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## EDITOR'S NOTE



**F**OR 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 acquaintances 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.

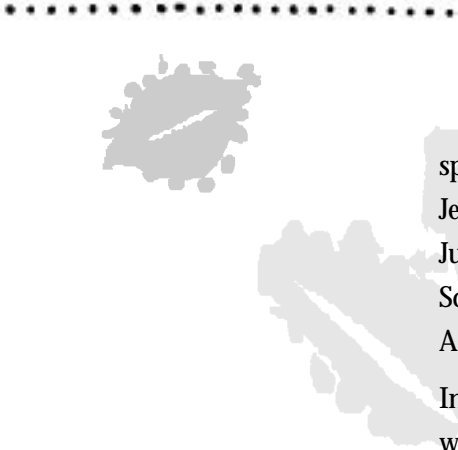
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My family entered this Upper West Side Jewish milieu towards the end of 1948 like creatures from another planet. My parents were *both* Holocaust survivors and political exiles from Communism. They had grown up middle-class, did not speak Yiddish, 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*

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## WOMEN AND RESEARCH ON WOMEN IN ISRAEL

by Hanna Herzog

**A** survey of the situation of women and research on women in Israel always generates a dilemma: do we report that the glass is half-full or half-empty?



The dilemma can be encapsulated by these two events. The newspaper *Ha'aretz* published a series of articles that evaluated Israel's universities. It was surprising and gratifying to find that one of the criteria for excellence was the existence of gender studies in these institutions. The writer awarded high marks to those universities offering frameworks for feminist studies and research. But the article did not mention the low percentage of women full professors at all of them. As this series was running, a conference was held at the Hebrew University marking the retirement of the sociologist Moshe Lissak, an Israel Prize laureate. The vast majority of the participants were men. The only session at which most of the discussants were women was one devoted to the effect of the army on the status of women in Israel. It was gratifying that this important topic had not been ignored. But, once again, I noted that women had been relegated to a special category of their own, as though problems that affect women have no bearing on the rest of the society.

My attention to this tendency intensified in the two sessions of the same conference that were devoted to the book *Troubles in Utopia*, which deals with the changes that have occurred in Israeli society over the past 50 years. The panelists reassessed the book, and there was some criticism of the authors for omitting various "troubles." No one mentioned women in this connection. So even though I, the only woman on both panels, had been invited to discuss the book's theoretical underpinnings, I found myself protesting its complete omission of the place of women in the Zionist utopia, not to mention its failure to address the adversities endured by women in Israeli society.

Born in 1955, I belong to the generation raised in Israel to believe in the myth of equality between the sexes. As a youngster, I belonged to a pioneer youth movement, and before being drafted into the army I attended a kibbutz program sponsored by the movement, aimed at preparing us for our future egalitarian way of life. While on the kibbutz, I never paused to wonder why my girlfriends and I had to work in the kitchen, the sewing workshop, or the children's house. When I served in the Navy, I took for granted my military role of secretary and maker of tea. As I began my university studies, I still believed that anyone who set her mind to it could achieve anything. It was only as my studies progressed and I began to build a career that I encountered the practical problem of gender inequality on the one hand, and the theory of feminism on the other. I suppose that my life-story is not so different from that of many women elsewhere, just as the story of research in Israel resembles the road taken by feminist research in the United States and other countries.

In order to understand and evaluate the status of women in Israel, it is useful to trace the development of Israeli feminist scholarship. The grounding of Israeli feminist knowledge still awaits a comprehensive socio-historical study. Still, we can sketch its evolution through several crude stages:

The first is characterized by the *absence* of women, by curricula that omitted women and in many cases by the absence of women researchers and lecturers. Research, conducted largely by men dealt with a social world that was largely about men. The male world was perceived as self-evident and as representative of society. The national literary canon consisted mainly of male writers and poets. Sociology and history recounted the history of Zionism and its construction of a new society without mentioning women's contributions to it. There was no mention of Israel's "first wave" of feminism, the struggle waged by women for their rights in the 1920s, including the establishment of women's political party. The history and sociology books merely noted that women had been enfranchised. The formative role of women in the pre-state era, the *Yishuv*, was ignored, as was the role of women in laying the foundation stones for democracy and the welfare state. As in other countries, much research was based exclusively on all-male samples. For example, a study conducted in the early 1960s on expectations of social mobility and career choices among urban youth in Israel sampled only boys.<sup>1</sup>

The conspiracy of silence in research was supported by the myth of equality embodied in the image of the smiling woman soldier and the pioneer woman holding the hoe and in the existence of two equal rights laws. They are the Women's Status Law, enacted in 1951, and the Security Service Law of 1949 that made military service for women compulsory. These two laws were welcomed at the time, although in retrospect we understand that in them, women were not perceived as civil equals but above all as mothers.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, this basic attitude explains why already in the late 1950s, Israel was a leader in the introduction of social laws that protected women as mothers. For example, working mothers were guaranteed paid maternity leave, women could not be fired during the first year after childbirth, and a system of day-care centers was established. Wife and mother comprised the major components of the role for women in Israeli society. Because this was taken for granted, no one questioned it or questioned whether or how it affected women's status. With the absence of studies on women, the myth of equality could be accepted and celebrated.

The second stage in the evolution of feminist scholarship may be characterized by the principle, "add women and stir." Literature departments began teaching works by women writers and poets. The sex variable was introduced into field studies in the social sciences. Findings began to show the differences between the sexes (e.g. income distribution in Israel).<sup>3</sup>

Curricula began to address gender roles and gender differences. Until then, sociology had focused on organizations and power structures, frameworks controlled by the dominant male-set rules of the game, in which women are manifestly marginal. The life experience of women was barely addressed, other than in connection with the family.<sup>4</sup> Although research in this period was still based primarily on male models, it finally moved women from invisibility to visibility. It is interesting that the problem of women in the

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<sup>1</sup> Lissak, Moshe. "Social Mobility Expectations among Urban Youth in Israel." Pp.87-118 (Hebrew) in *Strata in Israel*, edited by S.N. Eisenstadt, R. Bar Yosef, R. Kahana, and E. Shelach. (Jerusalem:Academon 1968)

<sup>2</sup> For an analysis of the inherent gender bias of these laws see Berkovitch, Nitza. "Motherhood as National Mission: The Construction of Womanhood in the Legal Discourse in Israel," Paper presented in a conference on Israeliness and Womanhood at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute 1993.

<sup>3</sup> Israel, Bank of. "Report of the Committee to Examine Income Distribution in Israel." Pp.45-85 (Hebrew) in *Strata in Israel*, edited by S.N. Eisenstadt, R. Bar Yosef, R. Kahana, and E. Shelach. (Jerusalem:Academon 1968)

<sup>4</sup> The pioneer of family research was Yonina Talmon-Garber, who already in the mid-1950s published articles on the family, especially with reference to the kibbutz.

kibbutz was one of the first to attract scholarly attention. As the ideology of equality failed to materialize, the dispute over gender inequality surfaced in a plethora of studies about kibbutz women and women in the *moshav*.<sup>5</sup>

Rivka Bar-Yosef, together with her student Ilana Shelach, put the place of women in Israel on the Israeli sociological agenda when their article "Stratification in Israel" was published in a reader on strata in Israel.<sup>6</sup> The article is striking for the absence of a critical tone. On the contrary, it goes a long way toward emphasizing the dimension of equality in Israel and is positive in its evaluation of the direction of future developments. The researchers adduce three modes relating to women's status: *Similar and Equal*, *Dissimilar and Equal*, and *Dissimilar and Unequal*. In Israel, they point out, the three modes coexist simultaneously: "The *Similar and Equal* type characterizes some of the basic laws, which define the primary rights and duties in the main areas of role activity: labor, the market, political activity, economic activity and education. The *Dissimilar but Equal* was seen as the basis for the welfare laws designed to ensure women against possible losses incurred by their ascribed biological roles.

The researchers noted that the laws pay little heed to problems caused "by the socially ascribed role of home-maker." They assume that the two egalitarian modes are inherent in modern culture and stand in opposition to the third mode, which is traditional and characterizes the Jewish and Muslim religious legislative systems. The study reflects the dominant conception that prevailed among the public and in academia at the time of its writing: namely, that the processes of modernization, secularization, and integration in Israeli society would bring about the entrenchment of norms of equality for women, and that this would become integral to the life of even the traditionalist groups.

This attitude implies a deep acceptance of the equality myth, but at the same time a picture that goes beyond formal pronouncements begins to emerge. Its outlines are discernible in the studies of Yonina Talmon-Garber, who wrote about sex-role differentiation in an egalitarian society<sup>7</sup>, Dorit Padan, who examined inter-generational professional mobility among women,<sup>8</sup> and Miriam Barad,<sup>9</sup> who studied women in management roles. These studies not only made women visible, and thrust the situation of women onto the stage of social research; they also produced an awareness that the existing models did not deal with women, and that in many cases they did not explain the place and special problems of women.

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<sup>5</sup> Please see See Buber-Agassi, Judith. 1980. "The Status of Women in Kibbutz Society." in *Integrated Cooperatives in the Industrial Society: The Example of the Kibbutz*, edited by K. Bartolke, T. Bergman, and L. Liegle. Assen: Van Corcum; Gerson, Menachem. 1978. *Family, Women and Socialization in the Kibbutz*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books; Rosner, Menachem. 1967. "Women in the Kibbutz: Changing Status and the Concept of Equality." *Asian and African Studies* 3:35-68; Talmon-Garber, Yonina, and Z. Stupp. 1965. "Sex-role differentiation in equalitarian society." in *Life in Society*, edited by T.G. Lasswell, J. Burma, and S. Aronson. Chicago: Scott, Foresman & Co.; Tiger, Lionel, and Joseph Shepherd. 1975. *Women in the Kibbutz*. New-York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

<sup>6</sup> Bar-Yosef, Rivka, and Ilana Shelach. 1968. "The Position of Women in Israel." Pp. 414-454 in *Strata in Israel*, edited by S.N Eisenstadt, R. Bar-Yosef, R. Kahana, and E. Shelach. Jerusalem: Academon.

<sup>7</sup> Talmon-Garber, Yonina, and Z. Stupp. 1965. "Sex-role differentiation in equalitarian society." in *Life in Society*, edited by T.G. Lasswell, J. Burma, and S. Aronson. Chicago: Scott, Foresman & Co.

<sup>8</sup> Padan-Eisenstark, Dorit. 1973. "Women in the Moshav Shitufi: A Situation of an Ideological Catch." Tel-Aviv University mimeograph.

<sup>9</sup> Barad, Miriam, and Theodore D. Weinshall. 1966. "Women as Managers in Israel." *Public Administration in Israel and Abroad* 7:78-88.

It is not surprising that most of these studies dealt with women in the public sphere. This merely reveals both the general agenda of sociological research and the fundamental social and political structure under which women's issues became relevant and role-defined.<sup>10</sup> During this early stage, neither the scholars nor their theories were defined as "feminist" and none of them openly questioned the dominant methodology. They did, however, begin to challenge the dominant agenda of sociological studies and to call for additional studies on women.

In the third stage of feminist scholarship, women are portrayed as a subordinate group and their social experience is defined as problematic. The studies point to systematic discrimination as the central experience of women. The range of research is extended and, along with it, the theoretical perceptions that the researchers bring with them. The equality myth begins to fall apart. Izraeli, Freedman, and Shrift write about the trap in which women in Israel are caught,<sup>11</sup> and in 1991 Barbara Swirski and Marilyn Safir expose the myth in their book, *Calling the Equality Bluff*.<sup>12</sup>

Dafna Izraeli is a leader in this research. Her studies, beginning in the late 1970s, examine women's status in the principal public spheres: law, politics, and especially the economy. At the center of her work is an analysis of the differential, unequal rights, positions, and rewards of women in Israeli society, compared to those of men. Her work suggests the central ambivalence of Israeli society toward women: "The conception of woman as a person entitled to equal opportunities and of woman as wife and mother in a patriarchal system of relations."<sup>13</sup> The most acute tension is generated by the clash between women's civic entitlement as women and the expectations held of women as carriers of family roles.

The accumulated research shows a situation of inequality for women in all spheres of life: low representation in politics, income a third lower than that of men, and a heavy concentration of women in "female" professions that are not as well rewarded as male professions in terms of salary, prestige and power. Increasingly, the picture that emerges is of women's secondary place in society and marginality in the public sphere.

It is noteworthy that this period marks the onset of the second feminist wave in Israel. Two professors at the University of Haifa, philosopher Marcia Freedman and psychologist Marilyn Safir – both from the United States – taught a seminar that engendered a radical movement critical of women's suppression in a male-dominated society. The movement was called *Nilahem* (meaning "we will fight" and a Hebrew acronym for "Women for a Renewed Society"). At the same time, various other groups cropped up around Israel. In the general elections of 1973, Marcia Freedman was elected to the Knesset on the Civil Rights Movement list headed by Shulamit Aloni. Concurrently, an anthology translated from the English was published that contained texts by leading American and European feminists.<sup>14</sup> Shulamit Aloni published

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<sup>10</sup> Smith, Dorothy E. 1990. *The Conceptual Practices of Power, A Feminist Sociology of Knowledge*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

<sup>11</sup> Izraeli, Dafna N., Ariela Friedman, and Ruth Shrift (Eds.). 1982. *The Double Bind, Women in Israel*. Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House (in Hebrew).

<sup>12</sup> Swirski, Barbara, and Marilyn P. Safir. (eds.) 1991. *Calling the Equality Bluff - Women in Israel*. New York: Pergamon Press.

<sup>13</sup> Izraeli, Dafna. 1987. "Status of Women in Israel." in *Encyclopedia Judaica Year Book, 1986/7*. Jerusalem: Keter.

<sup>14</sup> Shelf, Rina, S. Sikes, S. Kaufman, H. Meir-Levi, and M. Weinberger (eds.) *Isha, Nashim, Nashiyut* (Tel Aviv: The Feminist Movement in Israel 1975).

her book, *Women as Human Beings*, and in Haifa the first shelter for battered women was opened.<sup>15</sup> In 1977, a women's party was established, a first feminist publishing group was set up (The Second Sex), and a lesbian group was formed (*Aleph*). The feminist periodical *Noga* was founded in 1980. The feminist awakening and pressure by the UN in connection with the Decade of Women brought about the creation in Israel of the first Prime Minister's Committee to examine the status of women. During the 1980s and the 1990s numerous grassroots movements sprang up, such as the Israeli Women's Network and Woman to Woman.<sup>16</sup>

Although the feminists have found a voice, the status of women in Israeli society remains low. Inequality is blatant. It is especially blatant when seen vis-à-vis the myth of equality but also when compared to other Western countries and to the early achievements of Israeli women, such as paid maternity leave from work, a ban on firing women in the first year after childbirth, a ramified system of day-care centers, and even a woman heading the government.

It can be said that the inequality between men and women is not diminishing, the glass ceiling has yet to be broken, the feminization of poverty continues, and women's representation in politics at all levels does not exceed 10 percent. The percentage of women in the current Knesset is the same as it was in the First Knesset, nearly 50 years ago. Violence against women still exists, as well as sexual harassment on the job, including (or perhaps primarily) in the army. Legislation that infringes on the rights of women as human beings continues to be enacted, especially in the realm of personal status. For example, marital status is decided according to religious laws that imposes a different legal status on men and women. Advertising is rife with sexism, and the "health basket" of the State Health Law that was promulgated a few years ago shows a lack of consideration for women's special needs such as breast mammography for women of all ages.

Feminism as a social movement was received in Israel with great reservations. It was perceived as an American import, alien to the Israeli spirit. Worse, the demands of feminism were seen as a threat to the collective solidarity of Israel. They were seen as undermining women's readiness to accept the dominant agenda, which in Israel revolves around the security discourse and the centrality of the Arab-Israeli conflict. To this day, successful women make a point of emphasizing that they are not feminists. At the same time, developments in research and in the society paved the way for the next stage of research on women in Israel.

The fourth stage of feminist scholarship can be characterized as one of defiance toward the existing literature on the grounds that it omits women's accomplishments and women's experience. Ofra Greenberg and Hanna Herzog exposed women's roles in the nation-building process;<sup>17</sup> and analyzed women's struggle for political equality.<sup>18</sup> Shulamit Reinharz contributed to the growing literature her study on Manya Shohat.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Aloni, Shulamit *Women As Human Beings*. (Jerusalem:Mabat 1976).

<sup>16</sup> Ram, Uri. 1993. "Emerging Modalities of Feminist Sociology in Israel." *Israel Social Science*.

<sup>16</sup> Greenberg, Ofra, and Hanna Herzog. 1978. *A Voluntary Women's Organization in a Society in the Making – Wizo Contribution to Israeli Society*. Tel-Aviv: Institute of Social Research, Faculty of Sociology and Anthropology (in Hebrew).

<sup>17</sup> Greenberg, Ofra, and Hanna Herzog. 1978. *A Voluntary Women's Organization in a Society in the Making – Wizo Contribution to Israeli Society*. Tel-Aviv: Institute of Social Research, Faculty of Sociology and Anthropology (in Hebrew).

<sup>18</sup> Fogiel-Bijaoui, Sylvie. 1981. "Du côté de chez Eve: Les femmes Juives de Palestine: 1881-1941." in *Nanterre et Ecole Pratique des Hautes en Sciences Sociales*. Paris: Université de Paris, Paris X.

<sup>19</sup> Reinharz, Shulamit. 1984. "Toward a Model of Female Political Action: The Case of Manya Shohat, Founder of the First Kibbutz." *Women's Studies International Forum* 7:275-287.

Deborah Bernstein tried to solve the puzzle of why women failed to achieve equality in the Yishuv period, despite a continuous struggle at a time when the Labor Movement inscribed sexual equality on its banner.<sup>20</sup>

A subsequent collection of articles edited by Bernstein relates the untold story of women as social actors in the nation-building process. Moreover, it is not only women's experience in the public sphere which has begun to be told; the intimate experience of individual women, expressed in letters and diaries, is also coming to light. While the Israeli academic community began paying attention to women's social status in the 1960s, women activists had begun to write about themselves as social actors much earlier.<sup>21</sup> In fact, as Bernstein and others have documented, they had been struggling with their situation as early as the beginning of the Yishuv period. The perceptions of women written in their own terms reveals a rich world. It also gives rise to criticism of research methodology that did not make room for that world, spotlights spheres of life that were not previously studied, and calls for a re-examination of terms and the social structure.<sup>22</sup>

This takes us to the fifth stage, now unfolding, of feminist research in Israel. Considerable energy is being directed to exposing the gendered structure of Israeli society: the centrality of the army and its implications for the gendered structure<sup>23</sup>, and the influence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on reinforcing male culture while anchoring women's life in the family.<sup>24</sup> The potency of a patriarchal orientation that distorts the concept of citizenship is being discussed, and researchers are tracking the defiant routes of entry taken by women into the public discourse, such as Women in Black, who demand an end to the occupation; Mothers for Peace, who are calling for a unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon; and, at the other end of the political spectrum, Women in Green, who recruit mothers on behalf of Greater Israel.<sup>25</sup>

Feminist research in Israel today addresses many themes: control not only by men over women but also of women over women; different forms of gendered relations and the rise of new family structures; multiculturalism; the experience of women in the Holocaust and the second generation of mothers and daughters; the impact of immigration on women and women's experience as natives of Israel. The psychology of women in Israel takes account of all these themes and of the burden of being wife and mother to men who go to war or do not return from war. How does one build female identity in a reality that is controlled by a pressing national agenda and at the same time fulfil the yearning to be a woman in one's own right?

There an impressive growth of gender studies in the universities and colleges, including much interdisciplinary activity.<sup>26</sup> The ability to enter fascinating fields of research is not bound up solely with

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<sup>20</sup> Bernstein, Deborah. 1987. *The Struggle for Equality: Urban Women Workers in Prestate Israeli Society*. New York: Prager.

<sup>21</sup> (e.g. Azaryahu, Sarah. 1977 (1949). *The Women's Equal Rights Association in the Land of Israel*. Haifa: The Fund for Support of Woman (Hebrew). Maimon, Ada. 1955. *Fifty Years of the Women's Labor Movement, 1904-1954*. Tel Aviv: Ayanot (Hebrew).

<sup>22</sup> Herzog, Hanna. *Gendering Politics – Women in Israel*. (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press 1999)

<sup>23</sup> Izraeli, Dafna N. 1997. "Gendering Military Service in Israeli Defense Forces." *Israel Social Science Research* 12: 129-166

<sup>24</sup> Herzog, Hanna. 1998 "Homefront and Battlefront and the Status of Jewish and Palestinian Women in Israel." *Israeli Studies* 3:61-84

<sup>25</sup> Helman, Sara and Tamar Rapoport. 1997. "Women in Black: Challenging Israel's Gender and Socio-Political Orders." *British Journal of Sociology* 48:682-700

<sup>26</sup> see, for example, the two special issues of *Israel Social Studies Review* Volume 12, 1997 devoted to Feminist Theory and Research: Israeli Institutions and Society).

academic developments. Social processes such as feminism among *mizrachi* Jews, or the shift of ultra-Orthodox circles from the social margins to the political, social and economic center are also dictating a research agenda. Changes in Israeli society and changes in the research situation are interdependent. There is also close interaction between feminist activity within academia and outside it – an interaction made possible by the increase in the number of feminist researchers. In Israel, a relatively small society, patterns of informal relations still flourish. Ties are maintained between women in feminist organizations, female politicians, and women in academia.

From the time of its founding in 1948, Israel has seen a constant rise in women's education and in the entry of women to the labor market.<sup>27</sup> Still, Israel remains a fundamentally gendered society. In contrast to various Western societies, where the tendency is to blur the boundaries between the private and the public, in Israel that dichotomy has shown a good deal of resilience and immunity to change. This is due in no small measure to the protracted Arab-Israeli conflict.

In many societies, the concept of national security has been used to define the social order necessary to ensure that national security. But invoking national security can be a mechanism not only for protecting citizens from external enemies but also, even primarily, for maintaining the social order.<sup>28</sup> Among Israeli Jews, life in the shadow of the conflict has bolstered the standing of the army on the one hand<sup>29</sup> and the importance of the family with its traditional patterns on the other.<sup>30</sup> Army and security form the axis of masculine identity and are perceived as the male bastion; the universe of women revolves around family and domesticity. In nationalist societies women have the important role of reproducers of the collectivity: it is they who give birth to and educate the young generation. That role acquires even greater significance in conditions of a lengthy conflict.<sup>31</sup>

As a new immigrant society, Israel did not succeed in creating an infrastructure of equality among its mosaic of ethnic communities. The failure of the men became the failure of women as well. To be a woman in a Jewish state posits as an existential issue the meaning of civil rights for every human being. It entails a profound commitment to understanding "the other." The Jewishness of the state with its secular and religious diversity is in itself an impressive creation that merits discussion. However, we need not only mutual understanding between Jewish women and men within Israel, not only understanding among different ethnic groups and different religious streams in Judaism but also understanding with and of the country's non-Jewish citizens for Israel claims to be a democratic as well as Jewish society.

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<sup>27</sup> Izraeli, Dafna N., Ariela Friedman, and Ruth Schrift (Eds.). 1982. *The Double Bind, Women in Israel*. Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House (in Hebrew)

<sup>28</sup> Enloe, Cynthia. 1988. *Does Khaki Become You? The Militarization of Women's Lives*. London: Pandora/HarperCollins.

<sup>29</sup> Ben-Eliezer, Uri. 1988. "Militarism, Status and Politics." in *Sociology and Anthropology*. Tel Aviv: Tel-Aviv University. Kimmerling, Baruch. 1993a. "Militarism in Israeli Society." *Theory and Criticism: An Israeli Forum* 4:123-140 (in Hebrew).

<sup>30</sup> Peres, Yochanan, and Ruth Katz. 1981. "Stability and Centrality: the Nuclear Family in Modern Israel." *Social Forces* 59:687-704. Peres, Yochanan, and Ruth Katz. 1990. "The Family in Israel: Change and Continuity." in *Families in Israel*, edited by Lea Shamgar-Handelman and Rivka Bar-Yosef. Jerusalem: Academ (in Hebrew).

<sup>31</sup> Herzog, Hanna. 1998. "Homefront and Battlefield and the Status of Jewish and Palestinian Women in Israel." *Israeli Studies* 3:61-84. Yuval-Davis, Nira. 1980. "The Bearers of the Collective: Women and Religious Legislation in Israel." *Feminist Review* 4:15-27.



Is there research on Arab women in Israel? Almost none. Palestinian women lack political representation and are the lowest stratum on all stratification scales. They are marginalized by the males of their own community as well as by the Jewish community. The social barriers between them and the Jewish community are heightened by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, by religious beliefs, and by socioeconomic gaps.

The past decade has afforded women new opportunities to act as a bridge between Jewish and non-Jewish citizens, in the form of cooperation in women's peace movements and efforts to produce an alternative agenda not wholly subordinate to war. The quilt of peace, which began to be woven with the Oslo accords, has begun to unravel even before the work was completed. If we can judge by the persistence of Women in Black and by the intersections that on Fridays are alive with the activity of mothers and women demonstrating for peace, then hope still exists. Now that the conspiracy of silence – and the silencing of women – has been broken, there is no turning back.

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