch 4; Epstein 206). While Epstein’s concept of such cooperation was largely based on the Orientalist conception of the Zionists as “civilizing” agents in Palestine, his ideas were considered radical at the time and thus aroused much anger among his fellow settlers.¹⁸³

Pohatchevsky was one of the angry respondents to “Sheelah Na‘alamah.” In her essay “Sheelot gluyot” (Known Questions) published in the next issue of *Ha-shiloah* in 1908, she rejects Epstein’s suggestions as unrealistic, and associates his ethical deliberations with a “diasporic” mode of thinking, unsuited to “the practical logic that a reviving nation needs” (67). She writes:

How badly the people of Israel wanted to be liked by the Russian people, and to acquire their love? We gave the best of our sons for the freedom of the people of the land [‘*am ha-aretz* – the Russian people in this case], and how did they repay us? . . . We should leave this road of foolishness and go straight to our revival. We should start caring for ourselves, our existence and our happiness . . . “What we can give to the Arabs they cannot receive from anyone else,” Our God in heavens! *Why should we always give and give?* To the one – the spirit, to the other – the body, and to the Arabs – the remainder of the hope to live as free people on our historic land?! (68; my emphasis)¹⁸⁴

If the marker of national revival is care for the self only, then ethical concern for others, as with Epstein, is a risky business, a zero-sum game, that eventually entails giving everything up: The spirit, the body, and all national aspirations. Pohatchevsky’s response

¹⁸³ Other respondents were, for example, Moshe Smilansky, in the essay “Me-‘inyaney ha-yishuv” (On Issues from the Yishuv from 1908 and Aharon David Gordon in his 1909 essay “Pitaron lo ratzionali” (Irrational Solution. Both articles were published in *Ha-po‘el ha-tza‘ir*.

¹⁸⁴ כמה ביקש ישראל למצוא חן, למשל, בעיני העם הרוסי ולקנות את אהבתו! את מבחר בנינו הוצאנו לטבח למען חירותו של עם הארץ, וכמה שלמו לנו . . . על כן נעזבה-נא דרך כסל זה ונלך במסילות ישרות אל תחייתנו. נתחיל לדאוג לנו לעצמנו לקיומנו ולאשרנו! . . . מה שאנחנו יכולים לתת לערביים, לא יוכלו לקבל מכל עם אחר. אבינו שבשמיים! מפני מה צריכים אנו תמיד רק לתת לתת? לזה—הנפש, לזה—הגוף ולא לה— שארית התקווה לחיות בתור עם בן-חורין על אדמתו ההיסטורית!

closely resembles the response of her friend, the author Moshe Smilansky,¹⁸⁵ who calls Epstein's suggestions "slaves' morality," and claims that even if Epstein does not have the courage to admit it, his suggestions in fact imply "take your hands off the land of your forefathers; others have already taken it" (5). Like Pohathcevsky, he associates altruistic attitudes toward the Arabs with imminent destruction of the Jewish people:

We should not and we cannot treat them in the same way that the European people treat the people they find in their new colonies! We shall remember the command: every soul shall live! *But we will not kill ourselves for others!* ... It is not moral? No, it is moral enough! It is not moral to hand the weak to the strong and expect the integrity of the strong. It is moral for the weak to imitate the strong. We do not want to stay weak and to ask for mercy from our enemies; we shall be as strong as they are.¹⁸⁶ (6-9)

Smilansky's employment of the analogy between Zionism and European colonialism (which he contests) is instructive, for it speaks to the split self-perception that to a large extent legitimated the Zionist colonialist practices. According to this perception, the Jews in Palestine are, on the one hand, as weak as they were in Europe and thus cannot be blamed for oppressing, dominating and exploiting the Arabs; on the other hand, the Jews should never allow themselves to be as weak as they were in Europe, because such weakness equals destruction (Shapira 84-121). In this frame of thought, "giving," "helping," or "teaching" the Arabs is not the work of "benevolent" rulers, but rather a sign of dangerous weakness, which would inevitably lead to foregoing the national space

¹⁸⁵ Moshe Smilansky (1874-1953) was an author and colonist based in Rehovot. One of his most famous works is the short fiction collection *Bney arav* (Sons of Arabia, 1914), which is considered one of the first representations of Arabs and Bedouins in Hebrew literature.

¹⁸⁶ לא אנחנו בדרך הזאת לא נלך! יקר לנו מוסרנו הלאומי אבל לא מוסר של עבדים. לנו אמרו: הארץ הזאת נתונה לך!.. אל לנו להפקיע את מתנתנו הטבעית לטובתם של האחרונים! אמנם איננו צריכים ואיננו יכולים להתייחס אליהם באופן שמתייחסים כל עמי אירופה אל אותם העמים שמצאום במושבותיהם החדשות. אנחנו נזכור את הדברים הגדולים: חיה כל נשמה! אבל לא נמית את עצמנו בשביל האחרים! ... אין זה מוסרי? לא, זה די מוסרי! לא אותו המעשה נקרא מוסרי, המוסר את החלש בידי התקיף ומקווה ליושרו של התקיף. מוסרי נקרא אותו המעשה, הנותן את היכולת בידי החלש להדמות לתקיף. אין אנו רוצים להשאר חלשים לבקש רחמים ויושר ממתנגדינו, הנהי תקיפים כמוהם ויותר מהם, ואז נדבר דברים בשער, ואז נשתוו ונעשה שלום בשער כאנשים שניים!

and going back, mentally if not also physically, to the Diaspora, which means, indeed, within a Zionist mindset, no less than “killing ourselves for others!”

The terms of the 1908 debate may be read against certain strands within feminist theory, especially post-Freudian and post-structuralist revisions of psychoanalysis, which contemplate “a feminine” ethics of the self-other relation. Nancy Chodorow’s claim that – “feminine personality comes to define itself in relation and in connection with others more than masculine personality does” (44) – comes to mind in this context, and so does Carol Giligan’s theory of “ethics of care,” which associates femininity with morals based on immediate empathy rather than abstract principles of justice. Working within post-structuralist and Lacanian frameworks, French feminist Luce Irigaray phrases similar ideas about the feminine “essential” connection with the Other: “My experience as a woman demonstrates, as does my analysis of the language of women and men, that women almost always privilege the relationship between subjects” (*To be Two* 17). Arguably such theories of the “feminine” as intrinsically attached to the Other through some kind of “ethics of care” are irrelevant here. I invoke them all the same, because Poḥatchevsky’s work of fiction, in fact, often constructs femininity in terms of self sacrificing care for others of the sorts she blames Epstein for. As we shall soon see, in Poḥatchevsky’s stories, the category of femininity is not necessarily assigned to female figures (although it often is). Reading Poḥatchevsky’s fiction and political writing through the category of “the feminine,” I do not uphold an essentialist perception of women, but rather, I trace the ways in which the construction of “the feminine” plays into the Poḥatchevsky’s reworking of Zionist discourse.¹⁸⁷ In this context, Poḥatchevsky’s

¹⁸⁷ On strategic employment of “essentialism” in feminist theory, see, Diana Fuss’ seminal work *Essential Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference*.

intervention in the 1908 debate sets up a standard for the national subject, against which we can read the predicament of the protagonists of her stories. Indeed, the stories, as we shall see, eventually constitute a different kind of Zionist subject, one that who is much more fractured and tormented, one that cannot easily separate from its Others, and whose nationalism consists of constant negotiation of its porous boundaries.

Sentimental Affliction

The story “Ha-motza” (The Way Out), published in 1930 in the collection *Ba-kfar u-ba-avodah*, narrates the story of Gil’adi, an unsuccessful colonist, whose insistence to work the land himself rather than employ Arab workers leads him to financial ruin. At one point in the story, during a public debate, Gil’adi is scolded by his fellow colonists for his support of Hebrew labor: “Gil’adi is as sentimental *as a woman*, but sentimentality will not build the Yishuv, and we should be wary of that affliction” (86; my emphasis).¹⁸⁸ Like many of Poḥatchevsky’s protagonists, and like Poḥatchevsky herself (Govrin 114), Gil’adi is an outsider in his community because of his empathy, or as the colonists phrase it, his “sentimentality” (*ragshanut*), with regards to the plight of the young Jewish workers.¹⁸⁹ Indeed, many if not all of the protagonists of Poḥatchevsky’s stories disobey the 1908 command of their author to “care about themselves first.” Instead, they constantly engage in the risky business of selfless giving to others. Notably, Poḥatchevsky’s protagonists’ advocacy of Hebrew labor is often marked as the central venue of their altruism, for the employment of the frail but costly Hebrew workers does

¹⁸⁸ גלעדי רגשני כאשה, אבל הרגשנות לא תבנה את הישוב ועלינו להזהר מהנגע הזה

¹⁸⁹ Note the employment of the term “*ragshanut*” in Epstein’s essay. Epstein’s argument is divided to two parts: the first ethical, concerning the injustice of robbing the Arab peasants, and the second, practical, discussing the dangers of alienating the Arabs. As a transition between the two parts he comments: “but let us set aside for a moment justice and *sentimentality* [*ragshanut*]” (196).

not sit well with pure financial logic. While Gershon Shafir, in his materialist study of Hebrew labor, claims that the nationalists of the second immigration wave substituted the narrow economic logic of the colonists for the broader concept of a national economy, the gendered framing of Hebrew labor advocacy in Poḥatchevsky's fiction exceeds any simple concept of national egocentrism of the sorts she herself promotes in 1908. Rather, support for Hebrew labor is construed as a "sentimental" gesture of generosity toward homeless strangers, the youth of the second immigration wave, who, as Gil'adi phrases it, "wander the streets starving and the heart is horrified seeing them like this" (86).

The title of the story "Ha-motza" alludes to a story by the same name by Yosef Ḥayim Brenner, one of the prominent spiritual leaders of the second immigration wave.¹⁹⁰ Brenner's story is set at the time of World War One, and depicts a northern colony forced to care for a group of Jews deported by the Turks from the area of Jaffa and Tel-Aviv. The protagonist of Brenner's "Ha-motza," like Gil'adi in Poḥatchevsky's story, is an old man, referred to as the old workers' guide, who, like Gil'adi, is emasculated by his own idealism. However, while Brenner's story ends with utter disillusionment of the possibility of altruism in the Eretz-Yisraeli space, Poḥatchevsky's story seems to transmute selfless giving into an ultimate "way out."

In Brenner's story, responding to the alarming sight of the impoverished deportees approaching the colony:

The women of the farm [the socialist commune] felt the obligation to give, hard as it was to leave their families without any bread, for had not the exiles been breadless all through the long winter... the basket was soon filled with loaves,

¹⁹⁰ This is not the only time that Poḥatchevsky's titles allude to Brenner. As discussed in the Introduction to this dissertation, the story "Be-tzel ha-kvutzah" (In the Shadow of the Commune) that appear in the same collection was originally titled "Be-tokh ha-nekudah" (Inside the Point), alluding to Brenner's *Misaviv la-nekudah* (Around the Point) (see also: Govrin, "Nefesh" 151 and the introduction of this dissertation).

half-loaves and crusts that the women scraped together. (147-148; Alter's translation revised)¹⁹¹

The old workers' guide, the only male character in this scene, does as the women do. He gives one of his loaves of bread to the deportees out of a sense of obligation. Throughout the story, the "obligation to give" in a social context that ridicules generosity and empathy is the main predicament of the workers' guide. While the women of the commune give despite of their shortage, the men whom the workers' guide encounters in the colony are occupied with finding a way to give as little as possible. In face of this masculine selfishness, the guide is mute. Unable to shout, "Murderers! Why don't you do something" (150), as he originally planned, the guide stutters "in low voice . . . forty-two people . . . refugees . . . came" (Ibid). He is then informed that the leaders of the colony know about the arrival of the deportees and made arrangements to keep them out of the colony, under the excuse they may be carrying diseases. By the end of this scene, the guide regains his voice, and shouts in frustration "In that case you'd better be careful of me . . . I've been there, and I haven't been disinfected. I'm carrying all the germs!" (152). He is then again silenced by one of the colony's officials, who takes his proclamation seriously, and affirms that, "Indeed, you shouldn't have come here" (Ibid).

Poḥatchevsky's story seems to borrow from Brenner, not only its title and protagonist, but also the intersection of giving, femininity and disease. In this context, let us recall Rachel Katznelson's¹⁹² account of Poḥatchevsky in a commemorative article

¹⁹¹ נשות החווה הרגישו בחובה לתת. קשה היה לבעלות-המשפחה להישאר בלי לחם, אבל ההם הלוא רעבים ללחם כל החורף! ...

¹⁹² Rachel Katznelson (1885-1975) was a prominent leader of the Zionist women-workers movement, the chief editor of *Dvar ha-po'elet*, the movement's monthly, and an esteemed literary critic.

published in *Dvar ha-po'elet*, the women-workers' monthly, in the wake of the author's death in 1934:

The surprising element in her nature was her pursuit of good deeds – “the plight of compassion” – and it seems that her charitable acts and her defense of Hebrew labor were carved of the same light – the light of, private and national, “sick” conscience. (96)¹⁹³

Katzanleson's gesture here is dual: on the one hand, she celebrates Poḥatchevsky's life and work on the pages of the women-workers' publication as if accepting her into the *po'alot* community; on the other hand, she highlights the strangeness of her position. Like the colonists of “Ha-motza” do to Gil'adi, Katzanelson construes Poḥatchevsky's support for Hebrew labor in terms of sentimental affliction: “the plight of compassion” and “sick conscience.” And so, Poḥatchevsky, the advocate of the young workers, is rhetorically sent back by the socialist leader to the Jewish diasporic space, where compassionate Jewish women engage in “good deeds” of charity.¹⁹⁴ And yet, the sentimental affliction that Katzanelson attributes to Poḥatchevsky, the same affliction Poḥatchevsky herself warns against in 1908, is the marker of her unique intervention in the Zionist discourse of labor. For Poḥatchevsky, the failure of the colonists of the first immigration wave is not the failure of masculinity, not the failure to be “men enough” to conquer labor or land, but rather a failure to be “women” enough, to be “feminine,” caring and sentimental enough to comprehend the project of Hebrew labor. The masculine gaze of the colonists determining Gil'adi as “feminine” is transmuted with Poḥatchevsky into a feminized prism through which she re-envisioning Zionism.

¹⁹³ המפתיע באופיה היתה הרדיפה אחרי מעשים טובים - "אסון החמלה" - ונדמה כי מאור אחד חוצבו גם מעשי הצדקה שלה וגם ההגנה על העבודה העברית - מאור המצפון "החולה" הפרטי והלאומי.

¹⁹⁴ On Jewish women's philanthropic work in the German Jewish community see Marion Kaplan's *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class* (192-227).

Whereas Brenner is ambivalent about his protagonist's emasculation, presenting him, to a large extent, as a pathetic figure, whose ideals burden him, and, eventually, debilitate him, Pohatchevsky compassionately redeems her feminized Zionist. For Brenner, the emasculation of the old guide marks the ultimate failure of his idealism, a failure that culminates in the breaking of his toe at the end of the story, which, to his relief, absolves him of the "obligation to give," by preventing him from going out again to help another group of deportees (157). In Pohatchevsky's story, conversely, after his son and daughter-in-law immigrate to America, the devastated Gil'adi, as if fulfilling the settlers' prophecy, becomes physically and mentally ill. Yet, toward the end of the story he is quite suddenly cured, and a "way out" is found for him in a final act of giving, notably of the land. In the final chapter of the story Gil'adi gives his land to a group of Jewish workers, who cultivate it for him, while he retires to his quarters and goes back to study the Torah as in his youth in the Diaspora. In other words, the way out for Pohatchevsky is incorporation of the diasporic into the Zionist framework through an altruist gesture marked as "feminine." Whereas the workers' guide at the end of Brenner's story is disabled, arguably castrated,¹⁹⁵ Pohatchevsky's story ends with Gil'adi, who himself has become a kind of a workers' guide, joining the workers' group in their dances, "*ke-ehad ha-tze'irim*" (like one of the youth; 94). Selfless giving allows rejuvenation of the decaying space of the colony through a synthesis of Gil'adi's youth, as a student of the Torah, with the new youth of the second immigration wave. Sentimental affliction is transmuted into the only way out of the stagnating state of inter-

¹⁹⁵ The breaking of the toe in "Ha-motza" is reminiscent of the opening incident of Brenner's novel *Shkhol ve-khisalon*, where the main protagonist is debilitated by hernia.

generational conflict, and, as such, it becomes an element in Poḥatchevsky's fanciful feminized rewriting of Zionist history.

Carved of the Same Light: Hebrew Labor, Avodah Zarah, Women's Work

At the beginning of Poḥatchevsky's story "Bi-vdidut" (In Solitude), the female protagonist Tzipora questions her mental health: "Am I mentally ill? Why did the idea of suicide start occupying my mind?"(169). Soon afterwards, we are offered a possible answer to this troubling question. Tzipora's suicidal thoughts derive from her constant conflicts with her brother Amram over the question of Hebrew labor. Following one such argument she burst into an emotional soliloquy:

Restrained hatred grows in me sometimes upon hearing such things, but later I regret my negative feelings towards my only brother to whom I devote my life. I repent and ask God to return the love to my heart. And indeed it gradually returns, but my peace of mind does not wish to return, and I am tired of our farm, the work, and the entire existence of a forty year old maid. I decide that a Jewish farm created in its entirety by *foreign hands*, is a stain upon my world, and I, who participated in building it in this way, carry the sin and I do not have a right to live in the world. Weakness overcomes me, and I see myself on the threshold of life with no light, with no faith, no need for my existence and no strength to stop it. Nothing is left for me but to let go of the paddle and let the waves carry my boat as they wish – it will sail to where the wind takes it, till it hits a rock and breaks into pieces. (170; my emphasis)¹⁹⁶

Tzipora's extreme emotional response to Amram's employment of "foreign hands" in the siblings' shared farm calls for further investigation. At first glance, there seems to be a dissonance between the political issue, important such as it is, and Tzipora's morbid response. Note the slippage in the passage above between Tzipora's complaint that she is

¹⁹⁶ שנאה כבושה מתעוררת בי לפעמים לשמע דברים כאלה, אבל אחר-כך אני מתחרטת על הרגשתי הרעה לאחי יחיד, אשר כל חיי מוקדשים לו, חוזרת אני בתשובה ומבקשת את אלוהי הרוחות להשיב את האהבה לליבי. ואמנם זו שבה לאט לאט אל כנה. אבל מנוחת נפשי אינה רוצה לחזור, והמשק שלנו, והעבודה וכל ההוויה של עלמה בת-ארבעים נמאסים עלי. אני מחליטה, שמשק יהודי, אשר כולו נוצר בידיים זרות, נושא עליו כתם עולמי, ואני שהשתתפתי בבניינו בצורה זו – אני נושאת עלי את החטא ואין לי זכות-קיום בעולם...

tired of “the entire existence of the forty year old maid” and the exclamation that the “foreign hands” that have built her farm deprive her of “the right to live in the world.” If the story opens with Tzipora’s question about the reasons for her suicidal thoughts, then this passage meshes together two answers: one has to do with the gendered category of the “forty year old maid,” who is marginalized as an odd woman within the heteronormative settlers community; the other relates to her frustration over the failure of the Zionist project of Hebrew labor. These two aspects of Tzipora’s despair, the gendered and the national predicaments, emerge in the speech cited above as part of the same agonizing problem. The following passages attempt to unpack the particular conflation of the personal and the political that produces Tzipora’s psychological crisis.

As we may recall, the parable by Sh. P Rosen situated the daughter *‘avodah* as a victim of “foreign hands,” invoking both the sexual-racial discourse surrounding white women in colonial settings and the Jewish-Zionist trope of the rape of Jewish women by gentiles. Against the grain of these masculinist discourses, which exploit the feminine body in order to negotiate of issues of racial purity and national autonomy, Poḥatchevsky, I argue, constitutes the “victimized” white woman, and, at times, the feminized man, as subjects of a different but no less nationalist discourse. Like many of Poḥatchevsky’s protagonists Tzipora is a depressive, self-sacrificing, and self-victimizing subject, who, nonetheless, emerges as the voice of Zionism, and of Hebrew labor in particular.

Further on in the story, during a public debate about Hebrew labor, Tzipora, like Gil’adi, is silenced, but her inner voice rebels: “percentages . . . this is what they spoke of for a long time We do not take into account the fact that with *‘avoda zara*

we are delaying salvation” (185).¹⁹⁷ While the reference to the rabbinic concept *‘avodah zarah* seems casual, I would argue that Połatchevsky’s choice of words here provides a key for interpreting the conflation of the political and the personal noted above. The invocation of the loaded Jewish term *‘avodah zarah* was not uncommon in the Zionist discourse of Hebrew labor. The double meaning of the Hebrew word *‘avodah*, which can denote both “worship” and “labor,” make the term lend itself to Zionist usages in the context of the struggle for Hebrew labor. While in Jewish religious context *‘avodah zarah* stands for “foreign worship” or idolatry, in the discourse of Hebrew labor the term emerges as “foreign labor,” meaning specifically, the employment of Arab workers in Jewish settlements. Whereas it seems as though in both contexts the term relies on the sharp opposition between Jews and non-Jews, I would propose that both in the rabbinic context and in Zionist context the term in fact marks the state of unstable boundaries between Jews and others.

There are numerous examples of the employment of the term *‘avodah zarah* in the discourse of Hebrew labor. See, for example, David Ben-Gurion’s remark: “The first settlers . . . sold the aspirations of their youth for pennies, and with them . . . the revival of the homeland was performed through *avodah zarah*.” (Qtd in Shapira, *Ha-maavak ha-nikhzav* 21) or A.D. Gordon’s comment that: “If before the war, while the economical situation of the land was normal, the question of fixing the distortion of *avodah zarah* and returning to Hebrew labor depended upon the will of the colonists . . . now they cannot fix it anymore” (3-4). Whereas in these cases, the secular matter-of-fact language of the two Zionist leaders (almost) completely erases the religious origin of the term, Tzipora’s

¹⁹⁷ אחוזים! ... על זה הסתובבה השאלה זמן רב, כאילו באחוזים אלה נכלל כל חשבון הלאום. מה שבעבודה זרה אנו מרחיקים ת"ק ¹⁹⁷ פרסה את הגאולה ... עם כל זה אין לנו צורך להתחשב.

designation of “foreign hands” as a stain, a deadly sin, like her statement that foreign labor “delays salvation,” conjures the religious context, and posits it as an undercurrent of the Zionist enterprise of labor.

Poḥatchevsky’s particular employment of the term *‘avodah zarah* therefore calls for reconsideration of the rabbinic dilemma it encapsulates, as well as of the implications of this dilemma for the political project of Hebrew labor. As Arnold Eisen explains, much of the Talmudic tractate of *‘Avodah Zarah* is an attempt to regulate Jewish life in a space where idolatry is pervasive (35-36). Throughout the text the rabbis take great efforts to make it possible for Jews to live, walk and work in a world where everything may be contaminated. The state of affairs that the tractate negotiates, Eisen shows, is one where without a public center of worship, idolatry threatens to pollute not only the public space, but also the private space and body. The gravity of this predicament becomes clear particularly in the third and fourth chapters of *‘Avodah Zarah*, which deal with prohibition on “enjoying” anything that is the product of idolatry or that has been used for idolatry. In this context, we reveal that not only can idols be present everywhere in the streets, the public baths, under every tree, but one can also find that the water he drinks and “enjoys” came from a spring which has been worshiped as an idol (Steinsaltz 3.5). One may eat bread that has been baked on a fire lit with wood taken from a tree that has been used for idolatry (Ibid 3.9). The walls of one’s private home can border a house of worship (Ibid 3.6).

We may see how the notion of *‘avodah zarah* informs Tzipora’s interpretation of the meaning of Arab labor in her farm, which deploys concepts of contamination, stain, and sin. Her statement in the beginning of the story that “a Jewish farm created in its

entirety by *foreign hands*, is a stain upon my world, and I, who participated in building it in this way, carry the sin and I do not have a right to live in the world” is strongly reminiscent of the prohibition on enjoyment from *‘avodah zarah*. The farm, which Tzipora “enjoys,” is contaminated by the “foreign hands,” and while in the Talmudic tractate the rabbis suggest ways of purifying objects that were used for idolatry, it seems that for Tzipora no such way is available. Moreover, she herself is also contaminated, “carrying the sin.” Like the rabbinic *‘avodah zarah*, Pohatchevsky’s “Bi-vdidut” presents us with a Jewish self whose boundaries are so unstable that the very presence of “foreigners” in its vicinity threatens to annihilate it, and as in the tractate, the response to that plight is a discourse of purity and contamination that works to regulate the division of space between Jews and non-Jews.

Later in this chapter we shall further discuss the way in which the porous boundaries of “the feminine” self become the terrain of its racism. But for now let us return to the public gathering where Tzipora is still waiting for her turn to speak and add another layer to this discussion. Formally, Tzipora is silenced because she is “only a guest in the gathering and not one of its formal participants” (186),¹⁹⁸ but as she bitterly remarks in her diary:

If a man wanted to speak, they would not have denied him the opportunity – but a woman has no human rights at all, and what right has she to push herself into the public and give an opinion? . . . the place of a woman is in the kitchen, behind the stove, not among the representatives of the people. (186)¹⁹⁹

According to Tzipora’s feminist critique in the passage above, her “guest” status derives from gendered division of labor, not from the formalities that regulate permissions to

¹⁹⁸ רק אורחת אני באספה ולא מן הקרואים

¹⁹⁹ לו היה איש אורח כזה רוצה לדבר, לא היו שוללים ממנו את הזכות, -- אבל אישה הרי היא משוללת זכות-אדם בכלל, ובאיזו רשות היא נדחקת לתוך הציבור לחוות דעת? ... מקומה של האישה במטבח, מאחורי הכיריים ולא בין נבחרים העם!

speak at the gathering. As a woman, she is a “guest” in the public sphere. As a guest, her status is similar to that of the Hebrew workers, who are referred to by one of the colonists in the same gathering as *arḥey-parḥey*, a term which literally translates from Aramaic “wandering guests,” but also carries a negative connotation related to labor as it usually alludes to “lazy riffraff.” In an essay titled “Mikhtavim le-aḥot” (Letters to a Sister), Moshe Smilansky, Poḥatchevsky’s ally in 1908 debate, complains that the economical criteria used in the colony of Rishon Le-Tziyon (Poḥatchevsky’s colony) to determine who has the right to vote in the colony’s public meetings excluded both workers and women. Smilansky’s remarks further explain the situation that upsets Tzipora in “Bi-vdidut,” where she is not considered an equal participant in the colony’s public process of decision-making. As Smilansky reports, the colony of Rishon Le-Tziyon passed a resolution according to which a vote is to be given to those earning 700 Francs a year or more. Claiming that most workers do not make this amount and neither do women who work in the home, Smilansky cries: “The Hebrew mother and daughter... are excluded from our public life no less than the *foreigners* [*zarim*]” (15; my emphasis). Could it be that the sister in “Bi-vdidut” responds to Smilansky’s “Letters to a Sister”? It is indeed not unreasonable to speculate that Smilansky in fact addresses his letters to his close woman-friend in Rishon Le-Tziyon, Neḥama Poḥatchevsky, and it is most likely that Poḥatchevsky has read the essay or has at least been familiar with Smilansky’s position. In any case, we may note how Smilansky employs the term “foreigners” (*zarim*) to refer to the Jewish workers, who are new to the land and do not own homes in the colony. Remarkably, however, the foreignness of the workers is not a negative trait for Smilansky, but a cause for empathy. Smilansky’s comments provide us with a concrete

rationale for the identification, which is very much present in “Bi-vdidut,” between workers and women, who are both excluded from the colony’s public life through a formal system of economic discrimination.

“The place of a woman is in the kitchen, behind the stove, not among the representatives of the people” (186), Tzipora bitterly remarks in response to the silencing of her voice in the public gathering. Her remark, I would propose, invokes the concept of “women’s work,” another term that seems to intersect with Hebrew labor in the story. While men make decisions in the public sphere, she laments, women are sent to perform “women’s work” in the private sphere. Framing “women’s work” as a subversive element within the capitalist economy, Gayatri Spivak suggests that “the power of the *oikos*, domestic economy, can be used as the model of the *foreign body* unwittingly nurtured by the *polis*” (112; my emphasis). For Spivak, while the division between the private and the public sustains women’s subjugation, it also constructs the home as the site of an alternative economy. Women’s work is understood in this framework as a kind of labor that cannot be “calculated” into the logic of capitalism, and that, thus, constitutes a disruption of the patriarchal structure of power (see also: Foreman 128). We may discern here a similarity between Hebrew labor and women’s work. In the context of Palestine’s work-world during the struggle for Hebrew labor, employment of Jewish workers, who had little skills for or experience in agricultural work but demanded higher wages than their Arab counterparts, was a gesture that went against the colonists’ financial logic. As with “women’s work,” the value of Hebrew labor had to be calculated through a different framework than the capitalist one in order to be estimated. We recall the colonists’ critique of Gil’adi, the advocate of Hebrew labor in the story “Ha-motza” – “Gil’adi is as

sentimental *as a woman*, but sentimentality will not build the Yishuv, and we should be wary of that affliction” (86). Both Hebrew labor and women’s work, I would suggest, are often understood on the level of “sentiments”; sentiments for land and nation on the one hand and sentiments for the home and the family on the other. Arguably, the association between both types of labor and “sentimentality” makes both odd within a system that revolves around calculation financial profit and loss. Granted, the oddities of women’s work and Hebrew labor are different: in the case of women’s work, wages do not even enter the equation, as in the patriarchal system, women are expected to work without pay, strictly out of a sense of love and care for the family (Dalla Costa 24-28); Conversely, while the work of the Zionist laborers is understood as manifestation of their sentiments toward the land, they do demand fair wages for their work. In this ideological framework the colonists are in fact the ones expected to provide Jewish workers work and wages because they share with them the same love for land and nation. In both cases though, the assumption of “sentiments” confounds the financial calculations that sustains the capitalist and patriarchal economy. In this sense, women’s work, like Hebrew labor, is a “sentimental affliction.”

The confrontation between Amram and Tzipora in her flower-garden may further illustrate the association between women’s work and Hebrew labor that “Bi-vdidut” furnishes.

Some kind of lunacy comes over me while I start putting new order into our flower-garden. Day and night I am working on organizing it. At night how? At night I devise plans: which flowers to plant in this corner and which in that corner, which flowers should be moved from the flowerbed to flowerpots and which should go straight to the land. In the morning, before I even get dressed, I look the garden and I find that the plans I made during the night do not fit the actual space of the garden and I have to change them. Days and nights, days and nights the garden has taken, and my mind was not satisfied by it, till it was finally shaped according to my taste.

My brother looks at the garden and says with a chuckle:

-- This is the work of women's hands!

-- What is wrong with the work of women's hands?

-- The soil is not hoed properly! -- and he brings a hoe and shows me what good hoeing is.

He is right. With his work the soil gets a totally different shape. And I deeply feel his advantage. (197)²⁰⁰

Tzipora's "lunacy" in working in the flower-garden reminds me of Elaine Showalter's remark on Breuer's use of flowers as a metaphor for hysteric women – "the flowers of mankind, as sterile, no doubt, but as beautiful as double flowers" (291). While the garden is outside the home it appears as an extension of Tzipora troubled psyche: It is irrational and excessive ("days and nights"); it bears a tenuous relation to the reality of the physical space (plans revealed not to fit the actual space); and finally it is incompetent ("the soil is not hoed right!"). Moreover, while the work of the garden is, technically, "work of the land," it produces "decoration," rather nutrition. Like women's work, and like the Jewish workers' work, the cultivation of flowers does not fit into the logic of economic efficiency. In this context we may understand Amram's remark "the work of women's hands" (*ma'ase yedey ishah*), which abruptly situates Tzipora in the same place as the Jewish workers, as an incompetent worker who is incapable of penetrating the land properly.

²⁰⁰ תוקף אותי כעין שגעון בעת שאני מתחילה להכניס סדר חדש בגן הפרחים שלנו. יומם ולילה אני עוסקת בסידור. לילה כיצד? בלילה אני מחברת תכניות על תכניות. איזה פרחים לזרוע בפנה זו ואיזה בפנה אחרת, איזה פרחים להעביר מערוגות אל עציצים ואיזה ישר אל האדמה. בבוקר, קודם שאני מתחילה להתלבש, עיני כבר נטויה אל הגן ומוצאת מיד, שהתוכניות אשר עשיתי בדמיוני בלילה, אינן מתאימות למציאות ואני צריכה לשנותן. ימים ולילות, ימים ולילות לקח הגן ולא נחה דעתי ממנו, עד שלבש את הצורה הנאותה לפי טעמי.

אחי מסתכל בגן ואומר בגיחוך קל:

-- מעשה ידי אשה!

-- במה הוא רע -- מעשה ידי האישה?

-- בזה שהאדמה אינה מעובדת כדבעי! -- והוא מביא מעדר ומראה לי, מה זה עידור טוב. הוא צדק. בעבודה שלו האדמה מקבלת צורה אחרת לגמרי, ואני בכל הווייתי מרגישה את יתרונו בזה.

The spreading of the work over “days and nights” and the imagery of the garden give the entire scene an erotic air. And indeed, after the brother leaves, Tzipora’s beloved Shmueli comes to the garden, and the phrasing of his arrival – “*ba el gani... gam Shmueli*” (Shmueli too came to my garden) – is reminiscent of the Song of Songs (see Song of Songs 4.17 – “*yavo dodi le-gano*”; “let my beloved come to his garden”; *JPS*), where the feminine body and the garden are analogous. The encounter between Tzipora and Shmueli in the garden fails like her labor. Overwhelmed by Shmueli’s romantic advances, Tzipora moves away from him towards the flowerbeds and begins to “gently flatten the heaped soil,” a gesture that, notably, contrasts the phallic hoeing of the brother (198). When Shmueli leaves, however, Tzipora finds herself unable to keep working, and resorts to writing “feverishly on the sand ‘dear, dearly beloved’ until the writing fills the entire path” (198). The writing on the ground is reminiscent of the work in the garden described earlier: Both are excessive and feverish, and both can only touch the surface of the ground and never penetrate it deeply enough to set roots. Coincidentally, one of the common slurs thrown at the Jewish worker-intellectuals of the second immigration wave was that they prefer to hold – “*‘et bimkom et*” – “pen instead of a shovel” – that is, that they prefer writing about work to working (Rosen 4). For the workers then, as for Tzipora, writing is the mark of failure to work the land. The phallic connotations of the phrase about replacing the shovel with the pen bring in once again the erotic failure as a manifestation of the failure to root in the land. In this sense, the writing hand is the hand of the uprooted foreigner, the Jewish worker who, like Tzipora still maintains the diasporic investment in the textuality.

To conclude, although the triangular junction of “‘*avodah Ivrit*,” (Hebrew labor) “‘*avodah zarah*” and “‘*avoda t nashim*” (women’s work) may seem suspiciously literal and possibly anachronistic, for reading Neḥama Poḥatchevsky’s stories this junction serves as a fruitful interpretive framework. The term *‘avodah zarah* here is double edged, for alongside the acute anxiety of contamination that the “foreign hands” arouse is Tzipora, her empathy with the Jewish workers appears to derive from her own sense of foreignness *vis-à-vis* the Hebrew masculine subject. The references to “foreigners” and “guests” in “Bi-vdidut,” as well as in Smilansky’s article, produce an ambiguity, which is central for understanding Poḥatchevsky’s Zionism: While foreignness is explicitly assigned to the Arab workers, it is also a marker of the experience of Jewish workers and women in the space of the colony. The alliance between women and Jewish workers that “Bi-vdidut” furnishes is in fact an alliance of foreigners and guests. It is from a position of foreignness, as we shall see, that the text reclaims the discourse of Hebrew labor, making the masculinist project of rooting in the land, into a discourse of femininity.

“Why Should We Always Give and Give?”

Tzipora’s suicidal soliloquy cited earlier concludes when she observes a flock of birds that “rises to the east and returns to the west, swaying right and left ... and stays in its place” (170-171). Her subsequent comment – “Could it be that this entire flock too does not know its way?” (ibid) – assigns the birds with national significance. We can easily read the flock of wandering birds as a metaphor for the wandering Jews, the eternal *luftmenschen*, who fail to be rooted in the land through work. But, as her very name insinuates – Tzipora comes from the word *tzipor*, a bird in Hebrew – the association

between Tzipora and the birds is more intimate. Later in the story we learn the origin of this bond:

A flock of doves descended shaking their wings and demanding their meal. As soon as I threw their portion of grains at them, a mass of tiny sparrows, *uninvited guests*, arrived to share the meal. I bent down to take a stick and drive them away, but they foresaw my plan and flew up unto the fence. But they could not control themselves and soon they came back: Their instinct tempted them to get as much as they could of the delicious grains. This reminded me of far away days. Shabbat Shira . . . my mother took a portion of cholent and set it aside. Who is it for, mother? – I ask with great wonder – for the birds, my little child – the mother answers: this is Shabbat Shira, their Shabbat. I did not ask nor investigate why this is their Shabbat. I just ran after my mother to the yard to see how she threw the cholent at them. I think this was the first time in my life I felt the desire to look closely at these little creatures that fly in the air, and from then on there was a covenant between us. (175; my emphasis)²⁰¹

Tzipora's last name "Drori" connects her with the same type of birds she initially tries to drive away with a stick, since *dror* means sparrow in Modern Hebrew and *ankor* is the name of the same bird in Rabbinic Hebrew. Moreover, the sparrows, like Tzipora herself in the public meeting are termed "uninvited guests." In this context we may understand why, eventually, instead of banishing the sparrows as Tzipora intended, she proceeds to reminisce about the initiation of her "covenant" with the birds. The memory of Shabbat Shira construes the birds as a reminder of lost ethics associated with the diasporic mother. If the Eretz-Yisraeli culture entails strict differentiation between those who demand and deserve their "meal" and the "uninvited guests," who are to be driven away, the mother's culture is that of generous giving to the guests-birds.

²⁰¹ עדת-יונים פרוחה למטה, קשקשה בכנפיה ודרשה את סעודת-בוקר שלה. אך זרקתי לה מנת זרעוניה והנה המון אנקורים זעירים הופיעו, אורחים לא קרואים, להשתתף בסעודה. התכופתי להרים מקול כדי לגרשם, וירגישו מיד במזימתי ויפרחו למעלה אל הגדר. אך לא התאפקו וחיש מהר שבו על עקבם: יצרם גרה אותם לתפוש כמ שאפשר מהזרעונים הטעימים. מעשה זה של האנקורים הזכירני ימים רחוקים. שבת שירה... כשהגיע תור החמין, הפרישה [אמי] צלחת אחת עם דייסה והעמידה הצידה. בשביל מי זה, אמא? -- שואלת אני בתמיהה רבה. -- בשביל הציפורים, ילדתי הקטנה! -- עונה האם: -- הלא שבת שירה היום, השבת שלהן! ... כמדומני, שזו היתה הפעם הראשונה בחיי שהתעורר בי הרצון להסתכל מקרוב אל בריות קטנות אלה, שעפות באוויר, ומאז נכרתה ברית בינינו.

The child “does not ask or investigate” the roots of the ritual of giving food to the birds. However, these roots reach an ancient myth involving birds, giving and language, which may be of use for our reading. According to Jewish tradition, after Moses stated that God did not distribute the manna on the Sabbath, the priests Dotan and Aviram attempted to challenge Moses’ credibility among the people by secretly spreading the manna on Friday night. The birds, in this legend, ate the manna before the People of Israel came to look for it, and thus affirmed Moses’ words. Giving food to the birds on Shabbat Shira is a way of remembering their kindness to Moses, as well as, I would argue, the different economy that they stand for. The food is given to the birds for stealing food from the People of Israel and restoring the meaning of Moses’ words in return. If the act of Dotan and Aviram deprives Moses’ words, as signifiers, of their signified – no manna on Saturday – threatening to leave the People with full stomachs but an empty godly promise, the birds assure the absolute correspondence of the divine signifier and its referent.

We have noted in the previous section that one of the accusations often directed at the workers of the second immigration wave is that they exchange the shovel for the pen, and that Tzipora shares this “deficiency” with the workers, for she also exchanges labor for words, in the scene of the garden cited earlier. Throughout the story she is constantly writing and reading, and at one point she explains to another woman colonist that “for some people [such as Tzipora herself] bread and books are worth the same” (179). The economy of the mother that makes room for “guests” is also the economy where the bread and words may be exchanged, that is, where the phallic hierarchy between the shovel and the pen is irrelevant. Hélène Cixous writes: “I have always been a bird... I

have always practiced flight/theft (*voler*), and as a thief/who flies, I got away” (99). For Cixous, the metaphor of flying/stealing stands for a feminine employment of language, in which signifiers are not anchored to ground of the signified, but are rather fluid markers whose meaning is always shifting. The invocation of the myth of Shabbat Shira in “Bi-viddut,” also forms an economy in which the meaning of words is given “generously,” beyond the narrow limits of truth and lie. The myth opens a time-gap between the signifier – Moses’ statement – and the signified – the state of no manna on the ground – during which the relations between them is contested, and then restored, not by the authoritative voice of God or Moses, but thanks to the nocturnal kindness of the birds.

In the context of Zionism, where the opposition between being grounded in the land and being up in the air has particular ideological significance, the image of the birds and the memories it brings of Shabbat Shira and the diasporic mother add another layer to the identification between women and workers in the story. While Zionist discourse places the diasporic-feminine, which is quintessentially embodied by the Jewish mother (Seidman 115), as the excluded Other of the national project, Połatchevsky situates the diasporic-feminine-motherly at the heart of the project by making it the conceptual platform of Hebrew labor. Hebrew labor in this framework is not a discourse of phallic rooting in the land, but rather of welcoming the “uninvited guests,” like the mother does, of letting in the foreign, the diasporic, the feminine into the national space.

Within colonialist politics of competition between “natives” and “foreigners,” foreignness is an unbearable stain as we have seen earlier, but as it becomes harder and harder to distinguish who the foreigner really is in the story of Tzipora, *a potential* of another discourse emerges, not one of conquering land, labor and women, but one of

hospitality and generosity grounded in foreignness as fluid, rather than in the desire to purge the stain. It is, however, crucial to note that in the poetic-ideological space furnished by Poḥatchevsky, the mother's ethics of generosity are intertwined with the feminine subject's nationalist and racist anxiety of contamination. The same feminized "sentimentality" that underlies her vision of Hebrew labor is also the grounds (perhaps we may even say the "garden") of her racism. I have mentioned earlier the analyses of Hebrew labor as a colonialist project, but how are we to read the woman who speaks it so emphatically, not in a language of rights and ownership, but in the language of charity and hospitality? Several feminist post-colonialist scholars have theorized the position of the woman-colonialist as split between her oppression as woman and her complicity in oppressing the colonized, that is, between her feminine experience and her identification with masculine colonialism (Chaudhuri and Strobel 1-18; McClintock 352-390). I would argue, however, that in the case of Tzipora, racism and hospitality are "carved of the same light," stem from the same feminine wound, as symptoms of the same neurosis, both emanating from the porous boundary-lines of the Zionist feminine subject. In "Bivdidut," as the following section will show, as the politics of conquest are exchanged for politics of giving, Poḥatchevsky's 1908 warning is fulfilled, and the self remains so porous and fragile, so foreign to itself, that the very presence of others in its vicinity holds the threat its destruction.

The Contagious Sister: Her Hysteria and His

Let us go back to where we began, and listen to her first soliloquy:

Restrained hatred rises in me sometimes hearing such things, but later *I regret my negative emotions towards my only brother to whom I devote my life.* I

repent and ask God to return the love to my heart. And indeed it gradually returns, but my peace of mind does not wish to return, and I am tired of our farm, the work, and the entire existence of a forty-year-old maid. I decide that a Jewish farm created in its entirety by foreign hands, is a stain upon my world. (170; my emphasis)

The brother cannot be hated, but the “foreign hands” can. The brother must be forgiven, but she cannot be forgiven. *Her* world is contaminated by foreign hands. She becomes, in fact, a carrier of foreignness. She cannot be loved, just like the brother cannot be hated. But the Jewish workers can be loved, and the Arab workers can be hated. And so the neuroses of the forty-year-old maid are projected onto the colonialist project, conflating love and hate, hospitality and racism.

Note that the response of Amram, Tzipora’s brother, to her critique of the Arab workers and to her support of Hebrew labor is no less hysterical than Tzipora’s reaction to the “foreign hands:”

I have spoken out of place, and complained to my brother about Mustafa, who is also, excuse me, very lazy. This was cheeky on my part and for this I was punished harshly. Amram did not eat his breakfast, which caused me great agony. But I consoled myself by preparing a good and nutritious lunch, with all the dishes that Amram likes, and thought he would eat it with double appetite. But I was wrong: He did not eat anything for lunch as well! All my pleading and begging were of no use, he insisted: “I don’t want it!” and that’s it. “Why are you punishing both me and you at once?” I ask and my heart boils. “You are ruining my nerves and poisoning my blood!” was his answer. When I tried to get to the bottom of his words, and I said something he did not like – he ran into the field without a hat in the pouring rain. After he left the sky became even cloudier, thunder rolled in the air, and my heart was frightened: The boy will catch a cold. What to do? What to do? I hardly resisted my urge to run after him into the field and get him back home. I stayed by the window tormenting myself, that I, only I, am to blame for the boy’s suffering – I am bad and wicked! Some time passed and I heard Amram’s footsteps in the garden. He went up the stairs, came in, and went straight to his room. When I came into his room he was lying down, covered over his head with his thick blanket. In the room his wet clothes were scattered, and water was dripping on the floor. Silently, I gathered the cloths and wiped the floor, and brought him his meal. He still refused to eat, biting his blanket, and looking at me angrily with his red eyes. To my pleas to finish the day’s fasting, he responded with one word: “No!” (171)²⁰²

²⁰² נכשלת בלשוני ודברתי באזני אחי סרה על מוסטפה, שגם הוא, במחילת כבודו, עצלן גדול. אמנם זו היתה עזות מצדי ועל כך ²⁰² קבלתי עונש קשה! –

Generally, Amram is presented in the story as a strong rooted man, the natural owner of space, and, as in the garden scene discussed earlier, an expert worker of the land. However, in response to Tzipora's critique of his Arab workers, his stature seems to fracture. In the episode cited above, Amram "punishes" Tzipora with self-destructive gestures, such as making himself deliberately sick by staying in the field in the rain "without a hat," and refusing to eat the food that Tzipora prepares for him. As he rejects her food, Amram accuses Tzipora that she "ruins his nerves and poisons his blood" (171). While concretely the accusation of poisoning refers to Tzipora's food, its timing, after a discussion concerning labor, connects Amram's denunciation of Tzipora with her support of Hebrew labor. In the same way that she perceives the "foreign hands" as an annihilating stain upon her world, so does he perceive her speech against them as poison that "spoils his blood." It seems that, in this context, Tzipora's speech, like her food, constitutes a "poisonous" substance that infiltrates the frontiers of the masculine subject, and, as the scene cited above, infects him with hysteria.

If earlier we have pondered the identification between Tzipora and the Jewish workers, now we may ask: What is the meaning of Amram's intense identification with

עמרם לא אכל את ארוחת-הבוקר שלו; צער גדול הצטערתי. אבל מצאתי נחומים בזה, שהרי מכינה אני ארוחת-צהרים שמנה וטובה מהמאכלים שעמרם אוהב אותם ואכול יאכלם בתאבון כפול. והנה שגיתי: גם בצהרים לא טעם דבר! כל בקשותי ותחנוני לא הועילו, הוא באחת: "איני רוצה!" וחסל. מדוע זה, עמרם, מדוע אתה מעניש אותי ואותך יחד? – שואלת אני בלב מורתח. את מקלקלת את עצמי ומרעלת את דמי! – היתה תשובתו ולא הוסיף. כשנסיתי לבקש באורים לדבריו, ולשוני פלטה בלי-משים הברה שלא לפי רוחו – ברה בלי כובע אל השדה באמצע המטר הסוחף. בלכתו התעבבו השמים עוד יותר, רעם אחרי רעם התגלגל והחריד את האויר, ולבי אף הוא חרד ודפק: יתקרה הנער ויחלה. מה לעשות, מה לעשות? ובקושי כבשתי את יצרי מלרוץ אחריו אל השדה ולהחזירהו הביתה. נשארתי על יד החלון מתענה ומיסרת את עצמי, שאני, רק אני אשמה בסבלו של הנער, – אני הרעה והרשעה! עברה שעה קלה והנה נשמעו צעדי עמרם בגן. הוא עלה על מדרגות, נכנס ועבר ישר אל חדרו. כשבאתי אליו כבר מצאתיו שוכב מכוסה מעל לראשו בשמיכתו העבה; בחדר היו פזורים בגדיו הלחים, שהמים נגרו עוד מהם על הרצפה רצועות רצועות. בלי-אומר אספתי את הבגדים, נגבתי את הרצפה והבאתי לפניו את ארוחתו. עמרם עדיין מסרב, נושך בשניו את השמיכה וזורק עלי מבטי-זעם מתוך עיניים אדומות. על הפצרותי, לגמור את הצום של היום, נשמעה אך תשובה חנוקה אחת: "לא!"

the Arab workers that sends him running to the fields in the rain? What is the meaning of *his* hysteria? In her account of the story in the wake of Połatchevsky 's death, Rachel Katzanelson claims that the brother and the sister are "two races: She is the daughter of the north, weaving sequels to her beloved books in real life, and he is the native son the Hebrew colony, the street of which are full of Arabs" (95-96). Yaron Peleg in his study of Orientalism in Hebrew literature argues that the figure of the Arab man served as a model of masculinity for Zionist men, who desired to reconstitute themselves as natives (75-76). Indeed, it seems that Amram's masculinity and his sense of nativeness are inextricably bound with his attachment to the Arab workers. In this context, we may understand how Tzipora's critique of the Arab workers is experienced by him as undermining his own sense of identity. His refusal to eat her food, his escape into the field, and his act of hiding under the thick blanket, may all be regarded thus as efforts to restore the boundaries of his breached ego, against the threat that Tzipora, her words and her food, carry.

Here we may also locate the junction where Tzipora's racism meets her gendered predicament: Amram's masculinity is Arab; Tzipora's hatred of masculinity is her hatred of the Arabs; her racism is hatred of masculinity. The hatred of the brother who cannot be hated is projected onto the racial Other, the native, for both are conceived as owners of land and labor:

My brother has the trait that is common to all Eretz-Yisraeli youth of speaking always of himself: "My vineyard," "my house," "my orchard" etc., while the property was created by the father . . . indeed my brother has more right to speak of it, and still when he speaks . . . I feel a great insult like that of a person who is trampled by foot, and my soul demands and asks: Where is my youth, the best years of my life that I put into this farm to make it such as it is today? My work is nothing, my blood is not red, and the human being within a woman is

merely a dummy, a wooden log that one can throw a rock at and she wouldn't feel a thing!. (95-96)²⁰³

Tzipora's response to Amram's articulation of his ownership is reminiscent in its morbidity of her "foreign hands" speech. The masculine and the Arab emerge as her two antagonists, whose presence threatens her very existence, and against whom she eventually avenges. A later entry in the diary recounts her hatred of Khalil, the son of the head of the family of Arab workers Amram employs,

The son of Mustafa, Khalil, is also among the gang. I cannot stand that spoiled corrupted boy, and each week, on payday, I ask Amram to give him what he deserves and fire him, but my brother keeps silent and doesn't do what I ask. And Khalil does not even make an effort to deceive us and openly walks around doing no work counting on his forefathers-right [*zkhut avot*] to play on his behalf every time. (190)²⁰⁴

Khalil is in some ways a mirror-image of Amram. He too has an inheritance, that is, the right of the forefathers to labor (*zkhut avot*). In the Midrash, *zkhut avot*, that is, the inheritance of moral rights from the forefathers, is mentioned as one of the five causes for the exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt (Dvarim Raba 2.23). When Tzipora, the illegitimate inheritor of the father's property, uses this loaded Jewish term referring to Khalil, she is, at once, affirming his nativeness, his possession of the rights she lacks, and protesting against it, against inheritance as a source of power and legitimacy, against masculinity, Arabness, and nativeness, everything that passes from father to son. If the ideological conflict over the issue of Hebrew labor may be construed as a conflict over

²⁰³ לאחי יש אותה מידה, המשותפת לכל הנוער הארץ-הישראלי, לדבר תמיד בשמו: "הכרם שלי", "הבית שלי", "הפרדס שלי" וכו'... אז מתעורר בי העלבון הגדול של אדם הנרמס ברגל, ונפשי תובעת ושואלת: היכן נעוריי, מיטב שנותי ותמצית-חיי, שהכנסתי במשק הזה, עד שהגיע למדרגתו הנוכחית? עמלי אינו כלום, דמי אינו סמיק, ואדם שבאשה אינו אלא גולם, בול עץ, שיכולים לידות בו אבן והוא לא ירגיש!

²⁰⁴ בן מוסטפה, חליל, גם הוא בין החבריה, את הנער המשחת והמפונק הזה לא אוכל לסבול, וכל שבוע ושבוע, ביום תשלום- הפועלים מבקשת אני מעמרם לתת לו את המגיע ולפטרו, אבל אחי שותק ואינו עושה את בקשתי. וחליל אפילו לרמות אותנו אינו משתדל והולך-לו בטל לעין כל, כי סומך הנהו על זכות-אבות שתעמוד לו בכל עת.

the question – who is the foreigner on the land? – Połatchevsky remaps the political field of the colony in a curious way, setting up two unlikely alliances against each other: Women and Jewish workers on the one hand, and men and Arabs on the other.

One thing that infuriates Tzipora in particular is Khalil bringing his young foal into her stable to eat from the stall of her horses. Tzipora, the charitable bird-feeder, is suddenly jealous to no end of the little foal. In this entry of her diary, Amram is the one marked as too “soft.” At times it seems that she is angry at him for being a fair and generous employer (not firing workers, not sending them away when it rains, giving them presents for the holidays etc.). Here it is also Amram who defies economic logic, by being irrational and excessive: “Amram generously spends, because money has no value for him. Without questioning himself, he takes from the treasury, sometimes the last penny, to buy ornaments for the horses, and then I have to look for ways to pay the workers” (190). Associating Amram with softness, irrationality, ornamentality, and Khalil with “maternal” care of the young foal, the text’s assignment of the categories of masculinity and femininity is inversed. Curiously, a garden appears in this episode as well, but now it is a vegetable-garden:

My only consolation is the work in the garden. Grass has grown amongst the tomatoes, which are protected by cactus-leaves; it surrounds the plants from all directions, entangled with its roots and leaves, till it is unclear which is the main plant and which are the weeds [*mi ha-‘ikar u-mi ha-tafel*]. The lines of the onions, the garlic, the beet, the peas, need hoeing, and my mind is not at peace till the weeds are uprooted, and the garden sparkles with its loose soil that looks like velvet-strips amongst the green lines. Only one question remains: Which part of the garden should be prepared for spring-vegetables? Where should I start and where should I finish? How to make the best use of this small territory? (190)²⁰⁵

²⁰⁵ מפלט יחיד מעקת לבי משמשת לי עבודת-הגן. הנה משגשג ועולה העשב בין העגבניות, שעלי-צבר מגנים עליהן; מסובב את הסלק והאפון גם הן, מסתבך בתוך שרשיו ובין עליו, עד שלא נודע, מי העיקר ומי הטפל. שורות הבצל, השום, הצמח מכל עבריו שוב דורשות עדירה, ואין דעתי מתקררת עד שינוכש הגן ויבריק באדמתו התחוזה ונראית כפסי קטיפה שחומה בין שורות ירוקות. נשארה שאלה: איזו פנת גן לעבד לירקות האביב? במה להתחיל קודם ובמה לגמור? ואיך להוציא את התועלת הכי-מרובה מהשטח הקטן הזה?

A whole different garden, a whole different story, a whole different Tzipora: Vegetables and not flowers; effective rather than excessive labor; she manages to untangle the plants from the weeds; she succeeds in hoeing properly; she manages space logically; her work is not “women’s work.” It is Amram who is “feminine” in his focus on ornaments, the Arab workers who are spoiled, weak and lazy, and even motherly toward the little foal.

Analyzing Poḥatchevsky ’s story “Bil’adeha” (Without Her), Orly Lubin claims that Poḥatchevsky deconstructs the conceptual framework that underlies gender as a category, when she marks both men and women as feminine and masculine alternately (113-115). Lubin’s reading of Poḥatchevsky construes her as subversive of systems of power, but how can we do the same with “Bi-vididut,” when the alternations between femininity and masculinity are so tightly entangled with racist distinctions? How do we read her subversion when it coincides with racist politics? Perhaps we may only say this: This is the neurosis of the “old maid”; it is racist and man-hating at once; it is racism carved of the same light as feminine rebellion; what she does to Zionist discourse, she does to both men and Arabs: she constructs both the native and the masculine and then infects them with femininity, so that she can loath them as she loath herself. The breaking of gender distinctions here are thus not, as according to Lubin, a way to undermine the Zionist system of power, but rather a way of reclaiming this system, and bolster its national and racial hierarchies.

Looking into the Field of the Other

At one of his lowest moments, the protagonist of “Ha-motza,” Gil’adi, the sentimental colonist, looks into the fields of his Arab neighbor, where things are much less complicated:

And Gil’adi is fantasizing about the thoughts of the happy *fellah*. He has stored in the granary ten *ephahs* of wheat. He will plough his land fast. There are clouds still scattered in the sky. Rain will come again and will saturate the land: In two weeks he will plough again and will sow the field... and if it is a blessed year, if it brings him much profit and fills his pocket with cash Liras, he will at long last be able to take the most beautiful of girls, Zaharah, as a second wife in addition to his wife Fatma, whose traces of youth are already gone, and old age has dawned on her. What is the sense of living with a single wife who is stale? He has to marry Zaharah. Her eyes shine. She stands tall as the tower of Ramlah. And all of her is resonant of delight and desire. (79)²⁰⁶

Gil’adi moves swiftly from envying the future agricultural success of the *fellah* to envying his future erotic successes. He associates the “natural” and fruitful relations between the Arab *fellah* and the land with what he imagines to be “Oriental” gender relations, in which women, like the land, are bought and sold. While in the story of Gil’adi, a failed replacement of women takes place, as his deceased wife is replaced by his young daughter-in-law, another sickly and weak young woman, in the fantasized “Oriental” economy, the decline of the first wife is easily compensated for by a healthy and strong younger woman.

When Gil’adi is awakened from his fantasy he turns to reading a letter from his female friend Musha, a Zionist activist. While she writes to request his help in arranging

²⁰⁶ וגלעדי הוזה וחוקר עוד בהרהורי לבו של הפלח המאושר, החורש ושר לו את שירת לבבו: ואם תהיה שנת ברכה, שתכניס לו רנחים רבים וכיסו יתמלא לירות מזומנות, יוכל סוף סוף לקחת לו את היפה בבנות, את זהרה, כצרה לאשתו פטמה, הרי זו עקבות נעוריה נמחקו זה כבר והזקנה קפצה עליה. – איזה טעם לחיים בחברת אשה יחידה, שכבר נס לחה? את זהרה הוא מוכרח לשאת, זהרה עיניה כברק נוצצות, זקופה היא כמגדל רמלה, וכולה אומרת חמדה ותאוה.

employment for some Jewish workers, Gil'adi is reminded of her latest rejection of his romantic advances:

At the moment of their farewell he kissed her forehead. This was their first kiss on over 25 years, during which they have known and respected each other. The next day he looked for an excuse to be on the street when she was leaving; his heart pounded as he stood beside her, and it seemed to him that she was trying not to look at him. Was the kiss a sin? (81)²⁰⁷

Gil'adi's fantasy about the happy *fellah* purchasing women retroactively becomes a dream of replacement not only of the "sick sisters," the self-sacrificing wife and the selfish daughter-in-law, but also of the "healthy" Zionist woman, who appears as cold and emotionally unavailable. This scene may remind us of the words of one of the members of "Ha-shomer,"²⁰⁸

Why do we need these politically active women, with their psychology and philosophy? Let us take, each of us, four Bedouin women . . . healthy and beautiful women. The Bedouin woman will bring you your mare and hand you your gun without asking where you are going and when you will come back. She is used to the climate of the land and to working both at the home and in the fields. She is not so eager to read books and her mind is not confused by theory. (qtd in Elboim 101)

In "Bi-vididut" we find a parodic version of this kind of speech, made by a woman of the second immigration wave. Tzipora's friend the Salkins are an orange-orchard owner and his wife who "came to the land as a worker" (175), whose relationship appears to mirror that of Tzipora and Amram. In both households the tension between genders revolves around the political conflict over Hebrew labor. Mrs. Salkin, the former Hebrew laborer, convinced her husband to hire three Hebrew workers, whom he is quick to blame for

²⁰⁷ בשעת פרידתם נשק לה על מצחה, זוהי הנשיקה הראשונה במשך חצי יובל השנים. אשר הם מכירים ומכבדים איש את רעותו. למחר בקש תואנה להמצא ברחוב בשעת נסיעתה: לבו דפק דפיקה קלה בעמדו על ידה ונדמה היה לו, כי היא השתדלה לא להביט ישר בפניו. האם חטא הנשיקה גרם?

²⁰⁸ "Ha-shomer" was a Jewish organization devoted to taking over the work of armed guarding of the colonies. It was founded by members of the second Zionist immigration wave and remained active from 1909 to 1920.

every problem that occurs in the orange-orchard. During Tzipora's visit with the Salkins, she witnesses an argument on this very issue, which is curiously transferred into the private sphere:

-- An excellent deal your workers gave me today! They worked all day, and tomorrow I have to send the Arabs to fix what they have ruined.

She was silent, and he added in anger:

Only devils would work with Jews, not people!

And are you not a Jew? – Mrs. Salkin replied, her voice trembling a bit.

-- No, no!...

-- Then -- what right had you to marry a Jewish woman?

Salkin did not answer that, but kept denouncing Hebrew labor, *desecrating* it and praising *the work of the foreigners*... It seemed that she made an effort to conquer her anger, and in a slightly humoristic tone she said:

Why don't Jewish men marry Arab women? -- they have so many virtues: they work with clay and bricks, carry all kinds of heavy loads on their heads, and ride the donkey after their husbands; and the children, the children that Arab women bear, they are skilled since birth in every kind of hard work – a real pleasure!²⁰⁹ (175; my emphasis)

The language of “desecration” (*leḥalela*) and “the work of the foreigners” (*‘avodat ha-zarim*) conjures the predicament of *‘avodah zarah*, that is, the threat of unbearable contamination of space that would make it impossible for Jews to inhabit. Stretching this logic further, Mrs. Salkin's joke once again joins together Jewish workers and Jewish women as those who are to be excluded from the space of the colony by dint of *‘avodah zarah*.

²⁰⁹ -- עסק מצויין עשו לי היום הפועלים שלך! עבדו כל היום, ומחר אני צריך לשלוח את הערביים לתקן מה שקלקלו הם.

היא שתקה והוא הוסיף בחמתו:

-- רק שדים יעבדו עם יהודים ולא בני אדם!

-- ואתה אינך יהודי? -- ענתה הגברת סלקין, כשקולה רעד קצת.

-- לא, לא! --

-- אם כך -- באיזו רשות נשאת אישה יהודיה?

על זה לא ענה סלקין ישר, אלא הוסיף לשפוך רותחין על העבודה העברית, לחללה, ויחד עם זה להלל את עבודת הזרים... נכרת בה התאמצות גדולה לכבוש את כעסה, ובהיותו קל אמרה:

-- למה אין יהודים מתחתנים עם ערביות? -- הלא הרבה מעלות טובות להן: עובדות הן בחמר ובלבנים, נושאות כל משא כבד על ראשיהן ומחמרות אחרי בעליהן, והילדים, הילדים שהערביות מביאות לעולם, הלא מבטן אמם מוכשרים הם לכל עבודה קשה -- תענוג ממש!

The appearance of the native woman ties together gender, class and colonial power-relations, by mapping them all through the temporal dichotomy between the “primitive” and the modern. Mariarosa Dalla Costa explains that within the capitalist framework while the masculine work-world advances through modernization and industrialization, women’s work in the private sphere is maintained as a “backward” residue of a primordial economy (24-29). This reading of capitalism, I suggest, corresponds with Ann McClintock’s analogy between colonialist relations and gender-relations. According to McClintock, the “native” is a gendered category just as “woman” is a colonial category; both are the “primitive” others of modern capitalism and imperialism (154). Following McClintock and Dalla Costa, the juxtaposition in Palestine between the capitalist economy of the colonists and pre-capitalist economy of the Arab *fellahin* may also be understood as a gendered encounter between masculine and feminine spheres. In this framework, in contrast to Hebrew labor and women’s work, the work of the native woman is unthreatening, for it leaves in place the “normalized” temporality of gender-relations – men as modern, women as primitive.

Although she is invoked jokingly, the *fellaha* seems to serve as a panacea for the complexes around femininity and masculinity that trouble the story. Mrs. Salkin’s remarks, we recall, conclude with a statement regarding the hard-working children Arab women naturally bear. Tzipora’s instant inner response to the conversation interestingly enough predicts that since the Salkins are “strangers (*zarim*) to each other in spirit,” they “will bear children and bequeath to them all the lies and the crookedness that is in their hearts” (175). Again the issue of inheritance comes up. The Jewish parents spoil the inheritance of their children with their *zarut* (foreignness). The proximity between Mrs.

Salkin's reference to the "good" and productive children of the Arab woman and Tzipora's lament over the expected "bad" children of the Jewish woman retroactively expands the significance of the joke, making the competition between Jewish and Arab workers, a feminine competition between mothers. Rereading Marx, Gayatri Spivak argues that acknowledging the womb as a place of production may be used as a way of destabilizing the terms of capitalist economy, for, although motherhood is a site of alienation, the child is a product that cannot be thought of in terms of "consumption" or "direct exchange" ("Feminism and Critical Theory" 111). Along these lines we may say that the excessive rhetoric of the women of "Bi-vdidut," with their melodramatic soliloquies and their sarcastic jokes, unsettles the economic logic pursued by their husbands and brothers, transforming the masculine competition over labor into a rivalry of wombs.

The final act of this story reconsiders the possibility of the exchange of women even more seriously. Like Gil'adi Tzipora ends up giving away her farm, leaving it to Amram and his new wife, for the bride refuses "to enter as mistress to a home which an older sister rules" (211). Tzipora justifies her sacrifice as one that would enable Amram to be "an honest husband with a handsome wife and children – like olive-plants" (209). As in Mrs. Salkin's joke, Tzipora, the childless woman, is replaced by a woman who would hopefully bear Amram native children rooted in the land "like olive-plants." Yet, in a previous scene, we are informed by Mr. Salkin that the prospective bride is a questionable woman – "She is a young divorcee with a very suspicious past . . . the entire colony thinks that this step is a disaster for Amram" (208). Tzipora's oddness is thus to

be replaced by another woman's oddness,²¹⁰ which makes her dream of Amram's future rootedness in the land through the substitute-woman's children questionable as well. The story's play with substitutive wombs concludes with a sense of doubt regarding the possibility of Jewish women replacing each other, which re-invokes the "humorous" option of the native woman in all its seriousness.

Nora – Tzipora

"Bi-vididut" is one of three stories in the collection *Ba-kfar u-ba-'avodah* which feature a figure of a woman-colonist, *ikarah*, as their main protagonist. In Zionist historiography, the *ikarot* are doubly marginalized both as women and as members of the obsolete project of the first Zionist immigration wave (Shilo, *Etgar* 13-35; Berlovitz, *Lehamtzi* 47-79). With the advent of "socialist" Zionism and the figure of the *halutz*, the first Zionist immigration wave was marked as an irrelevant form of Zionism, and nobody cared anymore about the woman-colonist, a woman who was expected to play the homemaker but was never really at home on the land. Pohatchevsky's stories thus provide a rare glimpse at this forgotten figure.

Curiously, all three of Pohatchevsky's stories of the *ikarah* contain references to a literary icon which may well be the epitome of the European bourgeois New Woman – Nora of Henrik Ibsen's play *A Doll's House*. In "Sara Zarhi," the third story in the collection, for example, Sara, a woman-colonist who slaves to maintain her farm, while constantly being emotionally abused by her unappreciative husband, finds solace in reading, copying and writing about European modern literature insofar as it relates

²¹⁰ On the odd woman as a new political entity at the turn of the century and a source of social anxiety see Showalter in *Sexual Anarchy* (19-37).

“women’s agony” (102). “On Ibsen’s ‘Nora,’” she writes: ‘In the last play Nora is simply adorable articulating simple but deep words of truth. When Helmer says to her ‘But no man can be expected to sacrifice his honor for the woman he loves,’ she answers simply ‘Millions of women have done it!’ how tragic and how true!’” (103). In the next story, “Ha-meshek” (The Farm), the protagonist Zehava lives with her sister and her violent brother-in-law and exhausts herself working for the couple. Only when she becomes sick as a result of hard labor and emotional pain, does she finally find time to return to a thick volume of Ibsen’s plays, which “was standing on her shelf for months...” (136). Browsing through the volume she gets to “Nora” – “she should read it again, she thinks” (ibid). “Bi-vdidut,” the last story in the collection, mentions Nora in a peculiar context. Tzipora, who is yet another woman-colonist exhausting herself by working for an unappreciative man, refers to her beautiful and resourceful Yemenite neighbor Fadia as “*Nora ha-ibsenit*,” “Ibsen’s Nora” (196), since, like Nora, Fadia takes care of a sick husband.

In Pohatchevsky’s stories, as in *A Doll’s House*, sacrifice appears as a feminine way of being in the public sphere. Nora’s tragedy derives from her feminine altruism. As her story goes, she has saved her sick husband’s life by borrowing money and slaving for years to pay it back. The revelation of this feminine sacrifice makes Nora’s husband Helmer aware of his dependency of his wife, which causes a crisis of masculinity similar to the one Amram experiences *vis-à-vis* Tzipora’s “poisonous” talk of Hebrew labor. In both cases, women’s intervention in the public sphere threatens men, not merely by dint of their infringement upon the normatively male-dominated space, but also because of the nature of their interference which hints at an alternative economy. Earlier in the play, in a

scene that foreshadows the “fiasco,” Helmer warns Nora that “an atmosphere of lies contaminates and poisons every corner of the home. Every breath that the children draw in such a house contains the germs of evil” (35). The idea of feminine speech as poison is also reminiscent of Amram’s proclamation to Tzipora, “You ruining my nerves and poisoning my blood” (171). Both Tzipora’s discourse of labor, like Nora’s lies, are associated with women’s work. The figure of Tzipora, we recall, connects Hebrew labor with women’s work in several ways. Nora works secretly for years to pay her debt. Both also introduce the mother’s economy of giving and self-sacrifice into the public sphere. Indeed, according to Helmer in the same speech cited above, “Nearly all young criminals are the children of mothers who are constitutional liars” (ibid). To Nora’s question, “Why do you say mothers?” he replies, “It is usually the mothers” (ibid). In this context, we may understand the fear and disgust of the male partners *vis-à-vis* women’s intervention in the work world. For Amram, as for Helmer, feminine giving, women’s work, becomes poisonous once it transgresses the boundaries of the home, threatening to feminize the laws that govern the public sphere. It should be underscored in the context of thinking about the New Hebrew Woman, that Poḥatchevsky’s stories about the *ikarah*, like *A Doll’s House*, do not reject women’s sacrifice as mere submission to men’s will. On the contrary, for Poḥatchevsky, women’s sacrifice is always a gift given both in the private and the national realms. In other words, women’s sacrifice for men is construed as sacrifice for the land in disguise, and thus remains the core of feminine presence in the Zionist space; a feminine way of being Zionist. The problem, for Poḥatchevsky, is not women’s sacrifice. It is men’s rejection of the women’s “gifts” that threatens to void their sacrifices of meaning.

In this context we may revisit Tzipora's special connection with birds. In *A Doll's House*, Helmer, Nora's husband constantly calls her by names of birds – “skylark,” “squander bird,” “songbird.” Birds in the play appear to represent a strange mixture of powerlessness and agency. Helmer, of course, uses this image referring to Nora's smallness, agility, and frivolousness. However, Nora's final escape from the family home conjures the bird as a symbol of freedom. The birds as complex sign appear in “Bivdidut” as well, in the scene where Tzipora dreams of her beautiful Yemenite neighbor, Fadia, whom she calls Nora. In Tzipora's dream, Fadia cures her sick husband by letting him smell a pink rose, just as, we recall, Nora cures Helmer. Tzipora wakes up, as “a beak of a bird knocks on her window,” then “a frail twitter of a bird” sounds, and then “the sound of the birds grows louder and louder coming from the trees all around.” After being awakened by the birds Tzipora runs to do her duty of “*bikur ḥolim*” at Fadia and her husband's home (196). Visiting with the sick neighbor she finds that her “Nora's” husband is indeed better; the dream came true; women's giving is not poison but the healing smell of the rose.

We may recall how in the tradition of Shabbat Shira Moses' words vacillate between truth and lie, substantiated only by the generosity of the birds. Questions of truth and falsehood figure prominently in *A Doll's House* as well. In fact, Nora is characterized as rebellious against Helmer's clear cut definitions, according to which a word is a word, a lie is a lie. It is interesting to note in this context, two critiques of Ibsen's play, by two prominent Zionist figures that emphasize the distinction between truth and lie. Yosef Ḥayim Brenner, for example, denounces *A Doll's House*, as “a piece which is untruthful in its entirety” (benyehuda.org), and Max Nordau claims that while “it is pretended that

Ibsen is before all things exemplary in truthfulness . . . no writer has heaped up in his works so many startling improbabilities as Ibsen” (344). As a man of science, Nordau proceeds to critically analyze the improbability of several of Ibsen’s plays. What Nordau finds particularly improbable in *A Doll’s House*, is, notably, the way Helmer speaks to his wife:

In *A Doll’s House* Helmer, who is depicted as somewhat sensual, although prosaic, homely, practical and common place, says to his Nora: ‘Is that my lark who is twittering outside there?... Is the little squirrel running about? ... Has my little spendthrift bird been wasting more money? ... come, come, my lark must not let her wings droop immediately. ... What do people call the bird who always spends everything? ... My lark is the dearest little thing in the world, but she needs a very great deal of money ... and I couldn’t wish you to be anything but exactly what you are – my own little lark ...’ And it is thus that a husband, a bank director and barrister, after eight years of married life, speaks to his wife, the mother of his three children. (345)

Ibsen’s social critique of the infantilization of women in the patriarchal home constitutes, for Nordau, evidence of the improbability of his realism. The ironic baggage of this speech – given that Nora is in fact saving every penny to pay the debt that saved Helmer’s life – is of course completely erased by Nordau’s critique. The Zionist ideologue’s issue with the particular speech he cites, a speech that contains many images of birds, connects between the birds in the play, like in “Bi-vdidut” through the myth of Shabbat Shira, with questions regarding the truthfulness of words. Later in his essay, Nordau also questions the very possibility of Nora’s final dramatic liberation, claiming that it does not make sense that “the wife, who was only a moment before playing so tenderly with her children, suddenly abandons these children without a thought of them” (350). He also challenges her very act of giving, arguing that in the Norwegian climate it is impossible to think of a disease that requires travel abroad to be cured (353). Indeed, the entire feminist narrative is a lie according to Nordau, the scientist, and, presumably,

also for Brenner, who, as we recall, denounces the play as “untruthful,” attacking David Friesman for translating the *A Doll’s House* into Hebrew complaining: “Do we have a *Hamlet* already? And a *Faust*? Dostoyevsky? . . . we have nothing of these and they are worried about the lack of ‘Nora’!” Perhaps, only stories of men – Hamlet, Faust – can be true in this framework; or, perhaps, only stories of men can have any meaning at all. When Poḥatchevsky invokes Nora as a role model for her *ikarot*, when she rereads and rewrites Nora in the Zionist home, she is acting out against a masculinist critical tradition that detests “the hysteric fool” (Nordau 384), thus challenging through her the limits of the Zionist public space and inscribing into it women’s self-sacrifice as meaningful labor.

Nordau’s reading of Ibsen’s self-other ethics is striking in this context insofar as it cuts through the very tension which informs the relation between Poḥatchevsky’s political and fictional writing:

But the most remarkable things about this philosopher of individualism is that he not only expressly condemns egoism in the man as a low vice, but unconsciously also admires disinterestedness in the woman as angelic perfection. In *A Doll’s House* (p. 113) he brags that ‘my most sacred duties are towards myself.’ And yet the only touching characters in his pieces with whom this inflexible individualist is successful are the saintly women who live and die for others only – these Hedwigs, Miss Bernicks, Miss Hessels, Aunt Tesmans. Etc., who never think of their ‘I,’ but make the sacrifice of all their impulses and wishes to the welfare of others their sole task of earth. This contradiction, violent to the point of absurdity, is very well explained by the nature of Ibsen’s mind. His mystic-religious obsession with voluntary self-sacrifice for others is necessarily stronger than his pseudo-philosophic lucubration on individualism. (273)

The last line of this passage could have been written of Poḥatchevsky as well. Both Ibsen and Poḥatchevsky, it seems, are committed to individualism as part of their investment in modernity (Ibsen) and nationalism (Poḥatchevsky), but both are persistently attached to the idea of sacrifice. For Nordau, in the end, women’s sacrifice is the only believable story, not liberation, not empowerment, not rebellion, only sacrifice. That Nora too is all

about sacrifice is forgotten because of the final statement, “my most sacred duties are towards myself.” Once sacrifice is transformed into rebellion, and it is transformed into rebellion once it demands recognition, it becomes despicable and unbelievable. Poḥatchevsky transgresses the law of the masculine reader, for her “sacrifice” – or perhaps her “feminine” – appears as an infection that pervades all, “hysterically” demanding to be seen and heard. The very act of writing it down again and again is part of this venture of hers.

Conclusion: A National Metonym

Tzipora, in the end, has to go. Her presence, the conflicts and splits she creates, are unbearable so she has to disappear. At the end of the story, she leaves the colony. She gives the farm to Amram and his new wife and moves to one of the workers’ communes to serve as a cook. Curiously, this mimics two political-historical shifts that occurred during the struggle for Hebrew labor. Gershon Shafir describes the transformation of the quest for Hebrew labor from the colonies into the workers’ cooperative settlements (*kvutzot*) as a move from an impossible competition between the Jewish and Arab workers to the establishment of separate Jewish economy, or, from the “conquest of labor” (*kibush ha-‘avodah*) in the colonies to the “conquest of land” (*kibush ha-adamah*) in the communes (146-186). Something similar happens with women-workers. After the failure to compete with their male counterparts both in the colonies and in the communes, separate women’s farms are formed, in which women can work the land without the constant comparison to men that so deeply tortures Tzipora (Shilo 137-180).

In this sense, Tzipora's departure at the end of the story coincides with the Zionist trajectory. She too cannot stand the competition(s) the space of the colony forces her to live with. The story itself, it seems, cannot stand the contrasts that undergird it. Within it, women and men, Arab and Jews, and Colonists and workers, cannot share the same space. Like the Zionist space at night in Rivka Alper's *Ha-mitnaḥalim ba-har*, which become "heavy under the weight of the [different] voices," Poḥatchevsky's national poetic space implodes by its multiple "foreignnesses." "Bi-vdidut" thus does the impossible for a feminine story in the end. It becomes a metonym for the Zionist project, as a project that cannot stand the competitions it creates, that produces heterogeneity but marks it unbearable. "Bi-vdidut," thus, is a destructive story, painfully split at the root. It is a misogynist-feminist story, a tolerant-racist story, an altruist-egoist story, and eventually, indeed, like Zionism, it is a story of solitude, in which any encounter with the Other is horrifying.

CHAPTER VI

The Women's Journey: Coming of age, Coming to the Land, Coming to the Nation in the Writings of Dvora Baron

Introduction

In the preceding chapters of this dissertation, I have shown how women's nationalist writing transposes dominant Zionist narratives onto the register of "women's issues." Stories about the national space, self, body and labor, I have argued, are transformed in women's writing into stories about women's rights, work, bodies, and gendered traumas. To various degrees, the previous chapters have also highlighted the embeddedness of the Zionist feminine story, the construction of the New Hebrew Women, in colonialist and Orientalist discourses, that is, the impossibility of a "feminine sphere" detached from national and ethnic dynamics of power and domination. In this chapter, I further theorize the ways in which the categories of race, ethnicity, nationality and gender intersect in the Zionist feminine story, by analyzing Dvora Baron's representation of women's travel to and away from the Land. Contrary to other feminist readings of Baron's prose, which emphasize the continuity between the Diaspora and the Land as the unique mark of Baron feminine subversion of the grand narrative of the nation, I show how in the novel *Hagolim* and in the stories "Turkim" and "Bney Keidar," women's transitions between the

diasporic space and the Land undergird narratives of national initiation of particular feminine nature.

Dvora Baron (1887-1956) is considered a unique figure in the Hebrew literary landscape for she was the first woman prose-writer who entered the canon of Hebrew literature. Born in a small Jewish town by the city of Minsk in Belarus, and daughter of the local rabbi, she received extensive religious Jewish education which was unusual for Jewish girls at the time. As the story goes, her father let her listen in on the boys' lessons, as long as she sat in the women's section of the town's small *beit midrash* (Jewish schoolhouse) where he taught. At the young age of 15 Baron left the family home and went to study in Minsk, again a remarkable venture for girls at the time. As of 1903 she began publishing stories in Hebrew and Yiddish, and by 1910, when she immigrated to Palestine, she was already marked as a promising young author. In Palestine she met Yosef Aaharonowitz, a prominent figure in the Zionist workers' movement, *Ha-po'el ha-tza'ir*, whom she married in 1911. Baron and Aaharonowitz also cooperated professionally, as she became editor of the literary section of the movement's publication, of which he was the chief editor. This placed Baron at the very heart of the emerging Zionist cultural scene in Palestine. At the beginning of World War One, the Ottoman authorities deported a few hundred Jewish families from Palestine to Egypt including the Baron-Aaharonowitz family.²¹¹ The time in Egypt was painful for Baron who became sick and depressed. After the war, the family returned to Palestine, where the couple assumed again their editing positions in *Ha-po'el ha-tza'ir*. In 1923, however, Baron and Aharonowitz startled the small Zionist community in Palestine when they laconically

²¹¹ The Ottoman authorities deemed the Jewish settlers who were still subjects of their origin European countries a security risk at the time of the war and thus they deported the communities living in coastal cities such as Jaffa and Tel Aviv. See: Govrin, 'Pgishatam shel goley Eretz Yisrael 'im Mitzrayim.'

announced their resignation from the publication. While Aharonowitz continued to hold public offices in the years to come, Baron shut herself in her Tel Aviv apartment, which she literally did not leave from 1923 to the time of her death in 1956. During these 33 years period of seclusion, she wrote what is considered to be the more significant part of her literary work.

Baron is the only woman prose-writer who was established as a prominent figure in the Hebrew literature of the pre-state period (that is, the first half of the 20th century). Shachar Pinsker and Sheila Jelen remark in the introduction to their 2007 collection of essays on Baron that the enthusiastic reception of her work, since her very first appearance on the Hebrew literary scene, was to a large extent related to her singularity as a woman-writer (5). According to Pinsker and Jelen, however, while she was celebrated as “a social and cultural” phenomenon, i.e. a woman writer within an exclusively masculine milieu, for many years readers did not appreciate the “poetic significance” of her work (ibid). Jelen’s and Pinsker’s collection reflects the changes in the critical reception of Baron from the late 1950s to the present. It includes Dan Miron’s seminal 1959 essay, in which he argues that Baron’s late stories forge a cyclical a-historical metaphysics (33-68). While this framing of Baron dominated the critical discourse of her oeuvre for several decades, recently feminist scholars have begun to challenge Miron’s reading of Baron for its detachment from the specific historical and political contexts in which Baron wrote. Feminist critics have ventured to trace the subversive potential of the stories especially in the context of Jewish and Zionist gender politics. Scholars such as Naomi Seidman, Orly Lubin, Wendy Zierler, Sheila Jelen and Shachar Pinsker discern in Baron’s work gestures of protest and subversion both against

the patriarchal traditional Jewish world and against the androcentrism of the Zionist project (Pinsker, "Unraveling the Yarn" 145-169; Lubin, "Tidbits"; Seidman 67-101; Jelen, *Intimation*; Zierler, *And Rachel* 228-254).

One aspect of Baron's work which drew the attention of critical readers is the setting of most of her stories in the scenery of her childhood, the *shtetlekh*, the small Jewish towns of Eastern Europe, rather than in the Zionist space. Unusual for a member of the Zionist intellectual elite, this choice has been considered one of the reasons for her problematic position within the Hebrew canon for many years (Jelen and Pinsker 5-8). For the critics mentioned above, however, the diasporic setting has a subversive force, as it frustrates the Zionist demand for a clear break with the Diaspora. Given the Zionist marking of the Diaspora as effeminate, Baron's focus upon life in the *shtetl* is also compellingly assigned gendered significance by these scholars. "By resisting the dominant trends of Hebrew fiction in her day," Wendy Zierler claims, "Baron effectively resisted 'literary immigration' into the realm of male Hebrew letters" (130). According to Jelen and Pinsker, "In those instances in which Baron wrote about the move to Palestine, her representation was not much different from her literary depiction of the *shtetl*" (9). Instead of a clear rift between old diasporic Jewish life and the new Zionist life in the land, Baron radically constructs, in this approach, continuity between the old and the new, the Diaspora and the Land.

The way Wendy Zierler describes her critical move in reading Baron is telling in this context. Contrary to earlier Zionist critics, who fault Baron for failing to represent the Eretz-Yisraeli Zionist experience, Zierler claims to join other feminist readers in highlighting the way Baron's stories "respond to the problematic of early twentieth-

century Jewish women's experience" (239). According to Zierler, however, Baron's exploration of "women's experience" entails her detachment from the politics of Zionism insofar as those are embodied in the act of immigration to the Land (Aliyah). "Baron's fiction (when it touches upon these topics)," Zierler writes, "typically depicts Zionist immigration either as a male phenomenon from which women are excluded or as a thoroughly futile exercise" (230). Thus, Baron's stories constitute fictions of "female 'non-immigration'" (ibid). In these fictions, women cannot be the subjects of Zionist immigration, because Zionism is, so to speak, not theirs; because women, in these fictions do not act out Zionist visions, but rather, "find solace in the notion of a separate female community experience" (232). As powerful as Zierler's claims are, I would argue that they also limit our understanding of the crucial ways in which Zionist ideology shapes Baron's work, by eliding the ways in which Baron shapes a particular feminized, but yet nationalist, experience of coming to the land.

Is it the case that in Baron's stories, like inside Baron's secluded Tel Aviv apartment, such an intense feminine experience prevails, that it makes Zionist trajectories and narratives irrelevant? Is it true that places do not matter for women? My readings of the novel *Ha-golim* (The Exiles), and the stories "Turkim" (Turks) and "Bney Keidar" (Sons of Keidar) in the following pages would suggest that places, trajectories, and journeys, do matter for reading Baron. I take into account here the crucial political significance of transitions to and from Palestine in the Zionist context, in which Baron does write, and postulate that not even women can imagine themselves as being outside of this context. My readings in this chapter show how some of Baron's stories do represent "female immigration," imbued with racial and ethnic dynamics of power that

underlie Jewish Ashkenazi settlement in Palestine. These stories, I argue, do not subvert the Zionist structures of power, but rather work to expand their scope so that they include “the (Jewish Ashkenazi) women’s experience.” I contend, then, that Baron’s fiction is indeed an exploration of “women’s experience,” but that, as such, it revises nationalist, colonialist and Orientalist discourses in accordance with women’s particular gendered investment in traveling to Palestine, in coming to land and nation.

A Natural Woman

The novel *Ha-golim* is one of Baron’s few pieces that focus on the Zionist settlement in Palestine. It narrates the story of a community of Jewish settlers deported by the Turks from Palestine to Egypt during World War One.²¹² The novel is composed of two novellas “Le-‘et ‘ata” (For the Time Being; 1943) and “Me-emesh” (Since Last Night; 1955). Only in 1970 did the novellas come out as one novel titled *Ha-golim*, thus fulfilling the wish of the late Baron.²¹³ The novel takes place not in Europe, but in Palestine, in Alexandria, and then back in Palestine. Do these places matter, Palestine, Alexandria, Palestine, Jaffa, Tel Aviv, Europe, East, West? While the critical discourse delineated above implies that they do not – for Land and Exile are supposedly enmeshed by Baron into a kind of an undifferentiated flux – my reading gleans the ways in which Zionist journeys are inscribed into women’s stories and onto women’s skin and bodies.

²¹² The novel has definitely an autobiographical dimension as it relates to time Baron herself spent in Egypt. The framework of this chapter, however, does not allow me to discuss this aspect of the novel thoroughly, as the character who is thought to be a representation of Baron herself is not part of the following analysis. For more about the relation between the novel and the experience of Baron, see: Govrin, “Akirah tzorekh hanahah.”

²¹³ English translation by Sheila Jelen is available only for the first novella (“For the Time Being,” in Jelen and Pinsker, *Hebrew, Gender and Modernity*. 225-278). Thus, in the following pages, I use, in most cases, the published translation with certain revisions for quotations from the first part, and have translated by myself quotations from the second part.

Moreover, Zionist women's travel-narratives in *Ha-golim* enact colonial *topoi* about the ramifications of white women's travels in the Orient, and thus construct a Zionist feminine journey, which is imbued in colonial discourse.

Of the multiple families and individuals entangled in *Ha-golim*, I shall focus on the stories of three young women: Ita Blokh, a new Jewish arrival to Palestine at the beginning of the novel; Brakha Rothstein, the daughter of a bourgeois Zionist Jewish family settled in Jaffa; and Lulu, a Jewish Egyptian embroiderer, whom the deportees encounter in Alexandria, and who later travels back to Palestine with them. Ita arrives to Palestine from Lithuania at the beginning of the novel, as a "tourist to the Orient" (5), accompanied by her relative Menahem Gutt, who is hopelessly in love with her. In Jaffa, they stay at the inn of Neḥama Rothstein, whose daughter Brakha develops an admiration for the beautiful Ita through the course of the novel. When Jaffa's Jewish community is deported by the Turks to Alexandria, Ita and Menahem accompany them and continue their tours of the East in Egypt. In Alexandria, Ita again lodges with the Rothsteins. Eventually though, she falls in love with a Jewish Egyptian cotton merchant, whom she follows to Cairo, where she dies while giving birth to their daughter. After news of Ita's death become known to the community of exiles in Alexandria, in the hopes of learning more information about Ita's tragic fate, Brakha Rothstein goes to visit Lulu the embroiderer, a relative of Ita's Egyptian lover. This encounter that intertwines the stories of three young women would be the focal point of my reading in this section.

The visit with the Egyptian embroiderer is initially introduced to the reader as a fraught endeavor on the part of Brakha, "who would usually avoid Lulu because of Lulu's adornment and outlandish dress" (85; my translation). The text proceeds to mark

the visit as an act of transgression referring to the courtyard where the building Lulu resides in is located as “a forbidden courtyard,” which Brakha enters secretly, making sure first that “she wouldn’t see anyone she knew” (270; Jelen’s translation). The tension around Brakha’s entry into “forbidden space” of the “Oriental” woman intensifies even more as she climbs the stairs up to Lulu’s apartment:

The stairs creaked beneath every step she took, and as she climbed she saw the dizzying sight of countless spinning roofs, laundry blowing in the breeze, domes and towers suspended over the void. Finally, another sign with a ball of yarn whitened before her eyes, and the girl she sought appeared in the entrance to one of the rooms with her embroidery in her hand. (270-271; Jelen’s translation revised)²¹⁴

The description of “the dizzying sight of countless spinning roofs, laundry blowing in the breeze, domes and towers suspended over the abyss,” makes space itself correspond with the outlandish woman inside, as the Oriental space too seems overly “decorated,” dense and rich with details that confuse the gaze of the simple Zionist European girl. Later in the story, after Lulu immigrates to Palestine, she, like other Mizrahi women (Guliat 208-215), has to take off all her earrings, bracelets, and corals, in order to be integrated into the Zionist community in Palestine. As we have seen in the discussion of the feminine body in Chapter Four, feminine decoration and ornamentality are marked as foreign to Zionist culture.

The hierarchy between the European and Oriental aesthetics is substantiated by Lulu herself, who describes Ita as the ideal opposite of herself. While Lulu is “too outlandish and adorned,” Ita Blokh, according to Lulu, is the epitome of natural beauty:

²¹⁴ על פי השלט עם חוטי-הרקמה שבצדו מצאה את הבית המבוקש, הביטה בזהירות מסביבה לראות אם אין איש מכר פה, בחצר "המסוכנת", ופנתה לעלות אל הקומה העליונה. המדרגות רעדו תחתיה עם כל פסיעה, ומן הצד הסתחררו ריבועי גגות, כבסים מתלבטים ברוח, והמון כיפות ומגדלים תלויים על בלימה, עד שלבסוף הבהירה כנגדה שוב פקעת של חוטים. והנערה המיועצת נראתה בפתחו של אחד החדרים עם מלאכת הרקמה. (85)

“and what a beauty . . . everyone thought she walked around in satins and silks, when all she wore was simple cotton, unadorned *cotton and flannel*. She had no *need* for anything fancier” (271; my emphasis).²¹⁵ Natural unadorned beauty is assigned moral significance here, when it is juxtaposed in Lulu’s speech with Ita’s kindness – “she was so good, so good . . . she saw into everyone’s heart and pitied them” (ibid). This *post-mortem* image of Ita matches some earlier visions of her, but with some distinctions. The wearing of simple fabrics, for example, correlates with one of Ita’s most beautiful features – her natural white clear skin-tone – which arouses the envy of Brakha, whose face bears the marks of the Middle-Eastern sun, and is all covered with “pimples, freckles, and light spots” (ibid).²¹⁶ The text also associates Ita with the natural “special scent” she spreads in her room at the inn, which is, “not the scent of perfumes, but the scent of a tree in bloom” (236).²¹⁷ The reference to tree brings to mind the scene of the deportation from Jaffa, where one of the deportees “tore some twigs off a tree . . . saying ‘these will be a symbol to us of what they have done. This tree will stay here, in its flesh, in its place . . . [while] we, in contrast, are being uprooted...’” (231).²¹⁸ As we shall see later, although the association between Ita’s “scent of a tree” and the tree left on the land as a symbol of the nation may seem stretched, it does in fact correlate with the particular ways in which Ita’s character is developed throughout the novel. If initially she is depicted “a tourist to the Orient,” not at all a self-proclaimed Zionist, later in the narrative, especially after her death, her figure is reconstructed as a model for the ideological initiation of the other

²¹⁵ "ואיזה יופי," המשיכה בעצב, מתוך הרהור. "האנשים הלא חשבו, כי רק משי וקטיפה היא לובשת, ובאמת הן לא היה זה אלא כותן פשוט, כותן ופלנל, בלי כל קישוטים. לא היה צורך בכך." (86)

²¹⁶ אבעבועות, וגם נמשים ובהרות (29-30)

²¹⁷ לא מתמרקים כי אם מעץ העומד בבלבובו (27)

²¹⁸ והבחור הליטאי, אשר לא היה כל מאומה בידי, קטף לו מאחד העצים שבשדרה כמה זלזלים כי אמר: יהיו-נא אלה לי לסמל, אשר מה הם נתלשים והעץ נשאר פה מעורה במקומו, כך גם אננו פה כיום נתלשים והולכים, אבל העם יהיה קיים ומשריש בארץ. (15)

female figures. The natural scent assigned to Ita arguably foreshadows the posthumous connection the text forms between her figure and the land.

In order to trace the process that the figure of Ita undergoes in the novel, we should highlight certain disparities between Lulu's ideal description of her and her representations in the text before her death. Earlier in the novel, as she is cleaning Ita's room at the lodge, Brakha admires all the "marvelous objects" Ita has in her room, "among them a tiny, delicate manicure kit, and a hand-embroidered handkerchief bordered by an azure thread" (236). While we are told that "the truth is, she had seen all these things more than once" back when Ita was staying in the family hotel in Jaffa, we are told that in Alexandria, "her eyes were opened and she looked at all this differently" (*ibid*; my translation), because:

During her days here, in the city, she had become more sophisticated. Just as in their house in Jaffa, Brakha washed floors and dishes, peeled eggplants and zucchini for frying, and listened to her father's – or the Lithuanian boy's – history lessons on the Sabbath. But all this – she now knew – wasn't in the least bit interesting. It was interesting, rather, to stand and gaze through the window of "Modern," a giant store, or to look at the boys skating on the sidewalks, or to watch the group of attractive English girls rolling tennis balls along grassy fields. In the morning, on her way to the vegetable market, she sometimes stopped outside the beauty shop called "Paris" and was surprised to observe for the first time that all the young women emerging from there looked the same: they had the same loose, almost sloppy curls in their hair, the same white powdery countenances, and the same red tinge on the cheekbones, which made them look strangely cunning. But after some time, she understood on her own that they did all this on purpose, because this is what the seamstress from the basement apartment called "fashion." (237; Jelen's translation)²¹⁹

²¹⁹ כי היא, ברכה, במשך ימי שבתה פה, בכרך, נתפקחה והביטה על כל כמו אלה אחרת. כמו קודם לכן, שם בביתם שבשכונת הים, שטפה אמנם את הרצפות וכלי האוכל, קלפה חצילים וקישואים לטיגון והקשיבה בשבתות לשיעורי ההיסטוריה, שהרצה לפניו, אביה, או הבחור הליטאי, אלא שכל זה – ידעה עכשיו – הוא "לא מעניין", ואילו לעמוד ולהסתכל בחלון הראווה של בית המסחר הגדול "מודרן", להביט אל הנערים המתרוצצים בנעלי-הסקט על המדרכות, או לקבוצות האנגליות יפות הגזרה, המגלגלות בחצריהן המדושאות את כדורי הטניס – זה היה "מעניין". בבוקר, בדרכה אל שוק הירקות, התעכבה לפעמים לפני המכון ליופי "פאריס", והייתה תמהה בזמן הראשון לראות, כי כל הנערות היוצאות משם מראה אחד להן: אותו סלסול רופף, מרושל כמעט, בשיער, אותו הלובן הסידי בפנים, ואתו האודם בקצה הלחי האחת, זה שהוא מוסיף ברק מוזר, ערמומי, לעין. אולם לאחר זמן הבינה מעצמה, כי את כל זה עושים בכוונה, כי שהו מה שהתופרת מהמרתף קוראת לו מודה. (28)

Brakha's re-vision of Ita's feminine objects is an effect of her presence in the colonized space of Alexandria. In this setting, Ita, the Jewish European "tourist," is associated with the culture of the British colonizers of Egypt, and the adoration of her "marvelous objects" emerges as part of the overall adoration of the manifestations of European culture in Egypt. Brakha, the simple Jewish Eretz-Yisraeli girl, conversely, is posited in the place of the naïve "native," gazing enviously at the western models. Note that Ita is associated here with artificial beautification rather than natural beauty. While the ornaments of the Oriental girl, Lulu, are cause for disgust, the "marvelous things" of the European tourist, like the make-up and hairdos of the girls walking out of the European beauty salon, spark wonder and admiration. Furthermore, contrary to Lulu's claims that Ita wore only "cotton and flannel," an earlier scene in the novel emphasizes that Ita did own a pink silk scarf, which made her face "shine pink and rosy in its light" (237),²²⁰ thus drawing Brakha's envious attention. The way the text's underscores Ita's silk scarf as an object of envy invites a questioning of Lulu's idealization of Ita, making her characterization as a woman of complete natural beauty seem tenuous. Finally, Ita's remarkable compassion, mentioned by Lulu, never appears in the novel while she is alive. On the contrary, she is mostly depicted as a frivolous young woman, hunting after pleasures and adventures, who pays no attention to the suffering of her travel-companion Menahem Gutt, who is tormented by desperate love for her. Lulu's speech, which erases Ita's cosmetics, silk and desperate lover, begins a process through which Ita's figure becomes more and more idealized, which coincides with the return of the deportees to the land. Notably, it is the posthumously idealized figure of Ita that serves as a model for the transformation of both Lulu and Brakha as they travel from Egypt to Palestine.

²²⁰ היו פניה קורנים מבבואתה של זו בזוהר ורדי וענוג כל כך (29)

We may trace the beginning of the two women's transformation to Lulu's change in Brakha's eyes during their conversation itself. As she speaks of Ita, Lulu is "unmade-up" of external decorations with "the rouge on her face and the blue eye shadow becoming no longer visible to Brakha – only her sad good eyes" (271).²²¹ Furthermore, when Brakha exits Lulu's room she goes down the stairs "without feeling at all dizzy" (272), as if the space too, like Lulu's face, is stabilized and simplified, stripped of its dazzling ornamentality. On her way home, as Brakha contemplates all the confusion that Alexandria was for her, she concludes that "this girl [Lulu] had made it all clear. Like a good exegete, she had explained all that had seemed impenetrable. And suddenly Brakha knew all there was to know" (272).²²² Later in the day, after going through Ita's left-behind closet, and finding there indeed only "cotton and flannel," Brakha, we reveal, is also transformed:

This was the first time since they had been here that she did not put her hair in curlers before going to bed. She saw no need to. In order to keep her hair out of the way she braided it, as she used to, in Jaffa, and she felt as she did this that she had returned to the way she had been in those days: A simple girl, helping her poor mother with the house work so they could provide food and shelter to the family. (272)²²³

Rediscovering the memory of Ita, thus, enables a return home, and indeed soon afterwards the exiles will return at the end of the war. The trajectory of homecoming here coincides with the path leading from artificial curled hair to natural straight hair, from the outlandish femininity of "Oriental" Alexandria, that dizzying dangerous space, to the simplicity of the home in Jaffa, where Brakha too "has no need" for anything but the

²²¹ ושוב לא נראה מעתה לא השרק בפניה ולא שכבת הפוך, כי אם רק העינים הקטיפתיות האלה, העצבות והטובות. (86)

²²² כפרשן טוב הסבירה את כל המעומעם והסתום -- והדברים נעשו נהירים ומובנים לה. (87)

²²³ הפעם הראשונה היתה זאת לה פה אשר היא לא קיפלה לפני השינה לשם סלסול את שערותיה, לא ראתה צורך בכך. היא רק, לבל יפריעו, קלעה אותן לצמה, כמו לפני, בביתם שבשכונת-הים, והרגש הרגישה מתוך כך שאף היא עצמה שבה להיות זו של אותם הימים: נערה תמימת דרך, העושה עם אמה העניה בכל מלאכה, כדי להמציא לבני הבית לחם וכסות. (87)

basics. For this is indeed what one needs, Brakha discovers through Lulu, “food and shelter,” “cotton and flannel,” a home, and functional braids to keep the hair out of the way, whereas “silk and satin,” “sloppy curls,” “rouge and eye-shadows,” “dizzying . . . countless roofs,” all the excessive ornaments of the Orient, all this one does not need; all this is to be left to die in Egypt.

To conclude this section, let us recapture the three “journeys” of the three girls: Ita, the deceased European tourist, goes through a process of revision through which she is transformed from a woman who has “marvelous objects” and illicit love affairs to a chaste and virtuous woman, whose attributes are the simple fabrics she wears; Brakha, the Eretz-Yisraeli girl, who starts off fascinated by the marvelous “feminine things” that the colonized Orient offers her, goes back to being “a simple girl,” braiding her straight hair; finally, Lulu, whose markers are the Oriental ornaments, also becomes simpler through the process of re-imagining Ita, with her make-up becoming invisible in Brakha eyes, and later on, as mentioned, we shall find her in Palestine, taking off all her jewelry. Finally, let us stress once again that immediately after the dramatic scene in Lulu’s room, the exiles return to Palestine, as if, in a way, women’s sacrifice of the “feminine things” introduced in the colonial setting – the cosmetics, the Jewelry, the lovers – is the condition of homecoming.

The Color of the Daughter of Israel

Brakha, after conversation with the Italian seamstress about Ita’s glowing face, asked if she wasn’t using some kind of rouge that she had bought at “Paris.” But the young woman strenuously asserted that with Ita it was natural . . . It is possible, however, to create the same effect – she said – artificially.

In a beauty salon? “Brakha asked.”

“No, with drugs that can be purchased at the drug store,” she said . . . “You just buy a bottle of cream: ‘Belladrama’ or ‘Metamorphosis’ or ‘Disappearing Cream.’ You apply them to your face according to the directions on the bottle. If you have any pimples, freckles, or light spots, they all disappear, and your skin becomes as soft as a baby’s.” (237-238; Jelen’s translation)²²⁴

By the light of the street lamp, she squeezed out some of the cream and rubbed it, precisely according to the directions, on her face. Then she waited for it to sink into her skin . . . But suddenly, the door creaked open . . . Her mother, in her nightdress, entered with the kitchen lantern in her hand. When she saw the bleached face of girl . . . she asked, in a thundering voice:

“Have you gone mad? Are you out of your mind?” . . .

After she had put the lantern down on the table, she clapped her hands and cried out:

“Woe is me. A daughter of Israel, this is a daughter of Israel?!” (238-239; Jelen’s translation revised; my emphasis)²²⁵

In his seminal work on representations of whiteness, Richard Dyer recounts how “much of the history of Western make-up is a history of whitening the face” (48). Brakha’s unfortunate attempt to emulate Ita’s natural complexion, depicted in the quotations above, is embedded in this racist history, which stems from the cultural construction of white femininity as the beautiful and virtuous epitome of Western civilization and the embodiment of racial superiority (Ware 11-18). As Jews were never completely included in the Western notion of whiteness, the painfully ridiculous result of Brakha’s experiment seems like a mockery of the presumption of the Jewish girl to participate in colonial politics of color. The grotesque is further exacerbated by the way Neḥama, Brakha’s mother, responds to her daughter’s whitened facial skin, crying “woe is me. A daughter of Israel, but this is a daughter of Israel?!” (31). The “daughter of Israel” – *bat yisrael* – is

²²⁴ ברכה, אגב שיחה עם התופרת האיטלקית על זיו פניה של זו, שאלה אם אין כאן משהו מן הלהטים של אותו הבית רב- התמרקים, “פאריס”. אבל הנערה – בתוקף ומתוך כובד ראש – השיבה כי אצלה זהו “מן הטבע”... אך כי לא מן הנמנע הוא “לסדר” את כל זה גם באופן מלאכותי. “במכון ליופי”, סברה ברכה. “לא, כי על ידי סממנים הנקנים בבית מרקחת, אמרה זו ... קונים באחד מבתי המרקחת צנצנת של משחה: ‘בלדרמה’, ‘מטמורפוזה’, או ‘קרם סימון’, משפשים, לפי ההוראות הכתובות על הכלי, את הפנים, ואם יש בהם אבעבועות, נקודות, או בהרות – ונעלמו, והעור יהיה חלק כשל ילד קטן” (29)

²²⁵ פה הוציאה לאורו של פנס הרחוב מעט מן המשחה ומרחה אותה בדיוקנות, לפי ההוראות שניתנו לה, על פניה, ויישבה לחכות עד אשר זו תיספג לתוך העור... והנה חרק פתאום בדלת המנעול... ואמה, בלבוש-לילה, נכנסה ובאה עם עששית-המטבח בידה. למראה פניה המלבינות של הנערה... בקול שהכה כרעם על אונה של זו, שאלה: “ההשתגעתי?” “האם מדעתך יצאת?, חזרה ושאלה, ואחרי אשר הציגה את העששית על השולחן, ספקה כפיה וקראה: “אוייה, לי. בת ישראל, הלא בת ישראל היא זאת” (30-31).

a common term for a Jewish woman in the diasporic context often associated with images of purity and modesty.²²⁶ Thus, we may understand how Brakha's experiment is at odds with that image. While Ita's whiteness is "natural" and, as such, metonymic of her virtue ("she was so good, so good"; 271), Brakha's artificial whitening paradoxically distances her from the symbolic meaning of whiteness, that is, from purity, goodness, respectability etc. (Dyer 58-60), the attributes of "the daughter of Israel." If in the colonial context, as Dyer argues, "to be a lady is to be as white as it gets" (57), Baron's daughter of Israel furnishes a more subtle distinction. To be *bat yisrael* is to be "as white as it gets," but not whitened.

Dyer's discussion of the tension between three layers of whiteness: whiteness as hue, whiteness as skin color, and whiteness as symbol –is also relevant here (45-60). The evolution of Western cosmetics "as a history of whitening the face" (48) derives to a large extent from the persistent rift between the skin color we term "white" and whiteness as hue (no "white" person is really white as a blank page). The superiority assigned to whiteness in white cultures, according to Dyer, derives not only from the marking of whiteness as "good" as opposed to the "bad" blackness, but also from the cultural perception of white as transparent, as no color at all, indeed as a universal essence in relation to which all colors are to be understood (41-81). In this context, if whiteness reveals itself as an excessive cover of the face, if whiteness appears as a color – as it does with Brakha's unfortunate experiment – it loses all meaning; it loses its sublime quality and becomes grotesque.

²²⁶ See, for example, in Baron's own early stories: "Ha-erez ha-mufla" (The Wondrous Cedar; 286), "Bli kiddush" (Without Kiddush; 372), "Aḥot" (Sister; 505), in Baron, *Parshiyot mukdamot* (The Early Stories).

We recall from the discussion of Rivka Alper's *Ha-mitnaḥalim ba-har* the ascetic unadorned form of the ideal Zionist woman. In the second part of *Ha-golim*, when the deportees are back in Palestine, the national meaning of the whiteness of the "daughter of Israel" emerges. Shortly after the return of the deportees, Brakha and Lulu (who has decided to immigrate to Palestine) meet again by chance, on the streets of Jaffa. Lulu, who initially fails to recognize Brakha, eventually knows her by her freckles. She then comments: "I see that you do not use lotions anymore . . . I too have pushed all those creams and powders away, because my aunt with whom I'm staying said that *here there is no need for all this*" (159; my emphasis). Shortly afterwards, we learn that Lulu herself, "having decided that she is not going back to Egypt has taken off the last of her jewelry: the earrings, the bracelets, the corals, and has combed her hair in a simple manner, thus achieving, according to Neḥama Rothstein, the shape of a *daughter of Israel*" (177; my emphasis). The image of the "daughter of Israel" thus travels. She is not anymore just the chaste and pious Jewish Diasporic woman. She is a figure shaped "here," that is, in the Land. Like Ita Blokh she does not need anything to beautify herself. Unlike Ita, however, she is not a tourist from Europe, whose is not spoiled by the burning sun of the East. Rather, she needs nothing *because she is here*, because *here*, that is in Palestine, one does not need any lotions to heal the skin. The land is a supplement for the skin, better than any lotion, enabling the daughter of Israel to get closer to her admired European model, to be all natural beauty and in need of nothing, to be ideologically "white," that is, of no color at all. Indeed, what Brakha does not understand when whitening her face in Alexandria is that whiteness is an ideological rather than physical quality. In the land, even if her freckles in fact stay, they no longer matter. While the

actual whiteness of Ita Blokh is not achieved, the body of daughter of Israel ideologically “normalized,” mirroring Ita’s figure as rediscovered in Lulu’s room: simple, pure, all-natural.

The Specter of Ita

On the first year anniversary of Ita’s death Brakha performs a secret memorial service to commemorate Ita. She brings out the chest in which Ita’s clothes are kept, which looks to her “like *a wound* dressed and covered in all sorts of fabrics so that it cannot be seen” (127; my emphasis), and,

takes out with wonderful gentility the magnificent cloths, straightens every fold, arranges the creases, and carries the dresses downstairs, to the ropes . . . the dresses moved on the ropes when the wind blew, and with the swollen sleeves, each one of them seemed like someone spreading his arms in protest for the wrong that has been done to him. ‘Dita [Ita’s daughter], don’t go there’ Neḥama Rothstein warned the baby, and she herself turned her head from this so as not to see “this agony.” (128)²²⁷

Again the myth of Ita’s wearing only “cotton and flannel” breaks, or, rather, it is exposed as a tale forged through the East-West dichotomy, for the chest in fact contains “magnificent clothes.” Moreover, the chest conjures the manner in which Ita died, in Egypt, while giving birth to her daughter, as a consequence of her illicit affair with the Jewish Egyptian cotton-merchant. Lulu’s praise according to which Ita only needed “cotton and flannel” thus gains an ironic grim tone, for cotton is the business of the lover who caused her death. In this context, we may also think of the whiteness of cotton as

²²⁷ בידיה הרגילות בכלל בגירוד ובשפשוף סירי הבישול, הוציאה עתה בעדינות מופלאה את בגדי הפאר, ישרה בהם כל קמט ויישבה את הקפלים, ונשאה אותם למטה, אל החבלים... השמלות על החבלים זעו עם נשיבת הרוח, ובשרוולים המנופחים נראתה כל אחת מהן כמי שפורש את זרועותיו דרך מחאה על עוול שנעשה לו. "דית'לי, אל תלכי לשם," הזהירה נחמה רוטשטיין את התינוקת והפנתה היא עצמה את ראשה כדי שלא לראות את ה"יסורים האלה".

metaphorical of the whiteness of death, which, Richard Dyer proposes, is an important dimension of Western whiteness (207-223). Inasmuch as white “signifies the absence of color,” Dyer explains, it also signifies the absence of “life and presence” (207). Within this logic of whiteness, it seems, Ita has to die precisely because she is the ultimate, but impossible, epitome of whiteness. The image of the dresses blowing in the wind, empty of her body, seems to point toward the hollowness of the white woman’s myth.

We may also recall here the embeddedness of the cotton industry in the history of colonialism. As John Singleton remarks in his study of the connection between imperial expansion and British cotton trade, “the empire was crucial to the prosperity of the cotton industry” (58), as it is imperial power that made Asian markets available for British manufacturers of cotton products, with Egypt in fact vital for preserving British mobility of trade, especially since the opening of the Suez canal in 1869 (67). I invoke the imperial history of cotton, because I contend that *Ha-golim* cannot be read outside of the colonial framework. Ita’s unfortunate love affair with Morris Levy, the Egyptian cotton merchant, which leads to her ruin and death, cannot be separated from the fraught colonial *topos* of the white woman as a victim of the non-white man’s sexuality. This notoriously constitutive narrative for racist politics, which crystallizes the anxiety surrounding the fragile racial purity that white femininity stands for (Ware 4-11; Dyer 26-30; Woolacot 38-58), is another context in which I propose to read Ita’s tragedy.

Notably, anxiety about the color of the cotton merchant is present already in his first appearance in the novel:

The cotton merchant from Cairo, Morris Levy, came to spend the hot summer in Alexandria. He visited Ita Blokh’s room often. When she first saw his

*expressionless brown face – the face of an Egyptian – Neḥama Rothstein was startled. (251; Jelen’s translation; my emphasis)*²²⁸

Neḥama Rothstein (Brakha’s mother) being startled *vis-à-vis* the brown face of the Egyptian foreshadows his later wrongdoing of the beautiful white Ita Blokh. Since the text clearly designates the brown man as the victimizer of the white woman, and thus conspicuously plays into familiar colonial anxieties, it is curious to note the way Israeli feminist criticism disregards the role of color and ethnicity in this novel. Orly Lubin’s fascinating close reading of the novel, which constitutes the only scholarly feminist work that offers a comprehensive close reading of *Ha-golim*, may serve as an example of this tendency. Analyzing the same passage quoted above, Lubin, a prominent feminist and post-Zionist critic, overlooks Neḥama’s perception of the cotton merchant’s color:

The passage not only places a woman at the center of the action – she is the reason the man comes to visit— but it also immediately cites Mrs. Rothstein’s point of view and opposes it to that of another woman, Brakha. The chapter abandons Morris Levy and instead addresses a matter no less dramatic than the Egyptian merchant’s love life –Brakha’s swing between her mother’s perspective and values and those of Ita Blokh. (93)

The central critical category informing Lubin’s analysis here is gender. She cites the passage about the brown face of Morris Levy as part of her argument that *Ha-golim* marginalizes male-characters and foregrounds female-characters and feminine narratives. In this case, she shows, the chapter begins with Morris Levy, but quickly diverts the readers’ attention to the exploits of Brakha, Neḥama and Ita. Lubin, who elsewhere attentively engages with the intersection of ethnicity and gender in contemporary Israeli culture (*Ishah koret ishah* 253-262), here conforms with the prevalent trend in Israeli

²²⁸ סוחר הכותנה הקהירי, מוריס לוי, בא לבלות את עונת הקיץ החמה באלכסנדריה, והוא היה מבקר תכופות בחדרה של איטה בלוך. הגברת רוטשטיין, למראה פניו השחמחמים-קפואים, פנים של איש מצרי נבהלה בתחילה, אבל כששמעה שהוא מדבר יהודית, ועם נתן לב אפילו עברית – נחה דעתה והיא לא שמה לו עוד לב בבואו. (53)

feminist scholarship on pre-state women's writing (see the introduction of this dissertation), and in the scholarship on Baron in particular, which interprets the construction of women's imagination as a subversive or alternative site within the hegemonic culture. When Lubin traces Baron's diversion of the readers' attention from Morris Levy's "Egyptian face" to the female protagonists of the novel, her own analytical gesture foregrounds gender at the expense of ethnicity, and obscures the way colonial relations of power mobilize the stories of women in *Ha-golim*.

From this perspective we may also read another scene that foreshadows Ita's tragic fate, in which the forsaken Ashkenazi suitor, Menahem Gutt, sitting alone in a hotel room in Cairo while Ita and her lover explore the city, imagines his beloved "carelessly [getting] too close to the edge of the open balcony" with "no one to warn her to be careful not to fall into the abyss that lay beneath her" (246). The poor Ashkenazi lover, who is idealized as a saint in the novel, emerges here as "a white man," seeking to save the helpless white woman from falling into the trap of the Orient.

For Ita is "a fallen woman", precisely insofar as this expression is inextricably bound with the sexuality of modern white women (Dyer 28-29; Nead 95-96). The image of the fallen woman encapsulates the two facets of Ita's figure negotiated throughout the novel: she is both a transgressor and a victim. Notably, when after her death it is presumed that she has lived in sin with the cotton merchant, the Jewish community of deportees denounces her. "Shameful", Neḥama Rothstein comments when she hears the story (270). Just before the return of the deportees to Palestine, however, the community finds out that Ita, in fact, did marry the merchant in Cairo, but that he abandoned her and the baby she bore him because his parents opposed the match. "That good girl," Neḥama

then comments, “beautiful and good. Why did this happen to her?” (274). For the exiles to return, the white woman has to be saved. The white superiority she embodies has to be redeemed. The narrative of her victimization by the non-white man is thus deployed to set things straight. The distinctions between West and East, good and bad, white and non-white are embroidered again in clear colors. And thus, by dint of her white femininity, Ita becomes a symbol of the vulnerability of Zionist Ashkenazi Jews *vis-à-vis* the menace of the East, which is curious, given she has never really identified as a Zionist, merely as “a tourist of the Orient.”

Immediately after he imagines Ita in danger of falling into the abyss, Menahem Gutt himself experiences vertigo: “As he wandered, he found himself climbing a ladder to the roof where he arrived at a porch without a balustrade, and peered over the edge. Terrified of the abyss spreading before his eyes, he felt his way back to the stairs” (ibid). The black abyss is the rift separating Ita and Menahem. While she would fall, he finds his way back, just like Brakha finds her way back after visiting Lulu’s frightening Oriental space, and learning the “truth” about Ita. Through Ita’s story everyone’s anxiety is displaced. Her story is the sacrifice that enables the deportees to return home and produce a communal narrative of their time in Egypt. The concreteness of Ita’s sexual and dying body is evacuated from her magnificent dresses which are left hollow to blow in the wind. Perhaps in this way we may understand her “arms spread in protest for the wrong that has been done” (168), and the image of her chest, which remains in the home “like a wound.”

Talk like a Turk

. . . And finally – after she had added her Sabbath candlesticks – she took two shawls out of the dresser, draping *the Turkish one* over her shoulders. Placing the second, made of Muslin, into the basket for her daughter, she was ready to go.

“What about the pillows and blankets?” her daughter asked from the other room.

“We can’t, darling, the Turks are in a hurry.” (“For the Time Being” 228; Jelen’s translation; my emphasis)²²⁹

While a Turkish policeman stands in her living-room with a whip, rushing her and her family to clear out, Neḥama Rothstein covers herself with a Turkish shawl. It seems curious that Baron would highlight the correlation between the outfit of the deported Neḥama and the nationality of her oppressor. Why should she wear a Turkish shawl of all things? I wonder if Baron “borrows” the shawl for this scene in *Ha-golim* from another story of hers. The Turkish shawl appears as a prominent image in the story “Turkim” (Turks), which is considered as a precursor of the *Ha-golim*, since it too invokes the historical episode of the deportation from Jaffa to Egypt during World War I (Govrin, *‘Akira le-tzorekh hanaḥa* 159). Like the narratives of Brakha and Lulu in *Ha-golim*, “Turkim” may be read as a coming of age story throughout which a young woman is initiated into the national framework. The story narrates the journey of the rabbi’s daughter from the *shtetl*, to the city and then to Palestine. It ends on the shores of Jaffa, when she is about to be deported to Egypt by the Turks. As the following analysis of “Turkim” will show, the signifier *Turki* (Turkish/Turk), as in the “Turkish shawl” and the “Turkish language,” emerges as a key term in the feminine process of maturing depicted

²²⁹ ולבסוף, אחרי אשר צירפה עוד לאלה את פמוטות השבת, הוציאה מן הקומודה שני סודרים, הטילה את האחד, התורכי, על כתפיה ואת השני, של מלמלה, שמה בסל, בשביל בתה – והיתה מוכנה לדרך. "והכרים והכסתות?" שאלה מן החדר השני הבת. "אי אפשר, בתי, כי התורכי מאיץ, השיבה האם, והיא זירזה אותה להתלבש ולבוא אחריה. (11)

by the story. In fact, the narrator's entry into the national story is dependent upon her understanding of this signifier, "Turkish," as a marker of difference.

Like *Ha-golim*, "Turkim" too is far from being a "non-immigration" story where the move from the Diaspora to Palestine does not matter much, as Wendy Zierler claims of other stories of Baron. Conversely, a crucial point in the story of the young woman in "Turkim" is the realization of the split between the Diaspora and the Land. This realization coincides in the story with a larger realization of the existence of differences in general, that is, national difference, ethnic difference, gender difference and difference of power. It is only through the revelation of differences that the feminine national subject is born. If in the previous section I argued that the category of gender overshadows the significance of Baron's nationalism in Israeli feminist readings of Baron, "Turkim" makes it harder to untangle the construction of the feminine subject from the politics of the nation, and perhaps this is the reason that the scholarship on Baron hardly ever addresses this story (except for Nurith Govrin's article referenced above that identifies the story as *Ha-golim*'s precursor).

Unlike *Ha-golim*, "Turkim," like the bulk of Baron's oeuvre, begins in the *shtetl* and has the figure of the rabbi's daughter as its narrator. The opening scene features the daughter listening-in while her father arbitrates neighborly conflicts:

In order not to lose the central thread of their speech, both the prosecutors and the prosecuted had to be reminded from time to time, by a hint or a word, to do away with superfluous claims. But sometimes the hint or the word were not effective, and the speaker stumbled and slipped and strayed, and then my father would rise angry from his seat, as angry as his good heart would allow him, and he would hurl at the speaker the harshest remark he used to make at times of anger: excuse me, sir, *he talks like a Turk*. "Why Turk of all things?" Only the God of gods of the *shtetl* has the solution. Perhaps once, in his childhood, at the time of the famous Turkish war, my father saw a war-prisoner led by the victors, the people of the land, and when he listened to his speech that came out from his mouth ridiculous, incomparably ridiculous, my father decided that no other human tongue in the world has vicissitudes such as this one. and as for me,

when I heard that remark, *my mother's Turkish shawl glowed before my eyes*, that colorful shawl, which spread the sweetest scent around when it fluttered. (413; my emphasis)²³⁰

“Why Turk of all things?” (413) the child narrator asks in response to the father’s phrase “he talks like a Turk.” Indeed, why is this signifier chosen by the father to describe a distorted use of language, and, again, why does a *Turkish* shawl of all shawls glow both in “Turkim” and in “*Ha-golim*”? The father’s employment of “Turk,” the child observes, derives from the situation of war, and is embedded in the violent relations of power between the victors and the captives. The speculation of the child regarding the origins of the father’s use of the signifier “Turk” carries with it an ironic tone. The father’s use of “Turk” seems senseless as racism, for it derives from the mockery of the racial Other in his time of weakness simply because of one’s lack of understanding. However, while the father’s employment of “Turk” grounded in sharp distinctions between clear and unclear speech, victors and losers, and Russian and Turks, the mother’s Turkish shawl situates the word “Turkish” within a different process of signification. Before analyzing this process in more detail, let us digress one more time back to *Ha-golim*, and note that on the second time the Turkish shawl appears in the novel, it is associated with women’s use language. On her first day on the new residence in Alexandria, Neḥama once again wears her Turkish shawl and sets out to explore her new courtyard, where she meets the old

²³⁰ כדי שהחוט העיקרי של ההרצאה לא יאבד, הן לתובעים והן לנתבעים, צריך היה להעירם פעם בפעם, ברמז או בדיבור, שיתרחקו מן הטענות הטפלות. אולם יש אשר הרמז או הדיבור לא הועיל, והטוען נכשל ודלג ונטה הצידה, ואז היה אבי מתרומם ממקומו נרגז, עד כמה שמסוגל היה בטוב לבבו להתרגז, וזורק כלפי המדבר את המימרא החריפה ביותר שהייתה שגורה בפיו בשעת כעסו, היינו: אבל יסלח נא, מר, הן כאחד התורכים ידבר. ככה בזו הלשון. למה כתורכי דווקא? – לאל אלוהי העיירה פתרונים. ייתכן שפעם, בילדותו, עוד בימי מלחמת תורכיה הידועה, נודמן לו לראות אחד שבוי, המובל בידי בני הארץ מנצחיו, ובהקשיבו אז לדיבורו, היוצא נלעג, נלעג מאין כמוהו, מתוך פיו, עמד והחליט כי אין כלשון בני האדם האלה לתהפוכות בעולם... מה שנוגע לי, הנה, לשמע הגערה הזאת, הבהבה לנגדי בבואת סודרה התורכי של אמי, אותו סודר עשיר-הגוונים, אשר כה מתוק היה הריח שהפיץ מסביב בנפנופו. (413)

The translations from “Turkim” are mine. I am grateful to Efrat Bloom for her invaluable help and advice in translating the excerpts.

Italian woman, with whom she speaks in their special “language of troubles” (232).²³¹ For what language can these two old women speak with each other? Not Hebrew, Yiddish, Russian, Arabic or Italian, and for that matter, what language can Lulu, Brakha and Ita, speak with each other?²³² Subtly, Baron seems to mock such petty questions. *Ha-golim*’s courtyard, where women speak with each other in the language of troubles, is far away from the court in “Turkim,” where the father insists on precise language.

The women’s courtyard, where language works differently, may be the place where the sweet scent of the mother’s colorful shawl carries the child’s mind in the other story. And so, in “Turkim,” if with the father, “Turk” is a way of drawing oppositions, the mother’s Turkish shawl opens a series of comparisons, repeatedly invoking the comparison proposition “*ke*” – like. “*Like* the Turkish shawl,” the text proceeds, “were the pine-slivers that glowed in red and blue, at twilight, under the ash in the fireplace, casting their pale flickering light on the wall of the empty house”(413).²³³ While in the father’s court, prosecutors are distinguished from prosecuted, good talk is distinguished from “Turkish” talk, with the mother, and her Turkish Shawl, one comparison leads to another:

And behind the grim forest, the thick Lithuanian forest, the moon rose floating, sad, merciful, with all those fine lines on her face. Spring night sprawled around, and the head was drawn, as if by itself to the sheltering bosom of the mother, who sat at the doorstep, wearing her lovely apron, sad and merciful *like* the silver moon above. (414; my emphasis)²³⁴

²³¹ לשון הצרות (17)

²³² I thank Lital Levy for posing the question “In what language are we to think that Brakha and Lulu speak to each other?” after my presentation on *Ha-golim* at the ACLA 2010 conference.

²³³ כמראה הסודר התורכי היה עם ערוב היום גם לפני קיסמי האורן, אשר האדימו והכחילו חליפות תחת מצע האפר בתנור, בהטילם את בבואתם הרפה על כתלי הבית שנתרוקן.

²³⁴ ומאחורי היער המקדיר, היער הליטאי, העבות, צפה ועלתה הלבנה -- נוגה, שופעת רחמים, עם כל השרטוטים הדקים בפניה. השתרר ליל אביב מסביב, וכמו מאליו נמשך הראש אל חיקה המחסי של האם, אשר השפילה לשבת על הסף, חגורה בסינרה המלבב, נוגה ושופעת רחמים כלבנת הכסף אשר ממעל.

This passage, which begins with the moon, proceeds with the child's spontaneous movement toward the mother's bosom, and concludes with the comparison between the mother and the moon. The movement toward the mother is a comparative movement. It likens all things. It makes things the same. It makes differences and breaks invisible. Even the traumatic break we find in the next passage, when the narrator moves from the Jewish home to the modern city, is softened by the comparative *ke*, and the appearance of the moon and the mother again:

Like an extension of the old town of childhood, the urban suburb appeared, when the sound of twilight bells flowed into the air with the fall of the evening on my first day abroad. When space darkened later and the moon rose in the sky sad, fair, with fine lines on her face, the hand was drawn without me noticing it, as if longing for the mother's bosom, as if there was no distance of many feet and years between us. (414; my emphasis)²³⁵

Sheila Jelen argues that Baron never gives us a *tlusha*, a feminine figure comparable to the archetypal character of the *talush*, the uprooted young man who has left the Jewish home only to find himself alienated in the modern secular world, thus signifying the crisis entailed by the Jewish encounter with modernity (24). Rather, Jelen claims, Baron represents a different experience of *tlishut* (uprootedness), one that acknowledges continuity in spite of geographical breaks (25-26). In "Turkim" this continuous mode of being in the world stems from the Turkish shawl, whose flickering vision sparks a series of comparisons: The slivers of the pine-tree are like the shawl, the mother, "sad and

²³⁵ כהמשך העירה מלפנים, מימי הילדות, נראה אחר כך פרבר הכרך, בהשתפך בו צלצול בין השמשות עם ערוב יומי הראשון בנכר. כאשר החשיך אחרי כן החלל ועל פני השמים עלתה הלבנה, נוגה, בהירה, עם כל השרטוטים הדקים בפניה, נמשכה היד בלי משים אל האוויר, כחותרת אל חיקה של האם, כאילו לא היה שום מרחק של פרסאות ושנים בינינו.

merciful,” is like the moon, the city is like the *shtetl*, the mother is never far away, and everything is always the same, as we want it to be.²³⁶

“Turkim” constantly contests this “motherly” worldview by juxtaposing it with a reality shaped by differences and oppositions. Even though the child may long for the “Turkishness” of the mother’s shawl, eventually she is forced to accept the hard politics entailed by the father’s invocation of “Turk.” If in *Ha-golim*, we observed how young women need to forgo certain aspects of their femininity in order to be integrated into the Zionist framework, “Turkim” too may be read as such a story of Zionist feminine initiation. Here too, as part of her journey to Palestine, the girl-narrator would eventually have to let go of a certain “feminine” understanding of the way spaces, objects and experiences are organized in the world. And so, while in the light of the moon the city seems “like an extension of the old town of childhood” (414), “all this,” the narrator continues, “is only true in the evening, when the light is dimmed,” whereas, “when the sun shines in the morning it illuminates things in the right light” (414). At this point the text furnishes a list of differences between the city and the hometown: “Instead of the pine slivers . . . there were only barrels of cold cement and stones, stones, stones” (414); “instead of the forest. . . the barracks buildings blackened the horizon at sunset” (ibid); “instead of the monastery bells . . . the ring of the urban cloak” (ibid); “how terrible was the reflection of light cast by coal stones on the walls of the basements at dinner time” (ibid), unlike of flickering light of the burning pine-slivers which resembles the Turkish shawl; “the potatoes sold here were old and wrinkled” (ibid), unlike the potatoes that the mother cooks mentioned as an attribute of home. Indeed, in the “right light” of the

²³⁶ Of course this echoes famous psychoanalytic insights about human desire for inertia embodied by the mother. See Freud, “Beyond the Principal of Pleasure.”

morning the child reveals that the stones of the city are not the slivers of the pine tree; the buildings are not the forest; the urban cloak is not the bells of the monastery overlooking the town, the fire is not the same fire, and even the potatoes are different. In other words, “everything looks different, secular and insipid, not so [*lo kakh*].”²³⁷

The last words, *lo kakh*, are ambiguous. What does it mean “not so,” *lo kakh*? What does *kakh* stand for? It seems as though “not so” is an overarching catastrophic realization of things being different, *not* the same as before, in the home, not the same as near the mother’s bosom, “not so,” “*lo kakh*.” Most upsetting is the presence of the city’s whores: “vacillating in the nearby basement, with their gestures expressing something beyond desperation, with their murky intoxicated eyes that no other woman can meet” (415).²³⁸ The mother is not there “in the right light.” Women cannot even meet each other’s eyes; never mind speaking to each other in the “language of troubles.” “In the right light,” there is strangeness and alienation; there are distances of “years and feet,” and transitions in time and space emerge an irrevocable catastrophe.

Why Turkish then? If this is the language of the mother’s shawl, it is the language of comparison, as if the colorful fabric warmly wraps the space between the town and the city, the moon and the mother, the mother and the daughter. But if it is the father’s Turkish, it is, in contrast, a language marked by painfully sharp differences between the imprisoned and the free, the European and the Oriental, the persecutor and the persecuted, laymen and judge, sensible and nonsensical speech, the town and the city. The father’s Turkish, stems from – and thus represents – a world inhabited by power,

²³⁷ אולם כל זה היה בערוב היום, בהיות הדמדומים מסביב. עם זריחת השמש בבוקר הווארו הדברים באור הנכון. מתוך חצרות הפרבר ומרתפיו הציצה המציאות בפניה האמיתיים, הכרכיים, והכול נראה אחר, חילוני ותפל, לא כך.

²³⁸ נשות ההפקר, שהתגודדו בתוך המרתף הקרוב, בקהות של 'לאחר ייאוש' בתנועותיהן, ואשר עם עיניהן הדלוחות, נסוכות השכרון, אי אפשר היה להפגש לשום אשה אחרת.

cruelty, mockery, judgment and alienation. In contrast, in a world without contrasts, the mother's Turkish is soft comparativeness, mercy, warmth, and the instability of difference. The mother's daughter longs for a world wrapped in the mother's shawl, but the "rabbi's daughter" is awakened, "in the right light," to the world of harsh judgment, of *lo kakh*.

"Why Turkish of all things? Only the God of gods of the *shtetl* has the solution" (413),²³⁹ the daughter mocks her father the rabbi at the beginning of the story. His world is ruled by the arbitrariness of what is imagined to be transcendent authority, but is, in fact, just the provincial god of the *shtetl*. The father's world is limited and ridiculous in the eyes of the daughter at the beginning. It is the mother's shawl that wraps the entire cosmos, the moon, the forest, the city, the town. It is the mother's world that, in fact, makes perfect sense. In his seminal essay on Baron, Dan Miron, argues that in her imagination "childhood observations of human life (and therefore of Jewish life) metamorphosed... into a realm of fundamental types, taking the form of 'foundations scenes' that comprise the principal part of human condition" (19). Baron's *shtetl*, according to Miron, is not important as an historical-cultural context, but only as a setting through which she expresses her metaphysical worldview. Orly Lubin argues that for critics such as Miron, the concrete, the domestic, and the motherly, pose an interpretive problem as it does not make sense in the context of the Zionist narrative. Lubin proceeds to claim that viewing Baron as representing the universal makes it easier for critics to incorporate her into the national canon (91-92). *Ha-golim*, according to Lubin, oscillates between the national-universal-masculine narrative and the domestic-concrete-feminine one. "Turkim," in this sense too, may count as a precursor of the later novel. Yet, if we

²³⁹ למה כתורכי דווקא? – לאל אלוהי העיירה פתרונים.

look more closely, we may identify a more nuanced movement in “Turkim.” For “Turkim” can be seen as a magnified reflection of the painful moment in which the metaphysics of the “mother’s Turkish shawl,” the metaphysics of comparison and intimacy between all things and spaces, is forsaken for the arbitrary metaphysics of the father’s word, *Turk*. It is a magnified reflection of the mother’s daughter becoming the father’s daughter, the rabbi’s daughter. Indeed, the rabbi’s daughter, a figure that often serves as a narrator in Baron’s stories, has been the object of some interesting interpretations. Ruth Adler, for example, claims that the stance of the rabbi’s daughter endows Baron’s narrator with the status of the representative daughter of the *shtetl* (91-109; Jelen 27). Sheila Jelen claims that from this position derives Baron’s experience of *tlishut*, as she is both inside (as the real rabbi’s daughter) and outside (as a narrator) the depicted world. But “Turkim,” I argue, assigns an additional significance to the rabbi’s daughter position. In this story, the rabbi’s daughter is not a role simply inhabited. Rather, the story follows the process through which the narrator takes on the role of the rabbi’s daughter, which means, for her, accepting a world, which is arbitrary and cruel. In contrast to the claim that the rabbi’s daughter is representative of the *shtetl*,” yielding to the father’s authority in “Turkim” is part of the initiation of the daughter into the nation.

The “rabbi’s daughter” then is not the same as the “the daughter of the *shtetl*.” If in a world wrapped by the mother’s shawl everything may be compared to the primary setting of the *shtetl*, the home, and the mother’s bosom, the harsh metaphysics of the father is one in which departure and separation prevail. The child must awaken, which she does, three times throughout the story. I have already mentioned the first awakening

to the “right light” of the city. The second awakening occurs when the daughter returns to the *shtetl* to find that return is impossible:

To once again see, just one more time, the old childhood home, leaning so modestly on its two foundations; to go up to the attic and find the pages of the old *Chumash* with the first alphabet-notebook stuck in-between the joists, to climb up to the little window and see the entire town from there, and finally, to go down and eat the American potatoes, cooked in the front of the fire-place on the pine-slivers, and then whatever will be, will be.

But already at the sight of the forsaken mill at the foot of the hill with its completely sunk wheel, the fantasies were waned away and vanished.

Forsaken, and as if sinking into herself, the widowed-mother appeared, with her smooth mourning-coif, and the slanted tear on her chest stitched with hesitant hand.

All is forsaken and mourning chill is everywhere. The pages of the old *Chumash* with the alphabet-notebook from childhood are gone, and instead only a bundle of willow-branches is found under the joists, and by the little window, from which you could see the whole town, the hand slipped on the slanted wall, and there was nothing to hold on to.

As before, in distant childhood days, a jar of fried cherries peeked from the dark corner, and the thread holding its paper-lid was tied neatly and attentively, and then, before the actual departure, it was carefully brought down and put next to the journey-case.

The stove was lit by a miser's hand, and for the last time the reddish American potatoes were cooked, and although they were spiced with onion and pepper, they lost their delicious flavor, because they lacked an essential spice. (416-417)²⁴⁰

The child goes back, and the town, the mother, the home are not the same anymore. Mourning over the father's death has destroyed the point of origin. This is what the daughter has to once again awaken to find. There is no home, no town, no mother,

²⁴⁰ לשוב ולראות עוד פעם, ולו רק פעם אחת, את בית המולדת עתיק היומין, זה אשר כה צנוע ישען על שתי משענותיו. לעלות אל ²⁴⁰ עליית הגג ולמצוא את דפי החומש הישן עם מחברת האלף-בית הראשונה התחובים שם לבין המרישים, לטפס ולהגיע אל החלון הקטן ולהשקיף משם בבת אחת על כל העיירה כולה, ולבסוף, לרדת ולאכול תפוחי אדמה אמריקניים, המבושלים במבוא התנור, על קיסמי האורן, ואחר כך—מה שיהיה יהיה.

אולם, כבר למראה עזובת הטחנה, אשר שקעה כל כך על גלגלה בשיפולי הגבעה, נתבדרו הדמיונות וגזר עזובה וכאילו שוקעת אל תוך עצמה נראתה גם האם האלמנה, בשביס 'היורדים' שלה החלק, וב'קריעת' האלכסון המדולדלה על חזה שנתאחזה ביד לא-בטוחה.

עזובה, עזובה, וצנת אבלים בכל. במקום דפי החומש הישן עם מחברת האלף-בית מגירסת הילדות, נודמנו בעליה מתחת למרישים רק חבילות ערבות הבוסות, ועל יד החלון הקטן, שבעדו אפשר להשקיף על כל העיירה, נשמת מהיד הקיר המשופע, ושם אפשרויות של אחיזה לא היתה.

כמו לפני, בימי הילדות הרחוקים, הציצה מתוך אפולית הזווית צנצנת דובדבנים מטוגנים, אשר החוט המהדק את מכסה הנייר שלה היה קשור בדיוק ובמסירות, ואשר אחר כך, לפני עצם הנסיעה, הורדה בזהירות למטה והוצגה על יד ארגו הדרך. הוסקה ביד זעומה הכירה, ובפעם האחרונה נתבשלו תפוחי אדמה אמריקניים אדמדם, אלא אשר, אף על פי שתובלו בבצל ובפלפל, לא ערבו עוד לחיך, כי חסרים היו את התבלין העיקרי.

without the father's word. The old *Chumash* is gone; the alphabet is gone; she cannot see the town because there is nothing to hold on to, so everything slips away. Even the potatoes do not taste the same, despite the mother's careful hand, because some mysterious spice is gone; is it the father's word? It seems that through its lack, the significance of the father's word is realized. The child is awakened into a lack, which makes the world senseless, arbitrary and merciless as foreign language is, and all languages are foreign in this world where the alphabet is gone. The mother's metaphysics cannot cover this with its shawl.

And yet the next passage goes back, for the last time, to the language of comparison, the language of the mother's shawl:

Like the wave of the mother's shawl the air felt, days later, when our ship entered the waters of the Bosphorus, in the early morning as I was awakened to reveal light blue sky – in the middle of autumn – green patches on the mountain-slopes, and a small noisy gang of sailors, the first local people, the Turks... there they are, the sons or sons of sons of the same prisoner, perhaps, whom my father saw in his childhood. (417)²⁴¹

Encountering the “real” Turks, the daughter is torn between the mother's shawl and father's word. On the one hand, the voices of the Turks, like the voices of the litigators in her father's court, irritate her ears, but on the other hand, their faces are colorful like the Turkish shawl, and when “it was finally dark,” again,

The moon rose in the sky, fair, sad, with its familiar merciful expression revealed through the lines on her face, it seemed again, like years ago, that it is still the spring of childhood, but this time *without the agony of awakening in the next few days*, on the contrary. (418; my emphasis)²⁴²

²⁴¹ כעין נפנוף של סודר האם הרגש פעם, כעבור ימים, כשאנייטנו נכנסה, בבוקר השכם, עם היקיצה, אל מימי הבוספור, ומסביב נגלו – בעצם ימי הסתו – שמי תכלת בהירים, חתימת ירק על מדרונות הרים, וכנופיית ספנים הומה, לא גדולה, הראשונה מאנשים המקום, התורכים.

²⁴² כאשר החשיר, לבסוף, החלל, ועל פני השמיים נראתה הלבנה -- בהירה, נוגה, עם הבעת הרחמים המיודעת בין שרטוטי פניה, נדמה שוב, כמו לפני, לפני שנים, כי היה נהיה המשך אביב הילדות מסביב. אולם הפעם כבר בלי מפה-נפש והתפכחות בימים הקרובים, להפך.

“Without the agony of awakening,” and the moon, the sign of the mother, appears again to mark the continuation between the old hometown and the land. No awakening this time, on the contrary; on the contrary, because in the next few days she reaches “the last shore, the permanent one, the shore of homeland” (ibid). As Baron’s feminist critics show (Zierler, Pinsker, Jelen), Baron’s Palestine often appears as a continuation of the Diaspora. In “Turkim” she says it explicitly: at the beginning the land seems like a “continuance, continuance of the spring of the town, the spring of childhood, when the wheel of the mill went round so confidently” (418).²⁴³ There is, however, a third awakening in this story that has to be reckoned with, an awakening into the difference between places and its political meanings. The dream of continuity, represented by the mother’s “Turkish,” eventually emerges in “Turkim” as just that, a dream. When the girl awakens for the third and final time, she sees once and for all that “Turkish” means something other than the warmth of the mother’s shawl. This occurs when the narrator of this story, like the community of *Ha-golim*, is deported from Palestine by the Turks during World War One, she learns:

Like before, at the time of the police-searches there [in the Diaspora], the commissar stretched his neck taking pains in reading the names, and when somebody laughed at his difficulty, a whip of an invisible policeman whipped through the air making a whistling sound – this is that long, eternal whip, of which there is no escape. With curiosity mixed with disgust I looked at the face of the *kaymakam*,²⁴⁴ who made it clear, through his spokesman, that we are leaving the country in order not to ever return. The disparaging mouth widened infinitely, spitting the strange “yeks” and “yoks,” while the Tatar face, with the wide jaws, stayed frozen, motionless, with no expression. Indeed, I have never known a language of such vicissitudes. (421)²⁴⁵

²⁴³ המשך, המשך אביב העיירה, אביב הילדות, בעת אשר גלגל הטחנה הסתובב בבטחון גדול כל כך

²⁴⁴ A title of an Ottoman district-governor.

²⁴⁵ כמו לפנינו בשעת החיפושים שם, זקף הקומיסר משהו את ראשו מתוך התקשות בקריאת השמות, ולצחוקו של אחד מבני החבורה על ההתקשות הזאת, הונף מאחת הפינות שוטו של שוטר לא נראה, והצליף באוויר מתוך שריקה – אותו השוט הארוך, הנצחי, אשר כל מפלט אין ממנו בשום מקום. בסקרנות הקרובה לתיעוב הבטתי אל פני הקאימקם, אשר באר על ידי המליץ, כי עוזבים אנחנו את הארץ על מנת שלא לשוב אליה לעולמים. הפה הלעג התרחב עד לבלי חוק, בפלטו את ה'יקים' וה'יוקים' המשוניים, בעוד אשר הפרצוב רחב-הלסתות, הטטרי, נשאר קהה קפוא, בלי שום הבעה. אכן, זאת היתה הלשון אשר כמוה לא ידעתי לתהפוכות מעולם.

Things never stay the same. The final *like* is not the same as the other ones throughout the story. It does not signify the constant presence of the mother's bosom, but, on the contrary, it signifies the constant need to depart from it, to leave it for a world which is cruel, senseless and arbitrary, for the world of the father's word. It signifies the inadequacy of the Turkish shawl as protection for the feminine body against the Turkish man with the whip awaiting her departure (recalling the deportation of Neḥama Rothstein). The father is right about the Turks, the child learns as she is awakened for the third time in this story. Their language is a language of the vicissitudes entailed by political power-relations, in which this time, the daughter is the prisoner, the persecuted, the displaced. The child must awaken, and the world she awakens in is a world of arbitrary and cruel power-relations. There is no divine sense in the departure from the mother, the hometown, the land. It derives from a reality of war and imperialist rule, whose vicissitudes are senseless as war, imperialism and racism are. Notably, it is not that women's language does not make sense. On the contrary, the mother's shawl makes perfect sense. It is the father's *tahapukhot* that are senseless. In fact, the departure from the mother, is a departure from a world that may be comprehended, exchanging it for a world of "yoks" and "yekes," a world of no meaning.²⁴⁶ This is the daughter's imminent initiation into nation. She has to take on the father's metaphysics, which is structured through hierarchical differences.

Note that there is a subtle change in the last sentence of the story: whereas for the father, Turkish is "*ein ke-leshon bney ha-adam ha-eleh le-tahapukhot **ba-'olam [nowhere in the world]***," the daughter's final resolution is that "*zot haytah lashon asher kamoha lo yada'ti le-tahapukhot **me-'olam [never]***." With the exchange of "nowhere"

²⁴⁶ On the mother's body a source of production of meaning, see: Kristeva 17-100.

for “never,” time replaces space as the frame of reference for understanding the meaning of Turkishness. The final *like* stands for the story that sustains the national project: things are always the same for the victimized Jewish people; one can never escape the long whip of persecution.²⁴⁷ This too seems to be a sign of the harsh realization that morning has come. Whereas with the mother, an intimacy between spaces is preserved despite geographical transitions, now, at the moment of what seems to be a final departure, we reveal that space, the land, is impossible to sustain. The only continuity is the old story of persecution. What the child learns, in other words, is the vicissitudes (*tahapukhot*) which are at the heart of Zionism: That things are always the same for the Jewish People in the sense that nothing is ever stable, that everything is always under attack. In fact, this is the only frame of reference that may give meaning to the father’s word-world.

The word *tahapukhot* in itself, as Baron must have known, is an extremely loaded word in the Jewish context, appearing only a single time in the Bible, in Deuteronomy 32.20 – “*astirah panay me-hem ereh ma aharitam ki dor tahapukhot hema*”²⁴⁸ – in Moses’ horrific last prophecy, just before his death, in which he predicts for the People a cycle of a sin against God, cruel punishment, and then merciful redemption. Before the People even enter the land, Moses, the leader-prophet who himself is not allowed to enter, predicts destruction and return to exile (Eisen 19-34). Thus, in the word *tahapukhot* itself the conclusion of the story is embedded. Deuteronomy’s vision of the perfect “at-homeness on the earth” is, as Arnold Eisen observes, tantamount to a perfect “unity of language and reality” (19), in which the words of God and Moses are realized in full. In the notion of “*dor tahapukhot*” – “a treacherous breed” (*JPS* translation) or “a generation

²⁴⁷ On the way this narrative sustains the Zionist ethos, see, Shapira 179-275.

²⁴⁸ I will hide My countenance from them, and see how they fare in the end. For they are a treacherous breed, children with no loyalty in them. (*JPS*)

that reverses itself” (Kaplan’s translation) – there lies immanent disruption of this unity, like in the Turkish meaningless “yeks” and “yoks” and in the reality of exile, a mode of existence in which all that sustains the People are words removed from their source and referent (Eisen 34).

“Turkim,” then, is a family romance in which the daughter finally breaks with her mother’s promise of constant intimacy, in favor of the memory of the father’s judgment.²⁴⁹ It is also a metaphysical story, where a child learns the harsh “truth” about space, time and the break between language and reality. But, at the same time, “Turkim” is grounded in the particular history of modern Judaism and Zionism. In this sense, Lubin is right in saying that reading Baron’s metaphysics facilitates the author’s insertion into the national narrative. And yet, Baron’s metaphysics, the one the child must eventually awaken to, is embedded in her nationalism. The daughter’s realization that things are “not so” is, in the end, a very Zionist realization of the impossibility of continuity between the Diaspora and the Land, between the *shtetl* and the Yishuv. In this sense, no wonder that the story ends on the shore of the Mediterranean. The daughter’s awakening is an awakening to the existence of the sea, to the harsh reality of geography, as determined by politics of power, a reality of immigration and deportation, the harsh reality in which places do matter.

Hagar’s Shawl

That woman-slave to whom the angels spoke. Abraham’s anguish at the day of her expulsion, when, according to the legend, he along with her son put on her shoulders a kind of *shawl* that dragged behind her, so that he can trace their path in the desert, and his secret visits, later, in the desert, at the home of his son, on

²⁴⁹ On rejection of the mother as part of the girl’s maturing process in psychoanalytic theory, see: Freud, “Female Sexuality.”

whom he still took pity, according to the same exegesis. (Bney Keidar 424; my emphasis)²⁵⁰

Dan Miron claims that the stories Baron wrote during the second part of her life, the stories that are gathered in the collection *Parshiyot* should be read not as isolated stories, but in relation to each other, for they “portray a complete, consistent world of the author’s creation” (17). “Bney Keidar” (Sons of Keidar), the story that follows “Turkim” in *Parshiyot*, seems to provide another version of the same narrative of feminine immigration and feminine national initiation. “Bney Keidar” (Sons of Keidar) reinforces the metaphysics of “Turkim,” but also turns it upside down. While in “Turkim,” the girl joins the national story by letting go of the world view associated with the mother, “Bney Keidar” makes the mother-daughter identification into a nationalist site. Note that in the quotation above, it is Abraham and Ishmael who put the shawl on Hagar’s shoulders, so that the marks it leaves on the sand may serve as a link between them: between husband and wife, between homes, between fathers, sons and brothers, between mothers-sisters, and between Peoples. In this story, it is Sara who causes break and separation. At the same time, however, it is Sara, the mother, who will emerge as “right” in the end.

Like “Turkim,” “Bney Keidar” too begins with a comparison, even if less poetic. The opening of the story likens the Jews of the *shtetl* and the Tatars, the Muslim community that lives near the river:

And their Sabbath – the sixth day of the week is their sacred day. And air of Israelite Sabbath embraces all. No drunken revelries, no cries of rejoice. At the tavern of Zelda the widower, the innocent brute Mahmud sits with a glass of raisin-wine, and his eyes are clear and sober.

²⁵⁰ אותה אשה שפחה אשר המלאכים דיברו איתה. עגמת נפשו של אברהם ביום גירושיה של זר, כאשר הוא, ביחד עם בנה, שם עליה, לדברי בעלי האגדה, מין צעוף הנגרר מאחריה, כדי שיראה את הדרך שהלכו בה, וביקוריו החשאיים שהיה מבקר, לפי אותו הפירוש, אחרי כן, במדבר, בבית בנו, שעדיין היו רחמיו עליו.

He got up and grabbed the sickly boy Yossele, lifted him up high, and then put him back in his place carefully and affectionately.

“We people are related” – he said in broken Yiddish to the widower’s old father, Shmuel-David, the former *melamed*²⁵¹ – “we are grandchildren of the same grandfather –cousins.” And the old man, who was sitting and pouring Kiddush wine for the customers, seemed convinced.

Look – he said when Mahmud left – they do not touch pork, it is abomination for them. In their house of worship there are no statues, and they too fast. They are afraid of the police, because they are, like us, in exile, and they cannot stand the mountain-people, who are the real gentiles, but they will always be happy to help a Jew. (423)²⁵²

The Tatars, designated by Baron as “decedents of Ishmael,” appear as familiar-strangers, different but similar cousins. Already at this point, the instability of difference between them and the Jews is a cause for bewilderment and conflict, as “the *maskil* Ḥayim - Rephael always tried to prove that they are strangers, of another race.” The children, however, are “inclined to believe that there are family-relations between us. And alongside the story of Isaac in Bible... we were also drawn to the story of Ishmael (that in our imagination looked like Mahmud)” (424).²⁵³ Again, childhood is the time of comparison, a time where one is fascinated by legends of kinship and sameness. We are reminded of Gil Anidjar’s discussion of the discursive efforts to manage the difference between Jews and Arabs through the categories of race and religion (*Semites* 3-40). The Tatars of “Bney Keidar” embody this predicament. How can difference be made when

²⁵¹ A teacher of children.

²⁵² והנה שבתם -- היום הששי בשבוע יום מקודש. כעין השראת שבתון ישראלי בכל. לא מצהלות שיכורים ולא קול התרנונות. בבית מרזחה של האלמנה זלדה יושב הגברתן ותמים הלב מחמוד על כוס של יין צימוקים ועיניו הן צלולות ופיקחיות. הנה קם ומשך אליו את הנער החולני יוסל, הרים אותו 'גבוה גבוה' ושב והעמידו במקומו בזהירות, מתוך הבעה של חיבה גלויה. -- הן אנחנו אנשים קרובים הננו -- אמר ביהודית רצוצה לאביה הישיש של האלמנה, שמואל דויד, מלמד הדרדקי לשעבר -- נכדים של אותו סבא -- בני דוד.

הזקן שישב ומזג אותה שעה לקונים יין לקידוש, ניכר היה בו שהדברים מתקבלים על לבו. -- צאו וראו -- אמר כשזה יצא והלך -- הן בבשר חזיר אין הם נוגעים, פיגול הוא להם. בית תפילתם אין בו לא צלמים ולא 'סחבות', והתענית היא אצלם תענית של צום ממש. מאיש הבולשת הם יראים, כי יושבים הם, כמונו, בגלות, ואת יושב החר, שהוא הגוי האמיתי, אינם סובלים, ואילו ליהודים שמחים הם תמיד לעשות טובה, וכשנפלת דליקה ברחוב קופצם הם תמיד הראשונים לתוך האש.

²⁵³ המשכיל חיים-רפאל, חתנו של הדיין, השתדל תמיד להוכיח כי הללו זרים הם, בני גזע אחר, אבל אנחנו נוטים היינו להאמין כי אמנם יש קירבת משפחה בינינו. ולצד תולדותיו של יצחק בספר המקרא משכו את הלב גם אלה של ישמעאל (הוא שבדמינונו נצטייר בדמותו של הבחור מחמוד).

there is a religious proximity, mythic family-relations, and a shared political status of an exiled minority? While the Tatars are not really “Arabs,” Baron posits them as precursors of the Arabs encountered in Palestine later in the story, which further exacerbate the ambiguity of their position. In Europe, *vis-à-vis* the Christians, “The Jews” and the Tatars, as place-holders for “The Arabs,” are, in fact, the same.²⁵⁴ The comparisons in “Bney Keidar” emerge from the start as more political than “metaphysical.” Indeed, this story – which has never been addressed in the scholarship on Baron – does not hide its nationalist politics under the dim light of the poetic moon, but rather announces them quite bluntly, which makes it an uncomfortable reading for the feminist reader of Baron.

As in “Turkim,” the child’s process of maturing would entail awakening into a world where difference exists. Moreover, in this story too the final awakening is a national one, occurring after the immigration to Palestine:

This is how it seemed to be then, in childhood days, over there. But as time passed, after encountering these relatives here, all these scriptures and their exegeses appeared in a new light:

Ishmael did not resemble Mahmud the Tatar, not in bodily force and not in the innocence of the heart. He was humble and peace-seeking while he was oppressed, like us, by tough masters. Then we thought that amidst the sea of strangers how good it would be to work our lands side by side. But as the times changed, when the burden was lifted from his shoulders, his real nature was revealed: “a wild ass of a man” -- as the angel told Hagar -- “his hand against everyone.” (424-425)²⁵⁵

We are reminded of the child’s first awakening in “Turkim” – “*lo kakh*” – “not so” – and how “the right light” made everything different. Here, once again, under the Middle-Eastern sun, differences become apparent and sharp. It is not only that Ishmael does not

²⁵⁴ On the proximity between “Orientalism” and “Hebraism,” and on the lost cultural “intimacy” between Jews and Muslims, see also: Hochberg 1-19; Raz-Krakotzkin, “The Zionist Return” 162-181.

²⁵⁵ ככה נראה זה אז, בימי הילדות, שם. אולם לאחר זמן, עם הפגישה עם קרובי משפחה אלה פה, הוארו כל הכתובים האלה עם פירושיהם באור אחר: ישמעאל לא לאותו מחמוד טטרי דמה, לא בכוח הגוף ולא בתום הלב. צנוע ודורש שלום נראה כל זמן שהיה לחוץ, כמונו, על ידי אדונים קשים. אז אמרנו כי בתוך ים הזרים שמסביב מה טוב יהיה לשבת עם זה שבת אחים ולעבוד צד לצד את אדמותנו. אולם עם תמורות העיתים, כשהעול נפרק מעליו נתגלה בצביונו האמיתי: 'פרא אדם' - כדבר המלאך לאמו -- אשר 'ידו בכל'.

resemble Mahmud the Tatar, but also that the difference between Isaac and Ishmael becomes clearer than ever, which makes it impossible for them to live together. Ultimately, no chance of coexistence is possible, as “The Jew, The Arab” can only be imagined as a contradiction within the national space.

Like “Turkim,” where we have set a forsaken motherly “metaphysics of comparison” against a prevailing fatherly “metaphysics of difference,” “Bney Keidar” too contrasts two worldviews. Yet, in this story the gendered world seems to be inverted, as the narrative follows the trail of the biblical story of Abraham, Sara and Hagar, in which the mother knows best. Only the children cannot understand it at first:

We could not understand Sara’s stone-cold heart which brought about the expulsion. We felt a kind of guilt that this was the way our ancestors treated their forefather when he was just a boy, and despite all the sweetening explanations of the exegetes we could not understand how these people who had so many herds, slaves and maids, could not find a place for the rejected son except for the desolate desert. (424)²⁵⁶

Not a merciful mother, Sara, but a stone-cold hearted woman, who is willing to send a mother and a child to desert to die. In the *shtetl*, in the Diaspora, at times of weakness and vulnerability, in the days of childhood, there is no way to understand such senseless cruelty. In the land, however, with the emergence of national consciousness, it turns out that the mother, and not the father as in “Turkim,” in fact, knew best. Yet, what she knows is horrifying:

Abraham, who knew the nature of this son of his, still raised him in his home, and even had fatherly loving feelings for him, as we can see (“O that Ishmael might live by Your favor!”), but his wife Sara remained upset, because she, the mother of mothers, with her prophetic foresight, *given only to great lovers*, knew, already then, that one day this one will rise against her son and will demand a piece of the land that God himself has given to her son forever. And in her despair (the exegetes say that already then this boy would taunt her son and

²⁵⁶ לא נהירה הייתה קשיות לבה של שרה, אשר בשלה בא עצם הגירוש. כעין מוסר-לב הורגש כלפי אלה פה על כי ככה נהגו באביהם בעודנו נער, ועם כל הסבריהם הממתיקים של המפרשים קשה היה להבין היאך זה אנשים אלה שהיו כבדים במקנה ובעבדים ושפחות, לא נמצא אצלם שם מקום בשביל הבן הבלתי-אהוב חוץ מהמדבר השמים.

throw arrows at him) she cried her decisive and unequivocal cry: the son of that slave shall not share in the inheritance with my son. (425; my emphasis)²⁵⁷

This is the end of this story. It concludes with a return to the mother rather than the father. But what an awful mother it is: She brings no mercy, no charity, no ethics of care, no idealized sisterhood of women, no warmth, no “language of troubles.” She brings only clear-cut, unequivocal, stone-cold distinctions between mothers and between sons, between those left to die in the desert and those who may stay safe in their home. What an awful prophecy is the prophecy of the “great lovers”, when it is read now, after all these years. Motherly love emerges as racist hate for the child of the Other. Thus, once again we see the destructive-constructive clash between women and Zionism. While on the one hand, we recover the voice of the mother; on the other hand the words this voice pronounce are terrible: “the son of that slave shall not share.” In the national space, when the child is awake, there cannot be motherly love without hatred. The “great lovers” are, in fact, the “greatest haters.”

Picking over Wounds

When she recognized that she was about to cry, she said to her:
“Go into the little room on the left, there is no one there now.”
And, indeed, the room was empty. (*Ha-golim* 170)²⁵⁸

²⁵⁷ אברהם בזמנו, שהכיר וידע את טיבו של בנו זה, היה מגדלו בכל זאת בביתו, ואפילו הגה לו – כפי שרואים – רגשי לב אבהיים (“לו ישמעאל יהיה לפניך”), אבל שרה אשתו לא נחה דעתה, כי היא, אם האמהות, בחוש נבואי, שהוא ניתן לאוהבים הגדולים, צפתה כבר אז שביום מן הימים יקום זה על בנה ויבקש לו חלק מאדמת נחלתו, אשר האלוהים בעצמו נתן אותה לו לאחוזת אולם. ובמרי ייאושה (לפי המפרשים היה מתאנה אל נערה הרך וזורק בו חצים כבר אז) קראה את קריאתה החותכת והמכרעת: -- לא יירש בן האמה הזאת עם בני.
²⁵⁸ חנה רבין, שהכירה בה שהיא מבקשת לבכות, אמרה לה: "לכי והיכנסי אל החדר הקטן משמאל, שם אין איש עכשיו." ואמנם
החדר היה ריק.

Upon hearing the troubles of her Italian neighbor, Neḥama Rothstein, who earlier spoke to her in the women's "language of troubles," "blinks her eyes quickly . . . so as not to desecrate the Sabbath with tears" (232).²⁵⁹ I read this on a Saturday and fall in love with Baron's poetics once again, and I too hold in the tears, because I do not want to violate this beautiful moment of women's conversation with my talk of colonial journeys. Only we all know that tears cannot be forever held from breaking through the eyelids. They will eventually break out, if not now then later in the story, when we reveal the truth about the tragic fate of Ita Blokh who died of a broken heart. Upon hearing that, Neḥama "pulls the ends of her head-kerchief from behind her neck and holds them up to her eyes" (274).²⁶⁰ These strange gestures women make to hide their tears like pulling the ends of a kerchief or dying of a broken heart, what can they mean? A flood of tears washes the land when Ita's mother arrives to Palestine. The woman never stops crying, which is why her granddaughter, Ita's illegitimate daughter, Dita, dislikes "this *black* grandmother who is always wet" (136; my emphasis).²⁶¹ The blackness of our wet grandmothers, how can it be sustained? Especially since Ita was known for the clear whiteness of her complexion. Brakha Rothstein, Neḥama's daughter, then becomes a mediator between the granddaughter and the "black" grandmother who does not know Hebrew, as if fulfilling the place of the missing mother, Ita Blokh. Brakha serves as a good confidante for the "black" grandmother because "the others, for all their sympathy, did not abstain from

²⁵⁹ והיא עיפועה מתוך תנועת התאפקות בעיניה, כדי שלא לחלל בדמעות את יום השבת. (18)

²⁶⁰ משכה מאחורי ערפה את שני קצוות המטפחת ונשאה אותם לעיניה. (91)

²⁶¹ זו, הקטנה, לא נתקבלה עליה בתחילה סבתא שחורה זאת שהיא רטובה תמיד מדמעות. (136)

picking curiously over her wounds, whereas she, Brakha, only listened with silent understanding and an open heart” (Lubin 100-101).²⁶²

The act of reading nationalism, racism and colonialism into Baron’s stories feels a little like “picking over her wounds,” violating the beauty of women’s “language of troubles.” Indeed, I have found in Baron’s stories a complicated web of women who speak and listen to each other, who understand and interpret and substitute each other, who understand, interpret, and take each other’s place, who speak, and keep silent, and weep for each other, and let each other cry, and do not let each other cry, and hold each others’ tears, and hold their own tears, and kill each other, and silence, deport and agonize each other, and wound each other with utmost cruelty. Eventually, I would suggest, what makes Baron’s writing difficult to implicate in the politics of Zionism is the way it subtly intertwines beauty and ideology through its visions of Jewish and Zionist femininities. In this chapter, however, I have tried to go beyond the pleasure of reading Baron and of picking over wounds, to flesh out a violent layer of Baron’s complex poetics.

²⁶² שכן האחרים, עם כל רגשי השתתפותם, לא נמנעו מלחטט מתוך סקרנות בפצעיה, בעוד אשר היא, ברכה, רק הקשיבה לה (151) בשתיקת הבנה ובלב פתוח כנגדה ברוחב כזה, שהיא מדמה הייתה לשמוע בו הד לכל דיבור שלה. (151)
Here the translation is taken from Haim Watzman’s translation of Orly Lubin’s article, “Tidbits from Neḥama’s Kitchen: Alternative Nationalism in Dvora Baron’s *The Exiles*.” Jelen and Pinsker 91-103.

Conclusion:
Zionist Women's Zionism: Discourse and Vocabulary

Two discussions have interlaced through the five cases of women-nationalists presented in this dissertation: The first concerns the makings of Zionist women's Zionism in women's prose of the first half of the 20th century; and the second situates Zionist women's Zionism on the map of the intersecting relations of power forged by the Zionist project. At the end of this investigative journey I feel I am able to speak further of the critical possibilities that this work may be opening and to point toward some questions that may be of interest for future research.

The scholarship on early Zionist women in general, and on early Zionist women's writing in particular, evolved during the 1990s and the 2000s, as part of the general trend, in certain circles of the Israeli and American academy, of diversifying, and, to an extent, challenging Zionist historiography. This intellectual framework gave rise to critical studies of Zionism that made it a point to voice the experience of those marginalized and oppressed by Zionism, namely, Mizrahim, Palestinians, diasporic Jews and women. While the large and diverse body of scholarship on gender and Zionism posits women among the marginalized others of the masculine Zionist subject, I have investigated the Zionist imaginary furnished in the writings of Zionist women who never accepted the assumption that Zionism is, in essence, a masculine project, and who did, in writing, claim Zionism as their own, remolding it in response to women's gendered predicaments. I have argued that in construing women *only* as the victimized Other of Zionism and

obscuring their investment in the nation, feminist scholars of Zionist history and literature have elided the ways in which privilege, or the desire to gain privilege, shape the position of Jewish Ashkenazi women. Nationalist women-writers, Hemda Ben-Yehuda, Sara Azaryahu, Rivka Alper, Neḥama Poḥatchevsky and Dvora Baron, I contend, re-alchemy the Zionist imagination so that it would be in tune with their dilemmas, desires and anxieties as women. Their writings feature their efforts not only to imagine their place within the Zionist project, but also to make the project their own, to become proper and representative subjects of the nation.

Reading women's writing from this perspective I was able to raise questions about the makings of women's nationalism: What is the land for women if it is not a mother to be possessed? How do women conceive of themselves as "the New Hebrew," against the dichotomy between old Jewishness as feminine and new Zionism as masculine? How is the Zionist feminine body imagined outside of the framework of the "Muscular Jew"? What is labor if it is not virile penetration of the land? What is the journey from exile to the land if it is not the negation of the feminized Diaspora in favor of embodied masculinity in the Land?

At the same time, considering women's nationalism allowed me to expand the context in which Hebrew women's writing is read, by comparing the Zionist feminine position with the position of other white women in colonial settings. Therefore, if this project contributes to the diversification of Zionist historiography, it does so not with the "benign" motivation of expanding our knowledge on Zionism, but with a more concrete intention of fleshing out the different gendered forms of Zionist discourse as a discourse of power.

At this point, however, one may wish to ask: Is there at all a discourse for Zionist women's Zionism? Can we speak of the terms that define women's nationalist discourse? To further explore these questions we need to think of "Hebrew Literature" as an institution with its own discursive codes. If, as Foucault maintains, discourse is not only that which phrases struggle and domination, but rather, that which one struggles to dominate, Hebrew literature is definitely a site of struggle over discourse (12). If due to the work of scholars such as Boyarin, Biale and Gluzman, we have become accustomed to understand the Zionist discourse as a discourse about masculinity, close analysis of women's writing reveals efforts toward a Zionist discourse of femininity, where the meanings of terms like "adornment," "purity," "whiteness," "excess," "sacrifice," "beauty," "home," are negotiated.

Is what we find in women's prose only efforts-toward-discourse? Or in foucauldian terms, is it "the discourse of the insane," which holds neither truth nor importance, which does not partake in the dissemination of power (Foucault 12)? The critical reception of women's writing may indicate that this is the case. We may recall the fraught engagement of the critics of Rivka Alper's first novel with the issue of sexual trauma brought up in the novel. Alper's speech could not be heard within the terms of the Zionist discourse. The meaning she gives to sexual violence – not the rape of the Jewish woman by gentiles but a violation that occurs within the Jewish family – cannot be registered by the critics who have no discursive means to address it. A similar phenomenon may be found in the reception of Poḥatchevsky's first book *Bi-Yehudah ha-ḥadashah*, which was criticized for featuring too much death and suffering. "In the place where the reader expects to find life, he finds dead bodies with every step. Almost all the

protagonists are dying before his eyes,” one critic writes (Govrin 143-144). If Alper is accused of assaulting her readers with her excessive representation of sexual violence, Poḥatchevsky is blamed for confronting the reader with excessive death and suffering. Indeed, another critic charges Poḥatchevsky of being “cruel . . . killing people just like that, making parents lose their children, making orphans out of sons and daughters, killing with no reason” (Govrin 144). The reception of Baron has a longer and more complicated history, but the critical trend traced in Chapter Six of this dissertation, of placing Baron outside the politics of Zionism and marking her as the ultimate voice of Otherness, corresponds with the critical attitudes toward Alper and Poḥatchevsky.²⁶³ In sum, if we try to measure the resonance of women’s writing according to the response of the male dominated Hebrew “literary republic” (Miron, *Bodedim* 10-11), we may need to conclude that women’s efforts-toward-discourse were, indeed, the efforts of the insane, the irrational, the excessive, and thus, that although women writers were passionately invested in Zionist politics, their writing had little political resonance.

Yet, what if we step out of the literary republic? Zionist women, we should note, have formed many separate spaces where their words may have had different effects. That is, those passionate nationalists, whose love for the nation was largely unrequited, who have been constantly rejected from the power centers of Zionism, established their own feminine public spheres in order for their voices to be heard, even if only by other women. In spite, or maybe because, of their marginalization in the Zionist space, Zionist women were very active in founding and operating educational, medical, and social services organizations and institutions: Educational farms, schools and kindergartens, charity organizations, adult education groups, employment agencies for women, clinics

²⁶³ The texts of Azaryahu and Ben-Yehuda did not receive any critical attention until very recently.

for mothers and children, women's publications, women's political forums. All of these were extremely potent sites in which the features of the proper Zionist woman were measured and negotiated, and in which cultural hierarchies between women of different classes, ethnicities and nationalities were made. While recent decades have seen some research on the Women-Workers' Movement and its institutions and on several other women's organization,²⁶⁴ there are still piles of archival materials to study, and there is a real need to make the connection between Zionist women's organizing and Zionist women's writing, especially since many women were involved in both, and since both were very vibrant settings where women imagine their relations with Zionism. In order to further explore the question of Zionist women's discourse then, we need a thorough study of the inter-connections between Zionist women's writing and Zionist women's institutions and organizations. Such a study may show the significance of women's staging of the figures of "the Native Woman," the "Backward Woman" or the "the Sick Sister," and the gravity of terms such as "adornment," "purity," "whiteness," "excess," "sacrifice," "beauty," "home," etc., by tracing their deployments within women's institutional practices.

For now, this dissertation has begun to map the vocabulary of women's nationalist writing and the ways it figures the Zionist feminine subject, its Others, and the boundary-lines between them. Women's prose, I have shown, draws the contours of the Zionist feminine subject through loaded oppositions such as "adornment" and

²⁶⁴ See, for example, Deborah Bernstein's Pioneering study, *Ishah be-Eretz-Yisrael: ha-sheifah le-shivyon bi-tekufat ha-Yishuv* (Women in Palestine: the Struggle for Equality in the Yishuv Period); Hannah Hertzog's article, "Irgunei nashim ba-ḥugim ha-ezraḥiyim: perek nishkaḥ ba-historiyografiah shel ha-Yishuv" (Women's Civil Organizations: a Forgotten Chapter in History of the Yishuv); and Bat-Sheva Margalit-Stern's study, *Geulah bi-khvalim: tmu'at ha-po'alot Ha-Eretz-Yisraelit 1920-1939* (*Bounded Redemption: The Eretz-Yisraeli Women-Workers' Movement 1920-1939*).

“simplicity,” “excess” and “purity,” “whiteness” and “darkness.” To a large extent these oppositions are invoked as part of the project of constructing the New Hebrew Woman as a New Woman. Zionist women were invested in modernity as a promise of equality and in the nation as a modern project. Much to their surprise, however, Zionism as a modern project was revealed as an androcentric project, with women’s rights remaining an empty promise. In this context we may understand their textual efforts to keep bolstering the idea of the modern nation as a venue of gender equality, to think and rethink time and again the New Hebrew Woman as the New Women, by distinguishing her from other women.

As Homi Bhabha shows, however, the colonial nation is always a double site, where liberalism and violence operate at once (59-63; 134-136). While the gesture of stripping women from “everything they do not need” emerges as a central gesture by which the New Hebrew Woman is differentiated from the ornamentality of the East and constituted as a New Woman, her unadorned body, I would suggest, is also the naked body ready to be sacrificed. Consider the body of the orphanized Shlomit in Ben-Yehuda’s story or the body of the deceased Ita in Baron’s novel. Both are constituted as ideal New Hebrew Women only to be left behind, dead or behind the curtain. A few times in this dissertation I have addressed the double perception of the Zionist self as both empowered and victimized: The ethos of the peaceful workers of the land who are to defend themselves against supposedly stronger aggressors (Shapira, *Herev* 17-178). Arguably, one of the “gifts” that Zionist women’s Zionist imagination offers Zionism is the image of the victim, the sacrificed, the weak, which is no less necessary to sustain the Zionist fantasy world than that of the “Muscular Jew.” If the image of the “Muscular

Jew,” as Daniel Boyarin claims, is grounds for the Zionist “Colonial Drag,” that is, the Zionist man’s mimicry of the Western colonialist, then Zionist women’s prose may be a venue for “a colonized drag,” that is, a space where the image of the weak oppressed Jew may be preserved – through figures such as the silenced woman behind the curtain, the vulnerable feminine body alone at night, the abused woman, the tormented writer, the female-colonist contaminated by “foreign hands,” and the white woman victimized by the brown man.

Yet alongside this binary modality of Zionist feminine vocabulary, alongside the workings of oppositions, we find another narratological current, which constantly troubles of any neat delineation of the New Hebrew Woman. Arguably, Zionism is at its core a project of drawing both concrete and metaphoric boundary-lines between the Zionist self and its Others. It is my assumption that boundaries are an inherently gendered concept, as the cultural construction of masculinities and femininities is imbued with questions of separation and identification. In this context, the analysis of the construction of Zionist femininity *vis-à-vis* its Others seems to be of special significance, because the feminine, more than the masculine, is culturally constructed in relation to the Other (See theoretical discussion in Chapter Five). Throughout the chapters of this dissertation, we have seen the Zionist feminine subject constantly doubled by figures of other women: The sick sister (e.g., Dvora Ben-Yehuda, Sara Azaryahu’s sister), the diasporic mother (e.g., Tamara’s mother in Połatchevsky’s “Be-tzel ha-kvutzah,” Batya’s mother in Alper’s *Pirupurey Mahapekhah*), the idealized native (e.g., Ben-Yehuda’s Shlomit), the backward “poor” sister (e.g., Azaryahu’s Palestinian and Mizrahi women), the sister to be normalized through nation (e.g., Baron’s Lulu). If a vocabulary of Zionist women’s

Zionism is to be gleaned from Zionist women's prose, it would have the shape of a web of feminine figures tied together in multiple ways. And if the New Hebrew Woman is to be conjured from Zionist women's prose, it would be a figure constantly negotiating her frontiers *vis-à-vis* these other figures.

The recurrent *topos* of the exchangeability of women in Hebrew women's prose seems to highlight these contested frontiers. The reader may have noticed the abundance of instances where women, sick and healthy, diasporic and Eretz-Yisraeli, Eastern and Western, mirror, substitute and replace each other. While the exchange of women, as Gayle Rubin has showed, is an underlying structure of patriarchy (see discussion in Chapter Two), in the context of Zionist women's writing, arguably, women's exchangeability forms an alternative to the Zionist grand narrative of rebirth. If the image of rebirth naturalizes and mystifies the ideology of the negation of exile and its desired effect on individuals, the notion of exchangeability points toward cultural practices grounded in social relations of power: A woman is replaced for another (or the possibility of replacing her occurs), because she is disposable (e.g., Ephraim's wife, Tzipora, Hagar), because she fails as a Zionist (e.g., Dvora Ben-Yehuda, Sara Azaryahu's sister, Ephraim's wife), because she has to be sacrificed (e.g., Ita). In any case, the shadows of the replaced women tend to linger in almost all the stories we have read. As an alternative to the narrative of rebirth, the story of exchange calls attention to the ethical implications of the nationalist move insofar as it re-structures the self-other relationship. With this idea I do not mean to go back to the notion of women as subjects of a more ethical nationalism, but rather to point toward the ways in which the clash between Zionist women's desire to belong to the nation and the Zionist patriarchal framework, which

produces the stories of exchange, may eventually be of unsettling potential. The exchangeability of women in Hebrew women's prose, I would suggest, encapsulates in one image Zionist women's sense of marginalization within the nation and their willingness to be sacrificed for the nation. Insofar as Hebrew women's writings strive to delineate clear contours for the Zionist feminine subject, however, the multiple instances where women are replaced or are under the threat of being replaced signal the failure of their efforts.

Interrogating the terms of Zionist women's nationalism through the methodology of close reading applied throughout this work entailed unpacking in great detail the mechanisms of texts, sometimes at the level of the single phrase or word. While this may be perfectly in line with the ethos of literary studies, in the context of this project the close reading methodology may have worked against the effort to expand the framework in which Zionist women's prose is read; that is, to place this corpus not only within Zionist history or within the history of women and gender, but also within the history of global relations of power. Close reading is a work of love in the sense that it requires intense psychic investment in the Other. One cannot glean the intricacies of someone else's writings without developing a kind of relationship with them, which features an array of feelings, including love and hate, disgust and identification, anger and empathy. My own ambivalence was exacerbated through the extensive archival work that accompanied the writing of this dissertation, with the excitement of reading personal letters, journals, and unpublished manuscripts and drafts. Indeed, one cannot spend days exploring someone else's "hidden" life, without developing an attachment to them, or even a kind of loyalty, manifested by the desire to know all there is to know about them

in order to represent them as fully as possible. Delving into the lives and writings of Zionist women, I found myself susceptible to what I would call “the temptation” of enclosing myself as an analytical reader and writer within the gendered wound; of going further and further inward into Zionist women’s gendered predicament and forgetting about the “grand scheme” of intersecting relations of power in which the position of Zionist Ashkenazi women is embedded. My hope is that I have succeeded in resisting this temptation and produce a tensed text which moves inward and outward at once, and that rather than merely picking over wounds, this dissertation has opened some avenues toward a more complex mapping of the Zionist discourse of gender and nation as an asymmetrical, and yet tenacious, rivalry between feminine and masculine interventions, and toward a more complex understanding of Zionist women’s position as rejected lovers of the nation.

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