

Introduction

A new chapter of Jewish history began in Palestine in the late nineteenth century.* A new wave of Jewish settlement was underway, initiated by the Zionist Movement, a political and social movement for the establishment of a national home for the Jews in Palestine—*Eretz Israel*. Modern political Zionism developed during this time in Europe. The World Zionist Movement, and its leading organization, the World Zionist Organization, established in 1897, served as umbrella structures incorporating a variety of social and political ideologies of which the rebuilding of Zion as a Jewish homeland was the binding element. Immigration continued through the turn of the century and the first half of the twentieth century, primarily from Eastern Europe and to a much lesser extent from Moslem countries. It led to the establishment of numerous new settlements, urban and rural, new social movements and organizations and eventually to the consolidation of a semi-autonomous Jewish entity known as the New *Yishuv*, or simply the *Yishuv* (meaning in Hebrew—the Settlement).

Women were there from the very start. They were part of every wave of immigration. They settled, singly and in families, in all types of settlement: the early rural settlements—the *moshavot*, the communal kibbutzim and *kvutzot*, the cooperative *moshavim* and, of course, the towns and cities. The story of their immigration and settlement is thus part of the story of the period. And yet, it has not been told. Their experiences, actions and struggles, their daily lives and their special moments have been passed over with hardly a mention. At times their very existence has been erased. This is true for much of the documentation of the period and at least as true, probably even more so, for the recent study of the *Yishuv*. Women have either been ignored, or put on a “pioneering

*Special thanks to Dafna Izraeli for her insightful and helpful comments on an earlier draft of this Introduction.

pedestal", where they became the subject of a myth, according to which the *Halutz*, the pioneering woman, worked and struggled hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder, with her male comrade. In neither case were women's own voices heard. Women's demands and needs were conceived, at best, as their own problem, rather than a challenge to the whole community, men as well as women, in their attempt to build a new society.

But the women were not merely fighting for their own rights. Their aspiration was to change the essence of gender relations in the new Jewish society. They attempted, in different ways and at different levels of coherence and articulation, to break down the barriers between the male and the female spheres. In some cases, they attempted to enter the male sphere, in others to add value and social significance to the female sphere. They aspired to be part of the building of a new society, and to be acknowledged as such; to establish a new society in which men and women would work together to create something of value. These aspirations were not realized. However hard they tried, both as individuals and in organized struggle, as all the articles in this collection will show, however significant their achievements were, they did not change gender relations, they did not break down men's monopoly on all that was important, powerful and valued. They did not gain control over their lives.

The young women immigrants came from a highly patriarchal, gender segregated, traditional Jewish society. The men controlled all positions of power and prestige and were uncontested heads of community and family. The orthodox Jewish world was clearly divided into gender spheres, as Rhonda Berger-Sofer writes, "Internally, there is a strict division between the sexes with almost no social interaction occurring between males and females who are not nuclear family members. While the ideal roles for the women are as wives and mothers, the ideal roles for the men are as religious ritual observers and Torah scholars" (Berger-Sofer, 1982:9). The home was woman's domain. While it was by no means her only sphere, it was by far the most important. Her prescribed role within the home was seen as an essential obligation to the maintenance of the Jewish community. The norms and traditions that determined the centrality of the domestic sphere for women were validated by the religious law which established three commandments for women alone, all three relating to the proper conduct within home and family (Weissler, 1986). Within home and family the women enjoyed a strong position (Zborowski and Herzog, 1952:124;

Weinberg, 1988:xix), but many women were also the providers for their families, as earning a livelihood was frequently considered a woman's job and an extension of her work in the home. This was true of most pre-industrial Europe, but in the Jewish community of Eastern Europe women were, at times, the sole providers for their families while the men studied the holy scriptures (Baum et al., 1975:67).

Women worked in a wide range of occupations typical of women in a pre-industrial and industrializing society, and of the economic role of the Jewish community as mediator and supplier of services for the host society. These included marketing of goods, making and selling of food and drink (including liquor), tavern-keeping, sewing and embroidery, gardening in rural areas and domestic work, as well as industrial work in textile, clothing and food workshops and factories (Weinberg, 1988:1–21; Baum et al. 1975: 55–71; Lestschinsky, 1961:28–30). Although the contribution of women was essential to the home and to the economy, the most important spheres in the life of the Jewish community—public leadership and religious scholarship—remained beyond their boundaries.

By the end of the nineteenth century the traditional, relatively static Jewish society of Eastern Europe was undergoing far-reaching changes. Severe political restrictions were imposed on Jews, including their removal from the countryside into the towns and cities of the Pale of Settlement, and their exclusion from a wide range of occupations which had been essential to the Jewish economy. These changes were accompanied by rapid proletarianization on the one hand and a dramatic spread of poverty on the other (Lestschinsky, 1961:127–47). At the same time, cultural and ideological change was taking place. The movement of Enlightenment, the *Haskala*, which had begun in the mid-nineteenth century in central and western Europe, eroding the total predominance of the orthodox leadership, was gaining support in the more traditional Jewish world of the Pale of Settlement as well. Secular education was expanding and many parents, especially of the middle-class, began to provide education for their daughters, as well as for their sons. Women had previously often learned to read and write but by the end of the nineteenth century many had begun to attend secular schools—elementary schools, gymnasias and, in a much smaller number of cases, even university courses (Baum et al., 1975:72–74).

The combination of impoverishment and political persecution

on the one hand and education on the other, led to the development of radical movements within the Jewish community, in close conjunction with the growth of radical and revolutionary movements in the host society, in Russia. Women played an important role in these developments. They were part of the emerging Jewish proletariat of the newly educated (primarily middle-class) young generation, and of the various radical movements in which the young Jews enlisted, including the revolutionary socialist Russian movements, the Bund—the Jewish Socialist workers' movement, and the socialist-Zionist movement. Jewish society was on the move. People were moving from villages to towns, from towns to cities, from Eastern to Western Europe and above all to America. Some of the Jews, affected by and affiliated with the Zionist movement, headed to Palestine. Much of what happened to the women who immigrated to Palestine can be understood in the context of the society from which they came. The opposition with which women met from some sectors of the Jewish community in Palestine stemmed from the desire of the latter to lead a traditional, even ultra-orthodox, way of life. Many women, on the other hand, desired to break away from the traditional society that excluded them from full participation in the most valued spheres of life.

Zionist immigration to Palestine began, according to the accepted chronology, in 1882.¹ Palestine at the time was part of the Ottoman Empire, a poor underdeveloped territory, drawing unto itself the increasing interest of the European powers due to its strategic and religious significance. Jewish immigration continued in a cyclical form, portrayed in the historiography of the Yishuv, as consecutive waves of immigration (*Aliyah*), each identified according to its place in the series, and to its distinct social and ideological characteristics. As the historiography of the Yishuv has developed, to a large extent, in relation to these waves of immigration, a brief description of each will be useful (Eisenstadt, 1967; Bein, 1954).

The First *Aliyah* began in 1882 and continued, intermittently, until 1903. Most of the immigrants came from Russia and were affiliated with the *Hibbat Zion* movement, a section of the Zionist movement that called for immediate immigration to Palestine. They were lower middle-class families, with some means of their own. As the men, rather than the women, were politically active in Russia, the decision to immigrate was largely taken by them, with the women, in most cases, following—more or less willingly—in their footsteps. They established *moshavot*, agricultural villages

based on privately-owned farms, most of which were eventually supported financially by the charities of the Baron de Rothschild. They led a traditional Jewish life and, as private enterprise farmers, became an important component of the new middle-class. The women, many of whom were deeply committed to their life in the moshavot, faced a difficult struggle to achieve public recognition and participation (see Aaronsohn; Berlovitz).

The Second Aliyah, 1904–1918, was composed largely of Labor Zionist immigrants: young, single immigrants, known as *halutzim* (men pioneers) and *halutzot* (women pioneers) (singular: *halutz* and *halutza*). The constitution of the second wave of immigration was predominantly male, with a small minority of 17–18 percent young women (Blum, 1980:5). They had no financial means of their own, and were thus dependent for their livelihood on both the farmers of the moshavot and on the public funds of the World Zionist Organization (WZO). The young men, and to a much greater extent the young women, faced extreme hardship in their attempts to become agricultural workers, “to conquer labor” as the (highly masculine) expression was, at the time. They created the labor movement, later to become the dominant and hegemonic force in the Yishuv, and also set the foundations of the women workers’ movement. This Aliyah is therefore considered the one which formed the future pattern for the Yishuv. It established the rudiments of future organizations and formulated dominant values, among them the concept of the new Hebrew woman—a worker, pioneer and comrade. In consequence the Second Aliyah has won most attention both in the popular myths of the period and in sociological and historical studies. A relatively large number of articles in this collection are related to the women of the Second Aliyah, primarily those of Margalit Shilo; Dafna Izraeli; Shulamit Reinharz; Musia Lipman and Deborah Bernstein and Nurit Govrin.

The Third Aliyah began in 1919, with the end of the First World War, and lasted until 1923. Ottoman rule had ended and the British military and then civil rule of Palestine began, with the commitment of His Majesty’s Government—expressed by the Balfour Declaration (1917)—to the establishment of a Jewish National Home in Palestine. Zionist expectations ran high, as did socialist fervor in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution. Most immigrants, of whom 36 percent were women (Gertz, 1947:98),² belonged to the labor movement. They were young men and women, in their late teens and early twenties, who often were organized in collectives, prior to immigration. Collectives eased the initial tran-

sition for many of the young women. Nevertheless, they soon faced acute difficulties of finding employment, when many of the immigrants left their collectives or when the latter disbanded. In these years many of the goals of the Second Aliyah were implemented and major institutions took shape, the most important being the Histadrut—the General Federation of Hebrew Labor (1920). The Women Workers' Movement was formally established that year as well (see Izraeli).

The Fourth Aliyah, from 1924 to 1931, was composed largely of petit-bourgeois families from Poland, who arrived with small amounts of private capital. The gender composition of this immigration was far more balanced than in previous immigrations, both because of the larger proportion of families, and because of the increase in the proportion of women among the single, labor-oriented immigrants (Gertz, *ibid*). The immigrants of the Fourth Aliyah settled in the urban centers and ushered in a period of economic prosperity and full employment, at least for the male workers. The women of the petit-bourgeois immigrant families were largely housewives. The women workers still had difficulty finding employment in the urban economy which focused largely on construction work. In 1927, an economic depression set in as the result of the sudden halt of immigration from Poland and of the capital inflow which had accompanied it.

Slow economic recovery, together with the rise of Hitler in Europe, led to the last large wave of immigration, the Fifth Aliyah from 1932 to 1939 (or through World War Two, as well). This was the largest immigration, composed of approximately 50 percent middle-class families from Germany, and 50 percent labor immigrants (Gertz, 1947:103). Women were slightly over half of all immigrants arriving in Palestine between 1932–1939 and continued to comprise half of all immigrants in the following years (Gertz, 1947:98). This immigration was accompanied by the largest inflow of private capital, brought by the middle-class German immigrants, which once again led to economic prosperity. The urban centers and economy expanded, and the occupational opportunities for women became more professionally specialized and diversified. This short lived prosperity was soon followed by a slump when the threat of war became imminent and immigration from Europe all but stopped. It was followed, once again, by economic expansion during the war years geared to the needs of the British army in the region.

Between 1882 and 1948 the Jewish population of Palestine increased dramatically, changing the composition of the Palestine population in general. Reliable statistics are available only from 1919, the beginning of the British rule. From 1919 to 1945, Jewish immigration amounted to approximately 335,000 immigrants, approximately 172,000 men and 158,000 women (Gertz, *ibid.*) The Jewish population of Palestine, according to the first census carried out by the British in 1922, grew from approximately 83,800 in 1922 to 174,600 in 1931, the year of the second census, and to 554,000 in 1945 (Gertz, 1947:46). This increase in absolute numbers changed the percentage of the Jews in the total population from 11.1 percent in 1922 to 30.6 percent in 1945, according to the figures of the mandate government, and to 32.0 percent, according to the figures of the Jewish Agency (Gertz, 1947:47). This rapid growth took place under the relatively supportive rule of the British Mandate which, notwithstanding its occasional disagreement with the Jewish leadership and despite the opposition of the Palestinian Arab leadership and majority, allowed large scale Jewish immigration, capital inflow and the purchase of land, at least until 1939, and recognized the political institutions of the Yishuv. These policies enabled the Jewish Yishuv to become a semi-autonomous entity, a state-in-the-making, according to an expression current at the time. This formative period in the building of the nation—the composition of the Jewish population, the institutional structure, the allocation of power, and the ideological priorities—was also formative in the structuring of gender relations.

The Yishuv was a politicized community, highly divided, with groups in conflict on a number of crucial issues. What type of society would the new Jewish society strive to be? An egalitarian society? A socialist one? A society of free enterprise? A religious society? A pluralistic society where immigrants from Moslem countries would share power and cultural influence with the dominant European immigration? These issues became the foci of controversy and conflict between the Labor Movement and its various opponents, just as they divided the Labor Movement internally. Political segmentation within the Yishuv was exacerbated by the impact of factors surrounding it—the dependence of the Yishuv on the public funding of the World Zionist Organization, its dependence on the British Mandate government in determining immigration, land and labor policies, and its struggle against the opposition of the Arab majority. Thus, the experience of the pre-state years was one

of creative social experimentation in the formation of a new society on the one hand, and struggle and conflict on numerous fronts on the other hand.

These special and complex features of the period shaped women's experience and consciousness. Internal division created opportunities for new groups to emerge and to stake their claims. Among them were various groups of women who, in a variety of ways, voiced their demands for full participation in the making of the new society. Women of almost all sectors, except for the women of the veteran Jewish orthodoxy, demanded the vote (see Sylvie Fogiel-Bijaoui). Women workers demanded their share of the labor market, as well as of traditional male occupations, and created support systems and services to help them achieve their goals (Dafna Izraeli). Middle-class women organized to create new welfare services (Hanna Herzog). At the same time internal divisions in the Yishuv created a split among women, which was highly detrimental to achieving many of their goals. Women, especially the more active and militant ones, belonged to the different social camps and political parties. The high level of politicization of the community, as well as its internal segmentation, placed a high premium on the loyalty of women to their respective political and social groups. It also led to a highly centralized political system which exercised, as Dafna Izraeli argues in her study of the women workers' movement, strong social control on women by the leadership of the various sectors.

Against this background of political commitment and intersecting struggles, women had to gain priority for "their" issues., the redefinition of the division between male and female, the breakdown of barriers, and the end to the marginalization of women and women's spheres. While some men actually opposed equality for women, in principle, most did not care enough to devote much attention or thought to the subject. At times, when women's needs were compatible with, or even reinforced, goals identified with national revival, they won support and sympathy (see Shilo on the attitude of Arthur Ruppin, senior Zionist official in Palestine). Indifference or oversight, however, were far more common. The general milieu served as an encouraging context, in some respects, for women to advance their goals, as it was accepting of social innovation and change. The concept of a new society, and especially an egalitarian one, seemed to open the way for women to change their traditional position. At the same time, it was also a difficult time to wage a battle for new relations between

women and men, as other struggles were to gain unquestioned primacy, even in the eyes of most women. This is still very much the case.

Historiography

The study of women in the Yishuv has developed at the intersection of two trends in the study of Israeli society. The first, beginning around the mid-1970s, was the re-examination of the Yishuv. The second, the study of women in contemporary Israeli society, which began at approximately the same time, or slightly later.

The Re-examination of the Yishuv

Until the mid-1970s, the study of the Yishuv bore the imprint of the hegemony of the Labor Movement. This was evident in the topics studied and ignored, in the implicit and explicit interpretations, and in the myths and images accepted by the historiography of the period. During the 1970s, the Labor Movement, i.e., the Labor Alignment party and the Histadrut, suffered a rapid decline in power and status. By 1977 the Labor party had lost its political control for the first time in fifty years. The decline and downfall of the Labor Movement had a profound impact on the study of the Yishuv, the period in which the Labor Movement had gained its power, and which it eventually glorified by myths conveyed through the system of education, literary works, the mass media and not least, academic scholarship.

New perspectives began to emerge. These can be characterized by two main trends. The first, the study of social groups previously ignored; such as Druyan's (1981) work on the Yemenite immigration during the years 1882–1914; Herzog's (1986) study of the Sephardi and Yemenite political organizations; Shavit's (1983) work on the Revisionist movement and Drori's (1981) writing on bourgeois groups such as the manufacturers and the household owners. Thus the Yishuv society began to emerge as far more diverse socially, politically, and ideologically than the treatment by the Labor Movement tended to reveal.

The second trend, probably even more influential in bringing about a new understanding of the period, has been the re-examination of long-held images and myths, and their subjection to systematic and skeptical scrutiny. Three studies that challenged dominant myths concerning the Labor Movement were those of

Yonathan Shapiro (1976) who argued for the primacy of power over ideology in the development of the Histadrut; Zvi Sussman (1973) who demonstrated the striking inequality of wages between skilled and unskilled labor in contrast to the prevailing ideology of equality; and Anita Shapira (1977) who convincingly showed that "Hebrew labor" was never actually fully realized despite the well-known image of the pioneer tilling the land and drying the swamps. In the milieu of the 1970s, with growing criticism being levelled at the Labor party and the Histadrut for the gap between their ideology and their actual structure and practice, such a revision of the past was accepted by many as a welcome new approach.

The Study of Women in Contemporary Israeli Society

Until the mid-1970s the status of women was a "non-issue" in Israel. The general notion that women had been and still were equal prevailed in public opinion and was reflected in the absence of almost any academic study related to women.³ After all, sociological study was oriented primarily to "social problems" and women's status was not defined as one. Even as late as 1986, Izraeli and Tabory argue that "Israeli social scientists writing about social problems, social conflicts, and social stratification have generally omitted any discussion of the status of women as problematic . . . or have subsumed the discussion within the general topic of family . . ." (1986:664-5). However, while students of "social problems" continued to ignore the issue of women's status, it became a subject of study for those scholars, primarily women, who increasingly challenged the assumption of women's equality (for early works, see Aloni, 1976; Padan-Eisenstark, 1973; Hazelton, 1977; Brandow, 1980). This development was influenced by events both outside and within the academic world. A small, but articulate, Feminist movement appeared in Israel in the early 1970s. Marcia Friedman, one of the leading Feminist activists, was elected to the Knesset in 1973 on a civil rights list and raised the issue of violence against women for the first time. In 1975, Israel's Prime Minister established a Commission on the Status of Women to advise the government on the "means to advance equality and partnership between men and women". This action was taken within the framework of the United Nations' Decade on Women, and in response to pressure exerted by the women's caucus in the Labor Alignment party (Izraeli and Tabori, 1987:463-82). A wide range of women were involved in the work of the commission: politicians, academic scholars, trade union activists, social workers, army offi-

cers and others. The commission delivered its report in 1978. The work of the commission sensitized many of its members to the issue of women's inequality, gave the issue at least momentary public hearing and created the need for research which would provide greater knowledge and understanding of the many issues raised (Izraeli, 1987:37-53). At the same time, the development of women's studies abroad influenced women within academia, giving legitimacy to this new field of study.

The study of women in contemporary Israeli society began with the argument that women's status differed strikingly from the commonly accepted image of equality and liberation (e.g., Padan-Eisenstark, 1973; Brandow, 1980:403). As can be seen, the element of re-examination emerged rather early on in the study of women. Initially the critique of contemporary inequality still assumed that equality had been achieved in the past and had somehow been lost (e.g., Padan-Eisenstark, 1973; Clapsaddle, 1976). Before long this assumption concerning women's status in the Yishuv, was questioned. Thus the two trends converged, and the re-examination of women in the Yishuv joined the "myth breaking" trend already in full swing.

Many of the articles in this collection are, at least in part, an outcome of this process. The reader will see that many of the articles refer to the prevailing images of the past as a frame of reference for presenting new questions and new evidence. And yet, the dispelling of myths, as a research agenda, has its own risks and drawbacks. If the researcher remains tied to the recent myth, either by accepting or by rejecting it, the myth still dictates the questions asked. Were women equal to men in the Yishuv? The answer quite soon appears as a clearly negative one, reiterated by all students of the subject regardless of specific period, sphere of life, social group and so forth. It then becomes essential to move on from the "negative" though necessary stage of rejecting a misleading image, to the phrasing of new questions—what *was* the position of women, what did they aim for, *what did they do*, what were the attitudes, actions and reactions of the men, their comrades and husbands on the one hand and the male leadership on the other. What did women actually achieve—how and why . . . It is to these questions that the anthology is aimed: beginning with the rejection of the myth of the pioneering woman, the halutzah, as being the typical woman of the Yishuv, it moves on to chart new images, tell new stories, and present the women's own voices, dilemmas and action.

New Themes

The studies in this anthology are varied. They stem from different disciplines (sociology, history, geography and literature), deal with different sub-periods (First Aliyah, Second Aliyah), various spheres of life (politics, family, culture) and social groups (the women of the Labor Movement; women of the middle-class; Yemenite women). Three themes, however, recur in almost all of the articles: filling the vacuum or telling the untold tale, social change, and the dynamics of the private and the public.

Filling the Vacuum—Telling the Untold Tale

Until recently, very little had been written on women in the Yishuv. Large anthologies, such as the *Second Aliyah Book*, edited by Bracha Habas (Habas, 1947) and the *Third Aliyah Book*, edited by Yehuda Erez (Erez, 1964), devoted a special chapter to women, rich with impressive tales, and then all but ignored them in the other hundreds of pages.⁴ Other publications did even less. The myth of women's equality was taken for granted and the silence only reinforced it. The new study of the Yishuv, the application of systematic research from the perspective of a variety of disciplines, left the issue of gender untouched. A number of examples will suffice.

The scholarly interest in the Yishuv led to the appearance of a number of new journals. A quick survey of two of these is surprising even to the skeptic. The earlier of the two, *Me'asef* (meaning in Hebrew, "Collection"), is subtitled "Writings in the Study of the Jewish Workers Movement", and is published by Givat Haviva, the study center of the Kibbutz *Ha'artzi*, the left wing of the Kibbutz Movement. The journal began to appear in 1971, one volume a year, containing approximately fifteen items including articles, documents, memoirs, and reviews. In the eighteen volumes to appear so far, there have been only two items on women, both dealing with the same woman, written by the same author: an article and a document on Manya Shohat, written (or annotated) by Yaacov Goldstein in 1972 and 1979 respectively (Goldstein, 1972; 1979). The only other article of relevance to women is a long and illuminating article by M. Levin, "The Family in a Revolutionary Society: Norms and manners among the members of the Bund" (1982-3). Thus, even a journal published by those relatively more committed to gender equality, and dealing with social movements with a similar commitment, hardly acknowledge the existence of women.

A second journal, called *Kivunim* (meaning in Hebrew, "Directions"), which appeared between 1978 and 1987, is a quarterly, subtitled "A Journal for the Study of Judaism and Zionism". In slightly over forty issues, each containing nine to ten articles, only three deal with women. Furthermore, while well over half of all the articles deal with the Jewish settlement in Palestine and somewhat less than half with world Jewish events, in the case of women, all three articles concern women outside of Palestine and of the Zionist movement: Rosa Luxemburg (Weistreich, 1978), Grace Agilar (Schonfeld, 1986) and women in the Jewish society of Persia (Levi, 1987). If Jewish women existed in Palestine, or anywhere in the Jewish national awakening, the study of the Zionist movement and the Yishuv has certainly not "seen" them there.

Additional insight into the absence of women from recent study can be gained from an article by Ruth Fierer (1984) entitled "The Rise and Fall of the Pioneering Myth". It is an important article as it deals with the formation and evolution of a central social myth, described as follows:

A group of pioneers of heroic character, rebel against the historic oppressive circumstances and go out to conquer the ancient Land of Israel. The pioneers struggle in the motherland against grave difficulties: the virgin soil, deathly swamps, Arabs and hostile authorities. By the force of their will power and self sacrifice they overcome the difficulties, with the pure gun in the one hand and the plow in the other, while at their feet spread the bountiful and green fields and orchards. Before their eyes the nation is reborn and reunited with its land, as in the days of the First and Second Temple (1984:15).

This is very clearly the myth of the *male* pioneer, *Halutz*. The women do not belong to the material or the language from which this myth is woven: they did not hold the gun in one hand and the plough in the other . . . they did not "conquer" the land, nor did they penetrate the "virgin" soil . . . And yet Fierer makes no mention either of the male essence of the pioneering myth, nor of the existence of another, closely related, "female" myth, that of the *Halutza*. Most articles in this volume take this latter myth as a reference point. We seem to have forgotten that this myth of the *Halutza*, which has had an important impact on the consciousness of Israeli women, has also been relegated to the margins and beyond.

A number of factors help explain this total lack of interest:

- The marginality of the issue. Although the Zionist movement supported women's equality, in principle, and Labor Zionism was committed, ideologically, to women's equality, the issue was driven to the margins by the struggle for national existence, for the "building of the land" (*Binyan Ha'aretz*), for the "conquest of labor" (*Kibush Ha'avoda*), for the right to immigration and so forth. Even the women themselves often gave priority to other struggles, as argued, for example, by Berlovitz and by Fogiel-Bijaoui.
- Few women held positions of power and of leadership. It is these positions which are the most documented and studied, leaving all other segments, women among them, on the sidelines.
- Few women, even among the activist and influential ones, left collected volumes of speeches and public writings, as did many of the men. Their impact on the library shelves is even smaller than it was in actual public life. The documentation left by women is often of a very different nature, that of private writing, mainly letters and diaries, which have begun to play an important role in the reclaiming of the past lives of women.
- The private spheres. Just as women were relatively absent from the political and public spheres, the spheres where their voice was heard remained largely undocumented. Public activity which dealt with the more personal dimensions of life—welfare, health, child-care, etc.—was given far less attention than political power struggles. The private spheres, which occupied much of women's time and energy, and shaped much of their life chances, were hardly referred to in public debate, let alone systematically documented.
- Male bias in the writing of history. The feminist critique that historical writing has ignored women and made them invisible (Bridenthal et al., 1987; Gordon et al., 1976), is blatantly evident in the new, as well as the old, historiography of the Yishuv, as demonstrated above,⁵ and as argued in many of the studies included in this volume.

Each article in this anthology contributes, in its way, to filling the large vacuum of knowledge on women's experience. This has been done, in most cases, within the accepted categories for the study of the Yishuv. The distinctions between chronological waves of immigration,⁶ between types of settlements, between the Labor Movement and the middle-classes, etc., has been retained, as has the new attention to previously neglected social groups. Thus many of the articles are clearly located in specific *Aliyot*—the First Aliyah (Yaffa Belovitz; Ran Aaronsohn) or the Second Aliyah

(Margalit Shilo; Musia Lipman and Deborah Bernstein; Nurit Govrin; Shulamit Reinharz); many of the articles deal with the women of the Labor Movement who, due to their affiliation with the dominant movement of the Yishuv, were more prominent and therefore more closely studied than other groups of women (Dafna Izraeli; Margalit Shilo; Deborah Bernstein; Sylvie Fogiel-Bijaoui; Shulamit Reinharz; Musia Lipman and Deborah Bernstein), while additional articles deal with women belonging to other social groups, such as the middle-classes (Hanna Herzog) and the Yemenite women (Nitza Druyan).

These articles add a new dimension to the existing parameters of time and social group. They not only refer to the women within these contexts, they put them at center stage, they deal with them as social actors, having their own voice, their own creation. They enter new spheres previously neglected (e.g., Bernstein on the family, Fogiel-Bijaoui on motherhood), and make use of new sources to illuminate women's experience (Aaronsohn's presentation of annotated letters; Lipman and Bernstein's discussion of pioneering women's diaries). Social experimentation by women becomes the focus of study in Izraeli's study of the Women Workers' Movement; in Shilo's study of the women's training farm, in Reinharz's study of Manya Shohat and the Collective in Sejera, in Fogiel-Bijaoui's analysis of the way women in kibbutzim coped with their inequality and in Herzog's study of middle-class women's organizations. These new subjects go way beyond the initial question of equality between men and women.

Women and Social Change

The Zionist enterprise was, in essence, an enterprise of social change, an attempt at transforming the Jewish people from a persecuted minority in the diaspora to a sovereign majority in the old-new Jewish homeland (and eventually, state). There are two additional dimensions of change, deeply embedded both in the experience and in the historiography of the Yishuv. First, a change in the nature of Jewish society, the transformation into a new type of society, egalitarian and labor-oriented, according to the basic tenets of the Labor Movement. Second, the transformation of the individual, of the diaspora Jew, into a productive, creative and proud Hebrew person. Women shared in all these facets of change. But they faced additional challenges, unique to them. They had to free themselves from the specific gender definition of traditional

patriarchal Jewish society, where women were subordinated to men both in the family and in the community. From the first step, the process of change was far more difficult for them than for the men. The very act of immigration, of leaving family and community, was far more difficult for the young women who came on their own, and thus entailed a far deeper rejection of the past. In Palestine, they not only had to join in the struggles conducted by the men of the various social groups, they also had to struggle against the latter's conception of appropriate gender roles. The transformation of the diaspora Jew into the new "Hebrew" was not gender neutral. The very language describing the new Hebrew, as noted above in discussing the myth of the Halutz, was male language. The woman aspired to become a new "Hebrew woman". To do this she had to transform herself, and yet, how could self-transformation of her social role be achieved when the partners to this role, the men, were not engaged in the same process?⁷ Could she become a different woman if she was not treated differently? Could she establish new gender relations when men showed no inclination to give up any of their prerogatives, either in the public or in the private domain?

The process of change was an all encompassing one, it included individual identity, collective consciousness, formation of organization and the adoption of strategies of action. Most articles in this volume deal with some of these aspects. There were women who arrived in Palestine primarily because of their husband's decision to immigrate. They had no previous intention of transforming themselves. According to Ran Aaronsohn and Yaffa Berlovitz, who deal with the women of the First Aliyah, there were few new models these women could follow, as they developed a new sense of involvement in and commitment to their new society, and this often led, according to Berlovitz, to bewilderment and doubt. Even the Labor Movement women were often unclear as to the models they wanted to adopt. Margalit Shilo discusses the various models suggested in the women's training farm—some women aspired to emulate men, to try and be just like the pioneering man, the halutzim; others wanted to be their helpmates—working hand in hand at their separate and suitable tasks; still others offered to try and follow in the footsteps of the Russian revolutionary women or maybe to learn from the Arab peasant women who worked in the fields and milked the cows. The search for new models implies the development of consciousness of the need for, and possibility of, change. Both Sylvie Fogiel-Bijaoui and Dafna Izraeli discuss the

importance of such consciousness for effective action, while Nitza Druyan discusses the implications of lack of consciousness in relation to the Yemenite women, who arrived in Palestine at the same time. Though unintended, their immigration to Palestine entailed a significant change, as it often happened that the women were the only ones able to obtain income for the family, and were thus brought into closer contact with the new world around them. Nevertheless, little change took place in their social and public status, nor were they able to organize to try and bring about such change.

Many of the writers are concerned with strategies of action for change. A variety of strategies emerge: the demand for equal duties, rather than equal rights, as argued by Sylvie Fogiel-Bijaoui for women in the kibbutz; the transformation of self through the acquisition of new skills, a route of self-emancipation, as shown by Margalit Shilo regarding the women's training farm; the formation of organizations to advance "women's spheres", as demonstrated by Hanna Herzog in relation to women of the middle-class; the formation of a women's movement, autonomous yet affiliated to the larger movement with which the women identified, as in the case of the women of the Labor Movement studied by Dafna Izraeli; and finally, the multiple strategies for obtaining the power to win the vote, as shown by Sylvie Fogiel-Bijaoui in her study of one of women's most important achievements.

The Private and the Public

Feminist critique of the study of society (e.g., Nicholson, 1976) has argued against the separation of the public from the private spheres as two independent, unrelated spheres of society. It is argued that such a separation is artificial and misleading, in that it implies that there are different principles of analysis to be brought to each of these overall spheres, and that what happens in one is of basically little analytic or practical concern to the other. On the contrary, the critique argues, the "private" sphere—the sphere of personal relations, the family, everyday experiences—is deeply embedded in the economic, political and social structure of society. At the same time, these "public" domains are often affected, changed or produced by processes within the "private" sphere, such as socialization and gender consciousness.

In the Yishuv, the public sphere of political, military and labor activity had unquestioned priority. Not only was it considered the more important sphere, it was seen as the *most* important, as it,

and only it, was related to the "conquest of labor" and the "building of the land". While it is possible to see the relation between the "public" and the "private" spheres in the Yishuv as an integration of the two with collectivistic principles guiding both spheres, it can be argued that the "private" was expected to subordinate itself to the "public", with little recognition of its own social significance. The women were caught, possibly trapped, between their identification with the dominant ideology on the one hand, and the importance they themselves gave to their private experience and their personal world, on the other.

The articles in this volume show, in numerous cases, the depth of the relationship between the private and public spheres. The private sphere, the daily experience of family life and personal relations, was concretely shaped by the public sphere—by the political situation, by economic conditions, by social movements, etc., as argued by Bernstein in her study of the urban working-class family and women's daily experience. But, even more significant, the private was *experienced* by the individual women, as located in and related to a larger public reality. This is most striking in the annotated documents included in the anthology, the fragments of diaries presented by Deborah Bernstein and Musia Lipman and the letters annotated by Ran Aaronsohn. Almost every sentence reverberates with the intermeshing of spheres and experiences. The diary and letters are genres of writing which would seem to enable the most candid expression of intimate feelings of love, passion, and bitter despair. And yet, even in this private form of writing, the public sphere appears to be so basic to the women's feeling of self as to be always present, at times as a source of reassurance and satisfaction, at others as part of the sense of loss and bewilderment. The commitment to and involvement with the public is, in turn, invested, in many cases, with an urgency and passion which, once again, seem to link the "personal" and the "political".

The twelve articles in this collection are divided into three sections. The first, "Between Tradition and Change," deals with the early immigration and its impact on women who continued to live in a relatively traditional community, at least as far as gender relations were concerned. The second section "Women of the Labor Movement," contains studies of women who belonged to, or were affiliated with, the labor movement. The dominant position and innovative character of the labor movement and the women workers' movement attracted many of the students of the period, hence the relatively large number of articles in this section. The

third section, "Women's Rights, Women's Spheres," contains two articles which deal mainly with women of the middle-class and their organized attempts to secure women's rights and advance those spheres which have always been identified as women's spheres.

Before letting the articles speak for themselves, a brief comment on language and terminology is called for. The articles speak in different voices, both of the writers and of the women portrayed. The women, one must remember, spoke and wrote between one hundred and fifty years ago. Even when they spoke Hebrew, their language was different from the living, spoken language we use today. It was not only newly acquired by the women immigrants; it was a language in "the making". Thus an element of verbal awkwardness, of stiffness, is often noted, even in translation. But the difference runs deeper. Their language was replete with expressions of public commitment and ideological fervor, which today sounds either artificial, pompous, or even insincere. At that time, for those women however, it was the most suitable form to express, albeit in a somewhat stilted manner, their thoughts and experiences. The style and the content were part and parcel of the people and their experience.

The contributors to this volume come from different disciplines, bringing different styles, forms of analysis and types of data. I have attempted, as the editor, to leave in the variability, introducing only that unity necessary for systematic reading, such as the form of notation and referencing. And yet one term calls for a special comment. The reader will note that two different terms have been used to refer to the place where the events occurred—Palestine and Eretz Israel (or Eretz Yisrael). Without going into the history of the name Palestine, suffice to note that before the establishment of the State of Israel, and especially during the British Mandate, Palestine was the name of the territory and political entity west of the Jordan river. The government appointed by the British was called the Government of Palestine, there was Palestinian citizenship (for both Jews and Arabs living in the territory) as well as Palestinian currency. Jews used the term Palestine (*Palestina*) both in everyday speech and in writing, as did the British and the Arabs. The Jews also used the Hebrew term Eretz Yisrael, meaning the Land of Israel. Today both terms have acquired additional connotations. "Palestine", refers to an Arab (Palestinian-Arab) country or state, while Eretz Israel brings to mind an exclusively Jewish entity. Neither of these connotations is fully

satisfying for the period under study. As each term is rich, even rife, with connotations, I chose to allow the authors the prerogative of choosing the term they felt most appropriate for their writing.

Notes

1. It is difficult to set an exact date for the beginning of the new national immigrations, as compared to the previous religious immigration. The year 1882 marks the beginning of the immigration from Russia of the *Hibbat Zion* (Love of Zion) movement, a section of the World Zionist Movement which called for immediate immigration to Palestine. It became known as the First Aliyah. This, at least by implication, ignores the involvement of some of the earlier settlers in the building of the new national entity. It also ignores the Yemenite immigration which took place at the same time, which Druyan discusses in this volume. Thus, we have an additional example of bias introduced into the accepted historiography, reinforcing the centrality of the labor movement and its immediate predecessors.

2. Among the “bachelors” and “spinsters”, to use the categories of the formal statistics, which mainly refer to the labor immigrants, women were only approximately twenty-five percent (Gertz, 1947:98).

3. The fact that Golda Meir was prime-minister also created the impression that there were no special problems for women. Quite the contrary. Israel could serve as an example of an egalitarian society.

4. The larger of the two collections is the *Third Aliyah Book*. It contains two volumes, and all of nine hundred pages. Of these, one whole section of approximately forty-five pages is devoted to the women pioneers. In all other sections, devoted to all spheres of work and types of settlements, women are hardly ever mentioned. Nevertheless, in both collections there is a lot of implicit material on women.

5. An additional publication, probably with the highest academic standing, is *Zionism: A collection for the study of the Zionist Movement and the Jewish Yishuv*. It is published by the Institute for the Study of Zionism of the Tel Aviv University and has appeared annually since 1970. Not one article in this publication deals with women. It is beyond our scope in this Introduction to deal with the ways in which the historiography excludes women, focusing on issues which did not involve women on the one hand, and ignoring them where they were, on the other.

6. Given far more knowledge concerning women in the Yishuv in the future, possibly a different periodization will prove more useful.

7. I would like to thank Dafna Izraeli for this important point.