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EDITED BY HELEN EPSTEIN

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BASIA NIKIFOROVA was born in 1945, the first Jewish child born after the war in Volkovysk (Belarus). Her parents, who had lived out the war as Jewish partisans in the forests, moved the family to Grodno, where she finished secondary school. She is a graduate of the Philosophy Department in Moscow State University and taught ethics at Grodno Medical Institute before realizing her dream of moving to Vilnius. Only in 1990 did her father tell her about Lithuanian collaboration with the Nazis and that Latvian collaborationists murdered her mother's family. This information changed her scientific interests. Moving from the abstract idea of religious and ethnic tolerance, she began to focus on Christian-Jewish relations, and sources of anti-Semitism in the Eastern Europe, receiving grants from Harvard University and YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. During 1997-1998 she was Fellow of the Center for Study of World Religions at Harvard University and Maria Salit-Gitelson Tell Fellow of YIVO. Her subject of research was *"Religious and National Tolerance / Intolerance in Lithuania: The Case of Lithuanian's Jews in the Twentieth Century."*

LAURENCE PODSELVER is a researcher at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris at the Jewish Research Center. After many years dedicated to South American anthropology concerning Amerindians in Amazonia, she turned to Jewish culture and to the socio-anthropology of the Lubavitch community as well as a study of a Parisian suburb with an important Jewish population. Both fields focus on returning to religion as a new tendency of French Jews in the context of immigration and cultural change in France. She is a member of the editorial board of *Pardes* and the author of numerous publications.

RIV-ELLEN PRELL, an anthropologist, is Associate Professor of American Studies and an adjunct member of the faculties of Jewish Studies and Women's Studies at the University of Minnesota. She is the author of the forthcoming *Fighting to Become Americans: Jewish Women and Men in Conflict in the 20th Century; Prayer and Community: the Havurah in American Life;* and co-editor of *Interpreting Women's Lives: Personal Narratives and Feminist Theory.* Prell has published a number of articles on American Judaism in the late twentieth century, how gender shapes our understanding of American Jewish culture and Jewish/Black relations in the United States. She has served on the editorial boards of the Encyclopedia of Jewish Women in America and the feminist journal SIGNS. She teaches about American Jewish women, Jews and popular culture and religion and culture.

EETA PRINCE-GIBSON, an Israel-based academic and writer, is working on her doctorate through the Hebrew University on women settlers in the West Band and Gaza.

FOR SEVERAL MONTHS NOW, I have been editing the papers of 24 women working in different fields and in different places throughout the world. These women also come from very different parts of the Jewish community and work in a variety of settings: some are academics; some are writers; some are social workers. All originally presented papers in 1997 and 1998 at the Hadassah Research Institute on Jewish Women located at Brandeis University. Reading their work, thinking about their ideas, and sometimes struggling to translate them into English has been an unexpectedly absorbing experience for me and I've wondered what it is, exactly, that I find so rewarding. I've concluded that spending time in the company of an international, interdisciplinary group of Jewish women begins to fill a most basic and persistent need in me: the need of human beings to see themselves sympathetically represented and reflected in their culture.

As a Jewish woman growing up in post-war America, I rarely saw any semblance of my reflection in the mainstream culture. Although I grew up in the middle of New York City where almost everybody in my immediate world was Jewish, representations of Jews were absent from the museums I visited, the movies I saw, or the books I read in school. Except for *The Diary of Anne Frank,* which I consider problematic reading for a young Jewish girl, there was no Jewish heroine in the books of my childhood. I identified with active, adventurous girls like Jo March, Nancy Drew or Cherry Ames and liked reading about the dramatic lives of European and English queens. I didn't then notice that none of the women I was reading about were Jewish, or that Archie and Veronica seemed to have no Jewish friends; that there were no Jewish Mouseketeers; or that there were no Jewish girls in *American Girl* or *Seventeen.*

I was in my forties and listening to West Indian writer Jamaica Kincaid speaking at the Isabella Gardner Museum in Boston, when I suddenly perceived their absence (like Pnina Motzafi-Haller in her essay about *mizrahi* women in Israel, I applied the insight of an African-American woman to my own life). Jamaica Kincaid had done a brilliant and audacious thing: invited to choose her favorite painting at the museum and speak to a large audience about the reasons for her choice, she had beamed an old snapshot of her mother on the museum's large screen and talked about it.

All of us in the audience, of course, had been accustomed to viewing the parade of art history on such a screen – from the Greeks to the Renaissance masters to the Impressionists and Abstract Expressionists. We were accustomed to oil portraits and elaborately framed photographs. The effect of Kinkaid's snapshot was shocking and made the author's point more forcefully than her words: Had we ever seen the image of an ordinary West Indian woman on the walls of a museum? Had we ever contemplated her face? Her body? Her surroundings? Her life? How did we ascribe value to this snapshot when it was viewed in a private photo album, in a newspaper, or here, in the context of other portraits in the museum? We had all read or at least heard of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man,* but what about the invisible woman? In this case, what about an entire sub-culture usually hidden by the majority African-American minority culture?
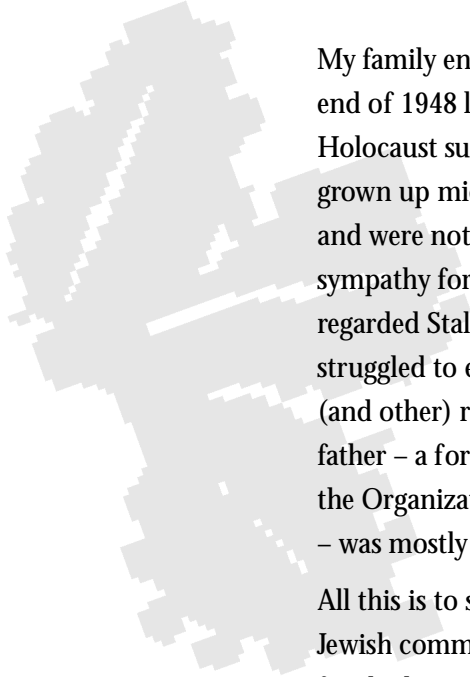
I viewed many of these working papers as such snapshots that raised some of these and many other questions.

In addition to experiencing a kind of invisibility as a Jewish girl in America, I also felt an invisibility in the Jewish community as the daughter of Czech Jews (of *ashkenazi* descent on my mother's side; *sephardi* on my father's). We lived on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, where there were many Jewish refugees from Central Europe but where the definition of Jewish culture was determined by people who, like the majority of American Jews, were of Russian and Polish descent.

This particular group, I later learned, had jettisoned their working-class, Yiddish-speaking parents (as well as their working-class culture) in the Bronx, or Brooklyn, or Queens, or the Lower East Side. They were West Siders now, middle-class, highly educated, new Jews, who frequented the American – not Yiddish-language – theater and Lincoln Center, collected art, read the cultural sections of the *Times* and the *New Yorker.* The men worked as professionals; the women were delighted to be full-time homemakers in the image of Betty Crocker. Most were political liberals who had flirted with Communism or Socialism in college; they had friends or aquaintances who were blacklisted and were deeply affected by McCarthyism. They had also been deeply affected by the events of the second world war and were in every way invested in a prototypically 1950s American mainstream lifestyle.
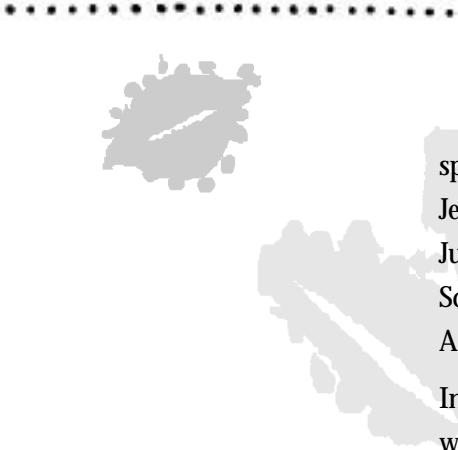
My family entered this Upper West Side Jewish milieu towards the end of 1948 like creatures from another planet. My parents were *both* Holocaust survivors and political exiles from Communism. They had grown up middle-class, did not speak Yiddish, had never seen a bagel, and were not especially interested in Israel. Although they had no sympathy for McCarthyism, they were staunch anti-Communists who regarded Stalin as another version of Hitler. During the 1950s, they struggled to earn money and to adjust to America. Like many Jewish (and other) refugee women, my mother supported the family. My father – a former Olympic water polo player and sometimes officer of the Organization of Czech Sportsmen in-Exile-in-the-Western World – was mostly unemployed until I was ten years old.

All this is to say that, as I was growing up, I felt as invisible in the Jewish community as I did in the American one. And when I had finished growing up, although I was counted as an American Jew, I still did not feel like American Jewish culture included me. G.B. could have been describing the Epsteins when she writes "Iranian Jews do not easily mesh with the majority Jewish culture. Those who live in North America feel marginalized: their experience has been that American Jews know nothing about them… The Iranian Jewish diaspora is triggering a re-examination of hegemonic notions of American Jewish identity. Iranian Jews with their own ethnic and cultural tradition are challenging the American Jewish culture that was brought from Eastern Europe and that is presumed to apply to all arriving Jews regardless of their background. This ashkenazi standard for Jews is similar to the WASP standard for assimilation to North American society."

The issue of cultural hegemony is addressed in an even more dramatic way by South African Sally Frankental. "It is a truism to note that all Jewish communities, in all times and places, reflect the context in which they are located," she writes. "In the South African case, the segregationist policies of the colonial authorities, the Boer republics, and the Union, followed by the apartheid system of the past fifty years, form the inescapable frame for all who live in South Africa… the disproportionate numbers who arrived from one region, Lithuania, gave the community an unusual degree of homogeneity relative to other diaspora communities. This was reflected in the virtual absence of Hasidism (until the 1970s), in the particular form of Yiddish

spoken, and in a variety of foods and customs particular to Lithuanian Jewry. In addition, the east Europeans' lack of exposure to Reform Judaism meant that Reform or Progressive Judaism was established in South Africa only in 1933, far later than in most diaspora communities." All this, of course, shaped the lives of South African Jewish women.

In reading these papers, I was struck by how many kinds of Jewish women there are, how profoundly we are influenced by our country of origin and the continuity or discontinuity of Jewish life within its borders, and by our experience of such factors as entitlement, dislocation, prejudice and outsider status. History, particularly this century's history, has not treated all Jewish women equally. In writing their papers, some authors – like Katalin Talyigas of Hungary – was reconnecting to and reconstructing the history of Jews in their country for the first time. Others, like Micaela Procaccia, who lives in Rome, is steeped in her history and writes with the surety of long immersion in the past: "In the year 1537, a Roman Jewish working class girl named Lariccia cried for days because of an unwanted match," begins her paper. "The day before the *qiddushin,* or betrothal, a washerwoman named Clemenza heard Lariccia saying to her father: "I do not like this man, nor do I desire him. I refuse him and reject him, nor do I want him." She declared herself to be "the unhappiest of all women," and on the next Shabbat, she told her father that she would not agree to let "the *qiddushin* become *nissu'in.'* Her father then hit her with the butt of a knife."

The biographical section of this volume itself makes for fascinating reading – as much for the wide geographical spectrum represented as for the facts each woman deemed important to include. As different as each woman is, I find much in common with her. It was easy for me to enter into her world.

Although this first HRIJW collection of writing by Jewish women around the world is inevitably uneven and incomplete, it is a respectable beginning. The authors represented here are, in some countries, part of a larger scholarly and cultural project of researching and writing about women's lives; in others, they are pioneers – the first of their kind. In some countries, they have been able to draw on a large body of data and literature; in others, they are themselves creating that data and literature. Ana Lebl from Split (now in Croatia) lives in an aging and relatively poor community of only 100 Jews

with scarce resources; Americans Riv-Ellen Prell and Pamela Nadell enjoy the support of Jewish Studies as well as Women's Studies departments at major American universities. Our Israeli and Latin American contributors bring both these realities into yet another perspective.

Some of the authors chose to spend time reworking their original presentations; others were content to have published what they originally presented. Many have struggled to express themselves in English – their second or third or fourth language. As a writer who has often had to communicate in foreign languages, I admire their pluck; as editor, I hope they forgive my journalistic bias, my many questions, and my inadvertent mistakes. Parts of all their work – even where it represents a starting point – moved and inspired me. I hope it will move and inspire you.

Helen Epstein
October, 1999

ISRAELI WOMEN: COLLECTIVISM AND INDIVIDUALISM

by Eetta Prince Gibson

There is, I believe, a fundamental conflict in Israeli society: between the collectivist, national aspirations upon which the Zionist ethos and the State of Israel were predicated and individualism, which is growing increasingly stronger in Israeli society today (Ezrahi, 1997). My current research focuses on a particularly collectivist group, women who have settled in ideological settlements in the West Bank.

Since its inception, the Jewish state has been faced with questions such as: How to reconcile particular group (including gender) interests with larger national objectives? How to integrate into the collective society without sacrificing one's special needs? How to pursue individual needs and aspirations without defying the community? How to avoid becoming trapped in tradition without being torn from an ancient heritage (Yishai, 1997). These dilemmas can broadly be seen as the dilemma between individualism and collectivism.

On a social level, women have had to choose between participation in the collective at the expense of their particular interests, or adopting a feminist position that would guarantee their rights as women but jeopardize their belonging to the collective. The various resolutions of this dilemma have far-reaching implications for women's individual and collective political organization and behavior and for public policy.

In this paper I hope to: analyze a critical phenomenon in Israeli society, with specific relevance for women, by presenting two examples of political activity; demarcate the spectrum of women's individualism/collectivism; explore some of the implications of this tension for Israeli society; and, finally, acquaint readers with some of the political activities in which Israeli women are engaged, especially at the grass-roots level. I believe that these activities do not receive adequate attention in the popular media, in academia, or at the political level. Yet the majority of Israeli women who are at all politically active participate in grass-roots, extra-parliamentary movements and organizations such as the activities I describe below (Chazan, 1993).

My research examines questions regarding the relationship between self and other. It is based on the assumption that each and every person must distinguish between "herself" and the "other," but that different people in different cultures do so in different ways. The meaning of "being me" is socially, culturally, politically, and economically constructed.

Different cultures provide different models for this distinction. That is, society provides "raw materials" for both the structure of the self and the content. In terms of the relationship between the individual and society, we can conceptualize a spectrum, whose extremes are individualism and collectivism.

Individualistic cultures feature a social pattern of loosely-linked individuals who view themselves as independent of collectives, are primarily motivated by their own preferences, needs, rights, and the contracts they have established with others, give priority to their personal goals over goals of others and emphasize rational analysis of the advantages and disadvantages to associating with others.

In contrast, *collectivist cultures* feature a social pattern of closely-linked individuals who view themselves as parts of one or more collectives, are primarily motivated by norms and duties imposed by those collectives, are willing to give priority to goals of collective over personal goals, and emphasize connectedness to members of these collectives. Furthermore, in collectivist societies, these obligations often do not relate to concrete, specific individuals; unlike the model of the "self-in-relation," the community which is part of the self is broad and its boundaries are socially constructed and imaginary.

While individualistic societies provide individualistic "raw materials" or models for the structure of the self; collectivist societies offer collectivist models. These models include behavioral proscriptions (including gender norms), normative dictates, and so forth, and so they shape the individual's sense of ideal self and much of the structure and form of social relationships.

Each individual constructs her own sense of self and the extent to which the collective (however she defines that collective) is part of her identity. This construction is based on social models, familial patterns, personal experiences, individual (and perhaps even genetic) inclinations, etc. In the United States, for example, schoolchildren learn very early that Patrick Henry declared, "Give me liberty or give me death!" In Israel, schoolchildren learn very early that Yosef Trumpeldor declared, "It is good to die for one's country." It does matter whether either of these men actually spoke these words. What matters is that they are slogans that schoolchildren learn, and that they are presented as models for ideal selves.

The models are radically different. The American, Patrick Henry, emphasizes the importance of individual liberties. The Israeli hero, Yosef Trumpeldor, emphasizes the importance of sacrifice for the collective. Even on an anecdotal level, Israelis are more collectivist, Americans more individualistic. These models offer more than the content of social interaction; they provide different ways of being. *The very meaning and essence of the self in the self's own eyes is different in different cultures.*

At this time, Israeli society is providing radically different models for the relationship between the self and the collective. The model of Yosef Trumpeldor is not the only model, nor is it even the predominant one. On the one hand, increasing individualism and "de-Zionization" have led to the breakdown of collectivist imperatives and given rise to an individualistic, privatized, and sometimes even hedonistic orientation. (Ohana, 1998) On the other hand, the breakdown of the hegemonic society has led others to form "sub-cultures," many of which are based on strong collectivist orientations.

The following two examples will illustrate one way in which these different orientations find expression in women's political activity. They are the stories of two women, SN and MD. Both of them are bereaved mothers who have lost their sons in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and both of them have taken political action in response.

The circumstances of the deaths of the two sons are very different: SN's son died as an infant of SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome); MD's son died as a soldier in combat in Lebanon.

I have also used different methods to collect data regarding these two deaths: I have extensively interviewed SN, an activist member of *Gush Emunim,* as part of my doctoral research. I have interviewed MD only briefly, as a journalist, and the material in this presentation is primarily based on interviews in the popular media and speeches she, and other who are members of the "Four Mothers" movement to which she

belongs, have made. Despite these differences, I believe that the context, the rhetoric, and the stated and implicit motivations are worth contrasting and comparing.

In spring of 1968, less than one year after Six Day's War, a group of *Gush Emunim* activists sought to settle in Hebron, which they call "the city of our fathers." *Gush Emunim* is a radical religious-political movement that believes that the entire biblical Land of Israel – most of which was captured by Israel in the 1967 Six Day War – was promised by God to the Jewish people. It therefore opposes territorial compromise with the Palestinians and seeks to settle these territories.

Through a political ruse, they managed to gain a foothold and establish a concrete, physical presence in the city. For security, internal political, regional, and geo-political reasons, the government refused to allow them to settle there. After a standoff, the government eventually compromised, allowing them first to live in an army camp on a hill outside Hebron, then subsequently establishing Kiryat Arbah, a Jewish settlement on the outskirts of ancient Hebron. Eventually, a Labor-led government capitulated further and a Jewish presence in Hebron itself was established.

In 1978, when SN became a national figure, the Jewish settlers were still living in the army camps. SN herself was living in a two room, make-shift apartment with her husband and ten children. Although the events I will describe occurred nearly 25 years ago, my research indicates that they are well-known to women who weren't even born when they happened and have attained a mythical status.

In an interview, SN told me how she discovered the crib-death of her 10th child, who had been named Abraham. In matter-of-fact terms, she describes wondering why the six-month-old infant hadn't woken up, how she tried to move him and realized that he was blue and heavy, how she called for help. She remembers reciting, *"Baruch Dayan Emet,"* (Blessed is the Judge of Truth), the traditional ritual response to discovery of a death.

Her husband is away. Neighbors take SN and the baby's body to Jerusalem, where the doctors can find no explanation for the child's death; SN refuses to allow an autopsy. While waiting at the hospital, SN spontaneously announces that she will bury her child in the ancient Jewish cemetery in Hebron – which has not been open to Jews since the violent pogroms of 1929, when all Jews were forced to leave the city at the insistence of the British. This, she asserts, will create meaning out of what seems meaningless.

Even the settler leaders try to dissuade her, telling her she is crazed by her sorrow, but she insists. A settler leader calls Prime Minister Begin, who personally forbids the army to allow her to reach the cemetery. SN begins to make her way back to Hebron, in a car driven by a friend, carrying the body of her dead child. By noon, the army has set up a road block at an intersection on the way to the cemetery, and a "stand-off" between SN and the soldiers ensues.

The field commander says to her, "Mrs. N., it is for your own good. Hebron will be returned…you'll want to go to the *Beit Ha'almin* (cemetery) and you won't be able to. That's the government's policy.

SN responds: "You think they'll return and I *believe* they won't. That's the difference between us, I live by *belief*."

By now, the press and the public have been alerted, and dozens of people have congregated at the scene. SN threatens to walk to the cemetery with the corpse of the child and to dig the grave with her own fingers.

The soldiers, she knows, will not fire at her.

She tells me: "When I saw that I'm standing at the intersection, and more and more soldiers are arriving to stop a woman that wants to bury her son, what law had I broken, what had I done? So I said, OK, I've waited, it's starting to get dark, I didn't come here to argue with anybody...I know you have orders. I'm leaving you the car. I'm taking the deceased that hasn't sinned yet, my little son, and I'm starting to march with him, and tonight I'll get to the cemetery, maybe on all fours, but I'll get there."

The army commanders contact the highest military authorities, who, in turn, contact Moshe Dayan, then Minister of Defense, who is in Egypt, negotiating what will become known as the Camp David Accords. Dayan, Begin, and the military authorities confer, and SN is given permission to bury her baby in the ancient Jewish cemetery of Hebron.

A procession of nearly one hundred people accompanies her to the cemetery. Her husband has been located, and he arrives at the cemetery as the child is buried. By now, it is night, and SN looks up at the hills surrounding her and at the sky, and she speaks:

"...And I saw all the lights glittering around, after a long day...I said, history goes in circles. Abraham, our father, bought a piece of land for Sara his wife here in Hebron, and me, my name is Sara, and I am buying today land for Abraham my son, at the same place, with only 3,000 years being the difference."

In her grief, SN relates to the Jewish people. Jewish history is part of her self and it is in Jewish history – not only Jewish ritual – that she finds solace.

My second example, the "Four Mothers Movement" is a more recent phenomenon in Israeli society. In 1997, a group of women who identified themselves as mothers organized to call for a withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Israeli-determined security zone in southern Lebanon. They demanded that the military and political leaders think "creatively and strategically," because "saying *we have no choice* [almost a mantra of Israeli culture in many realms of life] is no longer a viable or politically acceptable response."

The movement seems to be growing. Activists have circulated petitions demanding troop withdrawal throughout the country. Prominent women and several wives of prominent men (including the wife of the Commander of the Northern Front [who is responsible for southern Lebanon] and the wife of Rafael Eitan, former Chief-of-Staff and current Minister of the Environment) have signed these petitions.

For a brief period at the beginning of the *Intifada*, mothers spoke out "as mothers," but since then, women have rarely asserted women's voices and sensitivities as legitimate political concerns. The action of the Four Mothers Movement marks the first time that women in Israel are demanding specific military, as well as political, actions as a special, gender-defined group.

In late October, 1998, an ad-hoc coalition of grass-roots activist women, including the Four Mothers Movement, sponsored the First Conference on Conscientious Objection and Refusal to Serve in the Israeli Army. According to newspaper reports, nearly two hundred people attended. Women interviewed by the press described themselves as avant-garde, prophets or harbingers of wider trends to come.

The conference was to have taken place in a kibbutz dining room, but the organizers encountered pained and angry protest. Many of the protesters were aging Holocaust survivors who shouted at the women:

"How dare you hold this discussion in our hall?" "Your sons are not more precious than ours." "You are trying to turn cowardice into ideology"and "My whole family burned in Auschwitz."

It may have been the women's desire to set themselves apart from collective behavior and destiny that was unacceptable and painful for the protestors."In Israel, probably like elsewhere," says a participant, "one doesn't argue with Holocaust survivors." (Gila Svirsky, personal communication, November, 1998). The meeting moved outside, to an open lawn.

MD was one of the organizers of the Conference. Her son, Y, was killed in southern Lebanon in February, 1998.

In a parody of the formal, dramatic, and meant-to-be-awe-inspiring rituals of *Yom Ha'Atzma'ut* (Israel Independence Day), MD opens her speech saying, "I, MD, daughter of Y.E. and J. – May their memories be a blessing – and the mother of Y. – may his memory be a blessing – am honored to slaughter the last sacred cows of Israel."

MD specifically addresses Israeli collectivism. "Being a 'bereaved mother' is so important for Israeli society," she says, "that from that bitter moment on February, 1998, when I was told that my son was killed…I have ceased to be MD the individual, and…I am constantly supposed to be in the role of 'bereaved mother'. And everyone knows how I must behave, what I think…

"And the first sacred cow that I wish to slaughter is the message that we are like one family, and that these children belong to all of us, and that all of our hearts are crying, as one, over the loss of this child. It's the longest-running show in town, and it's about time that we lift the curtain and see what's backstage. The biggest bluff is believing that 'we all hurt'. If it really hurt all of us, then we would have stopped this a long time ago."

She continues: "We are walking out on a system by which we feel severely exploited. And more and more women and mothers are doing the same. All of them are acting on their emotions and their beliefs. I think their community needs to listen…There is a limit to obedience, and every soldier must set this limit for him/herself."

In an interview, MD presents this rhetorical challenge: "In the story of the sacrifice of Isaac, we don't know what Sarah thought. I wonder why we never heard her voice. Unlike her, I demand that my voice be heard with regard to my children. We are taught that God tested Abraham's faith and he withstood the test because he was willing to sacrifice his son. But in my opinion, refusing to sacrifice is the real test. We have already sacrificed twenty-thousand Isaacs. It's too many."

These vignettes could be deconstructed, compared, contrasted, and analyzed on numerous levels. Both SN and MD seek solace, of course. But it is worth looking beyond the immediate to their messages and to see the similarities and differences. I will comment on several issues: the sense of self and the relationship to the collective; the source of authority for individual action; the vision of womanhood; and the view of the future.

For SN, the collective is part of her self, while MD not only sees herself as separate from the collective, but she even attempts to limit her membership in the collective in order to be a more complete individual.

For SN, the collective is embedded in her self, and she is embedded in the collective. At her moment of most extreme loss, she is comforted by connecting to "her people." MD seeks solace by trying to find her "true self" and by being true to her own "pain and needs," and not those which the public demand.

SN is so embedded in the collective that she insists that her son's death be seen – and acted upon – as a seminal event for the people of Israel and demands that her personal sorrow be translated into community action. In contrast, MD refuses to allow the death of her son to be turned into an event for the State of Israel and demands to be left alone.

SN says nothing about her baby as a child. We don't know why he was named Abraham, what kind of a baby he was, or her hopes and dreams for him. We only know of the symbolic meaning of his birth and death. In contrast, MD reveals that she has sent the Prime Minister pictures of her son and letters telling him about his hobbies and loves, and his commitment to a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

SN sees Jewish history as her personal autobiography. Her life and the history of the Jewish people are inextricably intertwined, and she seems to have no existence apart from Jewish history. Both her words and actions convey an epic, almost tragic sense of self; MD speaks in terms of personal autobiography, separate from national, collective history.

SN asserts that the collective, God's will, and her membership in the Jewish people are the source of authority for her actions. They override such civil authority as the army, and even the possibility of future conflict or war with the Palestinians. In contrast, MD asserts an individual morality, based on the assessment of the individual. Some of her statements echo women's morality as described by cultural feminists such as Sara Ruddick (1985) as she calls for conscientious objection.

Both SN and MD present a certain essentialist quality to their debate. That is, they believe that the qualities of womanhood that they describe are an inherent, universal, and unchanging part of being a woman. From the radical right's perspective, SN sees gender as transcendent and inherent. MD, speaking from the perspective of the radical left, describes a "woman's voice," believing that women are the ones who should bring emotions to bear on states of war and peace.

Both SN and MD deny the separation between the public and the private sphere. Both assert that private actions and emotions have value in the public, "rational" sphere, and that their actions as women can influence political space and society's future. MD's activism is in accordance with the feminist adage that "the personal is political." That is, she has developed a feminist consciousness that enables her to understand that her personal pain is determined by political events. In contrast, one might say that SN reverses the adage and contends that "the political is personal." She perceives historical and political events as personal imperatives.

Throughout the extensive interviews I conducted with her, SN saw Judaism as a long history of persecution, perpetual threat, and bitter struggle, and the future as linked to, and dictated by, the past. MD refuses to see ongoing existential threat as a major component of Jewish history. In fact, as part of the Four Mothers Movement, she demands that the widespread Israeli slogan and belief *ein breira*, ("we have no choice") must be scrutinized and critiqued. She sees the future as different, as a break with the past, and as a hope

for peace. Although SN's dead baby was not killed in battle, she imparts eternal life and meaning to him through her peoplehood. MD has no such belief in eternal meaning.

We can extrapolate from the contrasting and conflicting narratives and political actions of these two women to examine several important developments in Israeli society.

SN and MD represent radically different identities. They mark the left and right extremes of the spectrum of identities in Israeli society, especially with regard to collectivist or individualistic selves. Do they represent a fraying of the connecting fibers in Israeli society? After all, despite the theoretical links which I have drawn between them, what do SN and MD really have to say to one another?

To many outside observers, it would appear that Israeli society is imploding, torn apart by its differences and tensions. I would like to suggest that there are some positive aspects to this ostensible breakdown, especially for women.

There has been, and to some extent continues to be, a hegemonic definition of "Israeli-ness," which has marginalized, ignored, or eliminated other identities. Women, *Mizrachim* (as we learn from Pnina Motzafi-Haller) and other "ethnic" groups have been excluded from this hegemonic definition, and we can "see" this absence in almost all aspects of public, and many aspects of private, life (Motzafi-Haller, 1997).

This hegemony has begun to break down, and its dissolution enables other groups to claim their rights and to play their role in the determination of the character of Israeli society. At its worst, this process can lead to a total disintegration of Israeli society, but, at its best, it can lead to a truly multi-cultural society. It can lead to an awareness of the particular needs and rights of various sectors of the population, and to the intersections of different, integrated identities: female and Palestinian, for example; or Russian, immigrant, and woman; or female and poor.

Until recently, awareness of these identities and intersections has been obliterated by the hegemonic view. The growth of a multi-cultural society will not only allow for the provision of different models of the self and of the relationship between self and collective. It will also allow for differing group identities. It can nurture greater cultural representation and sensitivity in the creation of public policy for women, for example, and for other formerly marginalized groups.

One of the dangers, of course, is disintegration into identity politics. With such deep, over-riding differences in sense of self, can women form emotional, political, and social coalitions across psychological, and not just party, lines? It is not clear that we can. It is clear that on specific political issues, such as initiatives of the Knesset Permanent Committee for the Advancement of the Status of Women, women (and some feminist men) have been able to cross party lines and to vote for laws considered to be good for women, as in the recent, very progressive, Sexual Harassment Law.

But on the level of self and identity, it is not at all clear that women can get past identity politics at this time. Until four years ago, for example, the Annual Israeli Feminist Conference was seen as a unifying, empowering feminist event. But in the past four years, *mizrachi*, lesbian, and Palestinian women have criticized what they viewed as the cultural domination and oppression by the *ashkenazi* heterosexual women, and the *mizrachi* women have sponsored a separate (or, perhaps it would be more correct to say, separatist) conference.

The growth of individualism as a socio-psychological and socio-political option in Israeli society has also lead to heightened criticism of, and distancing from, the State of Israel. Until recently, state power had been idealized, invested with faith and almost blind trust. Governmental agencies and institutions, and even the very fact of their existence, have held a quasi-religious value, for both secular and religious alike, known as *"mamlachtiut"* – they were regarded as the embodiment of national self-determination, the proof of the redemption of the Jewish people (Ezrahi, 1997).

Many things have contributed to a breakdown of this regard. In addition to global processes, it is important to cite the Yom Kippur War, the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, and the *Intifada*, as well as other public scandals and events that weakened public faith in political leaders and institutions. Once the sense of unity with collective and government has been disrupted, the individual can question policies in a way that she was not free to do so before, sectarian forces that vie for their differing best interests can develop, and women can become one of these sectarian forces.

Israel is the only state generally considered a western democracy which does not offer its male citizens a clear legal option for conscientious objection, and the demand by these "individualistic" mothers is the first time that such a demand has been made publicly. In addition, we note women's increasing recognition that they must struggle against – not with – societal structures in order to achieve social equality. How different this is from the first *chalutzot*, many of whom believed that their personal transformation and the revolution of the Jewish people would revolutionize gender relations!

The tension between individualism and collectivism can also be conceptualized as a tension between a discourse of rights and a discourse of obligation (Cover, 1985). In a discourse of rights, the individual is paramount, and the authority of the collective derives from the individual. In a discourse of obligation, as in traditional Judaism, the individual derives her very meaning from the community, and to act out of obligation is the "closest thing there is to a Jewish definition of completion as a person within the community." (Cover, 1985).

Currently in Israel, the discourse of rights, which is a new public discourse, has been expressed primarily as competitive conflict between sectors. The growth of individualism without the communal safeguards that attend to both individual rights and communal responsibilities has led to a too-rapid demise of the welfare state, increasing gaps between the rich and the poor, perpetuation of generations of disadvantage and alienation, and, possibly, the first signs of institutional retreat from the provision of basic human rights such as health care and education.

For women, whose lives are more intricately bound to, and dependent on, community and community structures, this has been particularly harmful. Among other things, it has led to the feminization of poverty, disadvantage in the job market, and loss of economic security even for middle-class women. Can Israel further individual rights and competition and still remain a caring society that seeks and pursues social justice? This is a serious and as yet unanswered question.

Lastly, the growth of individualism may foster a culture of peace. Although women do not fight in combat in Israel, they have played a crucial role in promoting militarism in Israeli society. They have been the mothers, daughters, lovers, and sisters who waited at home, washed uniforms, romanticized the military virility of their men, and cried and mourned according to script. In the past, they have refused to question

the wisdom of their military and political leaders. But if they begin to question, if women refuse to read the scripts as they are written, then, as MD demands, these leaders might be forced to come up with more creative ideas than "we have no choice."

The tension between the individualist model of self and the collectivist model of self, as illustrated here by the narratives and actions of SN and MD, has implications not only for women's political activity, but for the very character of the State of Israel. The challenge facing Israel, Israelis, and world Jewry is to find the balance between the two.

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