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DYNAMICS OF GENDER BORDERS

WOMEN IN ISRAEL'S COOPERATIVE SETTLEMENTS

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Women Writing Kibbutz

The Development of a Women's Literature in the kibbutz movement in the Pre-State Period

Abstract: This article tracks the development and nature of literature written by women in the kibbutzim in the years before the establishment of the state. It distinguishes three periods, in the years between 1920 and 1950, in which the ideological and aesthetic formation of a "kibbutz literature" were explored and discussed, during which, alongside men's literary production, women's narrative writing was developing as well, following a conditioned rhythm of its own. The article discusses the women's literary leadership in the labor settlements, as well as the leadership that dictated and encouraged non-canonical forms of writing while simultaneously repressing women's canonical aesthetic-literary production. It concludes that even if women's narrative writing in the kibbutzim was shunted aside and forgotten over the years, it constituted an alternative to the literary model revolving around the male pioneer and filled in the blanks on the kibbutz literary map with its own distinctive and different revelations, both informational and poetic.

Prologue: Toward the emergence of a women's learning and writing community in the kibbutzim

The year 1944 saw the publication of a weighty collection of writings by kibbutz women, collected and edited by Lilia Bassevitz and Yocheved Bat Rachel, both members of Kibbutz Ein Harod. *Women in the kibbutz* (Bassevitz et al. 1944) was meant to be the first of two volumes,[1] and Bassevitz and Bat Rachel explain in the preface why they saw fit to publish it even as World War II was raging:

> There has been little participation by women in the literature of the kibbutz. While, in the practical activities of the kibbutz, the areas in which men and women members share the

1 The volume has 421 pages, with writings by about 100 women from 28 kibbutzim. It includes some 124 essays and poems, of which 90 were published in it for the first time. The remaining 34 were drawn from kibbutz publications, such as settlement diaries, *Tzeror mikhtavim* (an internal newsletter of Ein Harod), *Mibifnim* and *Devar hapo'elet*.

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> burdens are many, their expression – both spoken and written – is mostly given over to the men. And that expression – quite naturally – is consequently lacking. [...] The woman's part, the questions that she, and only she, must ponder, are not revealed or brought to light. (*ibid.*: 9)[2]

Thus, the woman kibbutz member never sounds her voice "on the general questions that concern both men and women members," or even regarding "those niches ... that she has created, and in which only women labor" (*ibid.*).

The question, of course, is why, despite women's active sharing of the burdens, they so rarely shared their views in speech or in writing, while men served as the exclusive spokesmen both for their female comrades and for the kibbutz. And, furthermore, why do the writers of the book's preface not endeavor to point to reasons for this "piercing contradiction"? Instead, they present the women's silence as a given and make do with noting the failure of efforts at equality of the sexes in the first generation of the pioneering society: "The female comrade has not always been understood by her male counterpart" and "has not always had his support" (*ibid.*). In other words, if there is a failing or blame to be made in this regard, it is mutual.

Things sound rather different when reading the writings of the women themselves. Notwithstanding some descriptions of situations of understanding and mutuality, the recurrent narrative, in different formulations, points an accusing and wounded finger at the male comrade for his arrogance and domination of his female counterpart, from the beginning of their joint participation in the second *'aliyah*[3] on, as pioneering settlers and as kibbutz members. While the woman's tireless efforts were directed at easing the lives, assisting and caring for the man,[4]

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2 The preface bears no author name, but it was certainly written by Bassevitz and Bat Rachel.

3 The word *'aliyah* (pl. *'aliyot*), lit. "rising," is used to refer to a Jew's immigration to Eretz Israel (the land of Israel). With the advent of the modern Zionist movement, it was applied to the waves of Zionist-Jewish immigration, mainly from eastern and central Europe, that began making their way in the late nineteenth century to Ottoman Palestine and with increased intensity, after World War I, to British Mandate Palestine. Those who arrived in the first *'aliyah*, in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, established farming villages that were called *moshavot*, settlements, and were themselves referred to as *mityashevim*, settlers. The participants in the second and third *'aliyot* – respectively, from 1904 to 1914 and from 1919 to 1923 – were largely motivated by the ideologies of labor or Socialist Zionism. Those who came in the second *'aliyah* established the first *kevutzot* – settlement "groups" – and called themselves *po'alim*, laborers. The participants in the third *'aliyah* saw themselves as *ḥalutzim*, pioneers, and with their advent the *kevutzot* began to be called kibbutzim.

4 Atarah Sturman, in "Life chapters" (Pirkei ḥayim, in Bassevitz et al. 1944: 5), speaks of the women's devotion and caring for the men in Kibbutz Merhaviya, and how they shed tears when the bread was done too late to feed the men with it; Bluma B., in "Friendship" (Ḥaverut, *ibid.*, 69), remarks: "There was no suffering that the women were unwilling to bear for the sake of the man who needed their help."

the man did not see her as an equal partner in sharing and contributing to the communal-pioneering enterprise – not when she made the effort to do "masculine" jobs like agricultural and construction work (diary of Sarah Blumenkranz),[5] not when she organized to contribute to the kibbutz movement and lead it forward, in concert with the man or at his side (essays from the notebook of RR),[6] and not when she stepped up to express her opinions, in speech or in writing.

Eva from Ein Harod (1936) writes about this:

> A hard feeling has been seeping through me. It's as though, over the course of time, we've become two societies in the kibbutz: one of men and one of women. Or more precisely: a "clean" society of men. ... There's a feeling that we've been shunted off our movement's main road, back – not into the "family home," which has meanwhile been demolished, but into a dark alley, a "women's corner." And it's so odd! In everyday life, in the ordinary farm work, the women play such an important role!
>
> In times of crisis, however, these good fellows, with whom we set out on the road ... suddenly we're strangers to them. There's no consideration of your opinion; you don't exist for them when they're deliberating those serious, weighty matters, in the moments that determine the fate of our settlement and the fate of our children.[7]

There is no doubting that the exclusion of women from the public discourse of the kibbutz and the belittling of the views they expressed aloud had the effect of discouraging and smothering their written expression as well. Indeed, the scant appearance of their voice is striking in the early kibbutz movement periodicals that began to appear in the 1920s, such as *Meḥayeinu* (Our lives) – the organ of Gedud Haʿavodah (the Labor Brigade; 1921), *Mibifnim* (From within) – that of the Kibbutz Hameuḥad movement (1923), and *Alon hakevutzah veḥayeha* (Newsletter of the *kevutzah* and its life), renamed *Niv hakevutzah* (Voice of the *kevutzah*), the organ of the Ḥever Hakevutzot Vehakibbutzim movement; 1929). It cries out even louder in the framework of the group kibbutz diaries of the 1920s and 1930s.

These diaries, studied from a feminist perspective by Aviva Ufaz (Ufaz 1996: "Introductions and Illuminations"; Ufaz 2001), were written among groups

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5 Sarah Blumenkrantz, "My laboring life" (Ḥayyai baʿavodah, *ibid.*: 84–85). The writer, a member of Kibbutz Tel Yosef, relates how, when she was a pioneer in the "Labor Brigade" (*gedud haʿavodah*) in Rehovot, the women got together to form a separate road-paving crew. The men were trying to keep them out of the work, claiming that they were "slow on the job, and because of that the whole hired crew was suffering and making little pay." The women demanded the toughest roadwork from the employers and got paid well, but the jealousy and competitiveness that had seized their fellow brigade members did not subside.

6 R.R., "From my notebook" (Mitokh hapinkas, *ibid.*: 65).

7 Eva, "Women Members on the Defense," statements made at a general meeting of the members at Ein Harod in 1936 (*ibid.*: 395).

of pioneers who had arrived in the third *'aliyah*, for the purpose of creating an internal conversation among the members, male and female, both during the pre-kibbutz period (when they formed itinerant communes making their living from temporary physical jobs, such as seasonal farm work, draining swamps and paving roads) and in the period of erecting and settling their permanent kibbutzim. One might have thought that this intimate group diary would serve as a kind of "eastern wall," an alternative outlet where the women, silenced in public, could unburden themselves of their distresses and difficulties as a minority in a male society, uninhibitedly criticize the overweening behavior of their male comrades and freely express their own positions and views.[8] But the women mostly did this on a low frequency, and only when they had come to the end of their tether.

In the diary of the Sharon *kevutzah*, for example, there were just two main female contributors, who responded to matters of general concern, but not with any regularity or consistency.[9] In the *Kehilateinu* diary, the women's contributions were heart-rending confessions, crying out the pain of their loneliness in the togetherness of the collective, their longing for someone to pay attention to them, and their turbulent emotions and fears of self-destruction or death (Ufaz 2000). In the diary of the Kiryat Anavim *kevutzah*, the absence of writing by women is the most striking of all. The male discourse was the dominant one here, while that of the women was constrained and apologetic (Ufaz 2001: 20, 135, 197, 201 and the Preface).

In light of all this, it may be understood that *Women in the kibbutz* was actually a belated compensation for the silencing of the female voice in the discourse of the kibbutz. Only with the empowerment of a labor women's leadership (as we shall see below) was a way found to fill the gender vacuum, by drawing upon a plentiful reservoir of writings, which, after over thirty years of the communal society's existence (1910–1944), allowed its women members to be reintroduced. The editors, Bassevitz and Bat Rachel, addressed this in their apologetic preface to the collection, remarking that the encounter with kibbutz women and their world might raise awareness and understanding of the kibbutz community and its history.

In the Jewish community of Eretz Israel at the time, the women laborers and pioneers of the second and third *'aliyot* were seen and represented as a socialist

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8 *Kehilateinu*, the diary of the Beitaniya *kevutzah*, is the best known of these diaries. Published in 1922, it exposed the confidences of the members, male and female, and caused quite a stir at the time. *Sefer hakevutzah*, the diary of the Sharon *kevutzah* (which later established Kibbutz Gevat), and *Sefer haḥayim*, the diary of the Kiryat Anavim *kevutzah* (for both, see note 9) were exposed only by Ufaz's studies, and even that only after much soul-searching. See Ufaz 1996: 7.

9 Of the 16–18 women in the group, only two really contributed to the diary, with occasional notes from another four.

Zionist intelligentsia of young women seeking to expand their education. Some of them were students. Their deficient image as lacking the ability to express themselves, which was gaining cogency within the labor movement, spurred them to try to subvert that image. Already in the period of the second *'aliyah*, within the work crews of women laborers (Yannait 1930), they started organizing for the purpose of educating and advancing working women, particularly in the area of Hebrew language and culture. In so doing, they encouraged the emergence and development of women writers with the cultural potential to address their readers' horizon of expectations.[10]

Indeed, *Women in the kibbutz* had been preceded by an earlier collection of documentary and literary writings by women in the labor movement in Eretz Israel. *Writings by women laborers*, published in 1930, was edited by Rachel Katznelson-Rubashov. Here, too, the women were asked to write especially for the compilation, though most of the essays and diaries were taken from closed drawers and aging folders, "not written for publication ... and in this way," remarked Katznelson, "traces of real life were preserved that a formal essay or story might have effaced" (Katznelson-Rubashov 1930: ii). This remark of the editor challenges the accepted view concerning the silence of the kibbutz women and reveals that women laborers and pioneers did not in fact refrain from writing; on the contrary, the need to express themselves pulsed in them throughout the years.[11] Only their fear of the belittling and scorn of their male comrades made them leave their writings in drawers.[12]

In these compositions, we learn not only about how the women laborers managed to write,[13] but also about how they studied. For example, the "Woman

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10 The notion of a "horizon of expectations" was coined by the philosopher H.G. Gadamer (1975), who argued that writers channel their writing, consciously or not, to address their audience's horizon of expectations and gain their acceptance.

11 On the basis of recently discovered diaries (such as that of Dora Badar from Kibbutz Mizra), and others from earlier decades (such as those of Xenia Zilberberg from Na'an and Judith Mensch from Ein Harod), we may surmise that women laborers and pioneers did a great deal of diary-writing, openly or in secret. See, e.g., Tsur et al. 1981, which reproduces excerpts from the diaries of "Anna" of the Labor Brigade, Hayuta Bussel from Deganya, Rivka Mahanimit from Ein Harod, and anonymous diaries penned by "A Guards Wife" or "A Woman Pioneer." Most of the women wrote their diaries in Hebrew, others in their native languages (such as Anna, who wrote in Russian).

12 See, e.g., "From the letters of Pessia Abramson" (1916–1932) (Me'igerot Pesyah Abramzon [1916–1932], in Katznelson-Rubashov 1930: 210–218, 219–229).

13 See, e.g., the narrative by Shoshana Bogen in Katznelson-Rubashov 1930, in which she speaks of her longing to write, and the stratagems she devised to create opportunities to write while doing her agricultural work (*ibid.*, 195).

Worker" (*Ha'ovedet*) section introduces us to the Hebrew classes they organized, which were integral to their conception of what it meant to be a "Hebrew worker." In this section, the laborer-writers describe how, after exhausting days of work, they nevertheless sat down resolutely to study. They had no Hebrew textbooks at the time, and the Hebrew teacher was not necessarily a professional. Often she was one of the group members, a laborer like themselves, who had some expertise in Hebrew.[14]

The women continued with their pursuit of both writing and study in the 1930s and 1940s as well. Apart from the two anthologies described above, there was a women's journalistic initiative, them all, the magazine *Devar hapo'elet* (1934–1977); also founded and edited by Rachel Katznelson and her coterie, it was first published as a supplement to the labor movement newspaper *Davar* and then as an independent monthly. The first issue carried the editor's founding declaration of her articles of feminine journalistic faith:

> This women's periodical is meant as a vehicle not only for raising and clarifying important issues that have not sufficiently come to expression in our movement's existing newspapers, but also for combating the voicelessness of our women members. [It is a means to express] the woman's point of view, the intensity of her emotions, the difficulties of her working life, the complexities of her family life and her unique responses to the phenomena of our lives.[15]

Both of the above-mentioned collections include segments of poetry and fictional writing. In *Writings by women laborers*, a section entitled "In the realm of the individual" includes poems by Rachel Bluwstein, lyrical musings by Shoshana Bogen and several narrative accounts that, in their content, language and style, go beyond reporting to border upon literary writing.[16] The division of *Women in the kibbutz* is similar, though there the segments of narrative and reportage are interspersed with poetic works (by Fania Bergstein, Tzvia Katznelson, Sarah Levi and Rivka Davidi) as well as photographs of sculptures and paintings (by Shoshana Sendal, Naomi Schindler, Haya Fishendler and Sarah Peres).

To gain a better understanding of these women's documentary and literary publications, products of their desire and efforts to write (in Hebrew), we must examine several key questions. To what degree did these collections pave the

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14 M. Slimovitz, "The women laborers' farm in Naḥalat Yehuda," in Katznelson 1930: 108.

15 Rachel Katznelson, "Statement of the working woman" (Devar hapo'elet), *Devar hapo'elet* 1(1): 1 (March 1934).

16 See below for a discussion of the narrative as a literary genre.

way for women's writing in the realms of literary prose?[17] What was the nature of the literature by women composed in the very particular context of the kibbutz? How did this literature represent the kibbutz reality, ideologically and poetically? And in what ways was it distinctive, in content and form, as literature, or as women's literature? In the following pages, I shall attempt to respond to these questions, in three sections: (i) Outline of a polemic: What kind of literature was supposed to be written in the framework of kibbutz society, and what was women's place in it? (ii) Kibbutz women writers and their relationship to the women leaders of literary activity within the labor movement. (iii) Gender and poetics in women's narrative fiction writing in the kibbutz up to the establishment of the state.

I Outline of a polemic: What kind of literature was supposed to be written in the framework of kibbutz society?

In *The emotional underground: On the beginnings of the kibbutz novel*, Shula Keshet (1995) tracks the efforts to create *belles lettres* in the kibbutzim of the pre-state period, between 1920 and 1950. In this period, Keshet discerns three developmental stages. I shall endeavor to characterize these stages and to clarify the place of writing women in each.

(1) *The first stage (1920–1930):* The decade from 1920 to 1930 marked the emergence of collective musings in the kibbutzim as to how the community might expound itself and its novel experiences (in the itinerant Labor Brigades and the new collective settlements) through the medium of an elementary Hebrew literature. These musings sought their answers first and foremost in the ideological and poetic doctrines of spiritual leaders such as A.D. Gordon, Y.H. Brenner and Berl Katznelson, notwithstanding the opposition of these leaders to a hasty recourse to prose writing.

Gordon preached for prioritizing the pioneering, laboring life, which, at this stage, was the "true creativity" demanded for building up both the people and the individual. He therefore demanded of those young men and women who were

17 In the journal *Hedim* (Echoes), founded in 1934 in Mishmar Ha'emek, the number of women writers increased, in the area of literary writing as well, in contrast to the periodicals published in the labor settlements in the 1920s.

seized by the urge to write to suppress that urge and channel their whole selves away from the life of the spirit and into a life of action (Gordon 1924: 3–5; 1925: 140–157; see Keshet 1995: 42–43).

Brenner, too, took a stern view in this regard and did his best to block any ambition, even of a promising talent, to contend with the new realities by working them into a book (Brenner 1911: 161–162). However, he did propose a more modest, cautious way of writing that might give voice to the overwhelming but problematic event of the encounter with the homeland – one that Brenner, too, chose for his own writing: "Letters, I just write letters to my close friends about the life of a person such as myself and his feelings." Indeed, Brenner presents even his monumental novel of life in Eretz Israel, *Mikan umikan* (From here and there), as a "long letter" (*ibid.*, 163).

As for Berl Katznelson, he adopted yet another way of heading off youthful talents who might see writing as a vocation: namely, a democratization of literature. As he writes in his foreword to *The Aḥdut Ha'avodah collection*:

> The hoe and the letter, the plow and the newspaper were handed down together in the Hebrew labor movement in Eretz Israel. The efforts of the body and those of the spirit ... have complemented each other ... and so has emerged the youngest branch of the ancient tree of Jewish literature: the labor literature of Eretz Israel. (B. Katznelson 1929)

In other words, Katznelson sought to make of this "labor literature" something not only to be read but also to be written by the laborers themselves, as a group, and by this means to create a new image of the writer, on the model of "every laborer a writer"; he advocated an authentic writing, emerging directly from the people, that would bring together "the hoe and the letter" (see Berlovitz 1984: 21–23, 39).

And indeed, the prevailing respect and awe in which authorities like Gordon, Brenner and Katznelson were held tempered the literary ambitions of youths in the labor brigades and kibbutzim, who dared not try their hands at canonic genres, not to speak of the novella or the novel. At the same time, however, they encouraged the many to write, and by the end of the 1920s there was a growing stream of narrative prose written by pioneers (as though in response to Katznelson), modestly taking the form of experimental, experiential texts, focusing on non-canonical genres (as though in response to Brenner) – "letters," "sketches," "short-short stories" and the like. Based on a personal, confessional poetics (*hemiyat hanefesh*, the "cooing of the soul"), this type of writing spoke also to the hearts of the women laborers and pioneers, encouraging them to try and narrate what they were undergoing in the land, despite the image of their inferior literary status. And indeed, the *Writings by women laborers* collection is a representative corpus of such writings by women, almost all of them personal narratives: "letters" ("In my illness," by "Ḥ.Z."; "The epistles of Pesya Abramson,"

1916–1922); eulogizing poems and obituaries for women comrades who had died before their time ("On Shoshana," by "R.K." [Rachel Katznelson]; "In memory of Pesya Abramson," by Yael Gordon – R. Katznelson 1930: 205, 206–208);[18] and "sketches" – another genre that on account of its abbreviated scope and its openness to a broad and flexible range of expressive forms encouraged women to write and to infuse it with many varied types of content.[19]

In *Writings by women laborers* we first encounter the sketch as a bold, subversive vehicle of thought in the lyrical posthumous sketches of Shoshana Bogen (*ibid.*: 193–204). However, it seems that most of the future women writers of the kibbutzim (poets, prose writers, playwrights and essayists) got their start, in the 1920s and 1930s, with writings in this genre.[20] So it was with Miriam Singer, Gittel Mishkovsky, Emma Levine, Rivka Gurfein and others; however, the woman writer most identified with the sketch, endowing it with a unique textual quality in the women's writing of the period, was the poet Fanya Bergstein. In 1952, two years after her death, a selection of a hundred of her sketches was published, of which some had been published in various periodicals and others were taken from her estate. Menahem Poznansky, the book's editor, also gave it the title *Sketches* (*Reshimot*) and emphasized "that simplicity ... and that aspiration for clarity ... and that way of expression, unique to her," with its "naive and delightful style" and "clarity of spirit, joined with wistful understanding" ("On this book," in Bergstein 1952: 6–8).

(2) *The second stage (1930–1940):* By the end of the 1930s, there were thirty-nine kibbutzim (and by 1947, there were 145; see Keshet 1995: 67). This was a decade of consolidation for kibbutz society; the one-time itinerant groups of idealistic young men and women laborers had become a community of men and women who were established in farming settlements on the land and were becoming one of the most central and vital elements in the *yishuv*, the pre-state Jewish community in Eretz Israel. With this process, the call to "restore the creativity" to the

18 Eulogies written by women for women emerge as a genre in their own right, given the frequency of their appearance in kibbutz periodicals.

19 Keshet (1995: 57), following Nurith Gertz (1989), focuses mainly on the poetic sketch, a genre that attained significant poetic achievements in the Hebrew literature of the writers of the period of the Hebrew revival, particularly in the works of Gershon Shofman. She points as well to the manifestations of this genre in the literature of the Russian populist heralds of the revolution in the 1860s and 1870s, also referred to as "sketches."

20 Keshet (1995: 65) adds in this context that in her estimation, the sketch of the 1920s and '30s laid the foundation for the initial repertoire of "realemes" (following Even-Zohar 1980).

national literature was sounded (Zemach 1926: 7). As Yocheved Bat Rachel wrote in 1943:

> In the period when we were laying the foundations for building up our lives, as our social cells were beginning to form, the issue of developing the features and talents of the artists among us was not ... especially pertinent; ... however, to the extent that our lives have taken a permanent shape, rooted in the land, in labor, and in creating a culture, to the extent that our society is growing and developing, so that we have begun to number in the thousands, that question must come to the fore, and it must do that ... now. (Bat Rachel 1943: 128)

Discussions of the nature of kibbutz writing in those years dealt with broadening the literary genres and with the effort to offer a more comprehensive account of this very particular local way of being. For as much as the literature of the kibbutz sought to develop as a complex, incisive vehicle of poetic expression, it also sought to serve as a vehicle for stamping the socialist-Zionist worldview upon the consciousness of Jewish youth in Eretz Israel and in the Diaspora, and to influence the shape of society in Eretz Israel as a whole by modeling the laboring life and the "religion of labor." Thus, the writer was expected to function not only as a narrator of the kibbutz, but also as an educator and molder of the generation by means of the kibbutz. In the words of Bat Rachel, the artist must transmit "our own reality" and "the image of our life," even if that meant carving "their expression – straight out of the unhewn ... bedrock of life" (*ibid.*: 128–129). Writer Emma Levine similarly hailed these difficulties, seeing in the struggles and turmoil endured by the writer a powerful force for creativity (Levine 1954: 46).

The voices of kibbutz women writers and authors stand out for their passionate involvement in the arguments over the status of artists in the kibbutz – their roles, the conditions in which they worked and how they were to be supported and encouraged. So it was in the 1930s, and so it was later on, as they became editors of periodicals and members of writers' committees. Nevertheless, their views do not appear to have been heard in the course of the critical ideological controversies that sent shock waves through kibbutz society, split it into opposing streams and camps and posed a rather different picture of the kibbutz framework and its activities, such as the splits that harrowed the labor brigades in the 1920s, Kibbutz Beit Alfa in the 1930s and the United kibbutz movement in the 1940s (Keshet 1995: 114). Nor did women writers take an active part in the stormy controversies, starting in the 1930s, over trends in kibbutz literature and how it was to be composed – as an elitist, avant-garde literature or as populist literature written in the service of a cause. These ideological and cultural controversies, including those concerning the political poetics of kibbutz literature, were the exclusive province of the male writer and man of the spirit, and so he, too, was the dominant presence in the construction and development of kibbutz writing

in the 1930s.[21] This dominance was especially striking in the literary image of the hero, the new man in the new/old land of Israel – the pioneer. This "new man" was specifically gendered male, with not a hint of concern for the possibility of the existence or activity of a pioneering woman.

As noted, the 1930s saw the beginning of belletristic writing by kibbutz writers – including women kibbutz writers. The question to be addressed, then, is: How, if at all, did women figure as protagonists of kibbutz literature – and as its writers?

Angela Ingram, co-editor of the collective volume *Women's writing in exile*, distinguishes in her introduction between "geographical exile" and "metaphorical exile" – that is, between physical exile, in which the writer is uprooted from home and homeland, and literary exile, in which, alienated and estranged from her own surroundings, she writes her exile from within (Ingram 1989: 4–7). But Ingram also points to an additional, contradictory aspect of exilic writing, what she calls the "exhilaration of exile":[22] The very exile of the writer within her own country may provide her with an independent creative territory, in which her writing itself becomes a "home," a free, liberated living space of her own, from which she can carry on a dialogue with the hegemonic male literary center while simultaneously critiquing it, subverting it and creating an alternative literature of her own.

Already in those years, women kibbutz writers seem to have chosen to take the path of metaphorical "exile" within their own home. Perusal of their writings and stories, in all the genres in which they wrote, reveals that they were producing an independent, liberated writing of their own. The woman kibbutz writer may have been on the periphery of kibbutz literature and may all too often have been deprived of the attention her work deserved, in terms of publicity and reviews. However, she was in the position of being able to carry on a dialogue with the men's literature without being committed to it; as we will see, she was free to accept or reject its poetic decisions and conventions. It was she who decided upon her themes, structures, genres, linguistic forms and style, and first and foremost upon the images of the heroes and heroines who populated her writings (and who did not always conform to the accepted image of the "new man"). Indeed, the 1930s saw the beginning of women's narrative prose in

21 The leading figures in these controversies were the editors of the literary journals, such as M. Braslavsky and M. Dorman of *Mibifnim*; and see also the views of such writers as A. Volcani (1930), M. Zuckermann (1935), Y. Shimoni (1937, 1938) and others (Keshet 1995: 74–76).

22 Drawing on the title of one of the articles in the collection: Judith Kegan Gardiner, "The exhilaration of Exile: Rhys, Stead and Lessing," in Ingram 1989: 133–150.

the kibbutz – an alternative prose, which, for all its "extra-territorial" status and excluded works, resounds with that "exhilaration" of otherness.

As for the published literary works produced in the kibbutzim in the 1930s and early 1940s, David Maletz (1899–1981; Ein Harod) and Shlomo Reichenstein (1902–1942; Tel Yosef) topped the list of promising writers. However, the 1920s also saw the appearance of Shulamit Bat Dori (1904–1985; Mishmar Ha'emek), the first of the women kibbutz writers, who started out with short stories (1926) and expanded into dramatic writing with her first play, *The trial* (Hamishpat), published in 1936. Additional women who published in the 1930s were Yehudit Mensch (1901–1972; Ein Harod) and Emma Levine (1905–2004; Mishmar Ha'emek). Mensch published a large number of stories in the 1930s, most of them, in 1934–1935, in the Warsaw newspaper *He'atid*[23] and in the Saturday supplement of *Davar*. Levine, too, published in *He'atid* (1929), which also published her children's book, *We: Kindergarten stories* (Anaḥnu, misipurei hagan, 1937). In Palestine, Levine published in the kibbutz periodicals *Hedim* and *Basha'ar*, as well as in *Davar* and *Devar hapo'elet*. Other women writers who published during these years were former kibbutz members who had left for the city. Among them were Rivka Alper (1902–1958; Giv'at Hasheloshah), whose first novel, *Throes of revolution* (Pirpurei mahapeikhah, 1930), was published by the Mitzpeh press, and whose short stories appeared in the periodicals *Moznayim*, *Davar* and the *Mitzpeh almanac*; and Sarah Gluzman (1915–1988; Ein Harod, Giv'at Hasheloshah), who, upon leaving the kibbutz, published *On the brink of death* ('Al saf mavet, 1936), a novel of the laboring life set in a kibbutz and in Tel Aviv, as well as short stories in *Davar*, *He'atid*, *Bama'aleh*, *Gilyonot* and *Moznayim*.

(3) *The third stage (1940–1950):* The 1940s saw the maturation of kibbutz literature. By then, kibbutz society was no longer homogeneous. Bitter ideological splits had provoked movement crises and misgivings regarding socialism in the state-in-formation, the identity of the kibbutz and its way forward, and they were also making themselves felt in the literature produced by kibbutz writers, such as the novels published in this decade by Reichenstein (*Beginning* [Reishit], 1943) and Maletz (*Circles* [Ma'agalot], 1945).

At the end of the 1940s, another novel about communal life in Palestine came out – this one written by a woman. The writer was Emma Levine, who had first come to prominence as a leader in the Hakibbutz Ha'artzi Hashomer Hatza'ir

23 *He'atid*, edited by Mordechai Yitzhak Edelman and published in Hebrew and Yiddish, ceased publication in 1935. Mensch dedicated her story "The daughter" (Habat), published in *He'atid* on December 15, 1935, to the writer Gershon Shofman.

socialist Zionist kibbutz movement and for years edited its journal, *Hedim*. In her 1949 novel *Time of tents* [Le'et ohalim], she focused on a group of young people in the preparatory stage of kibbutz formation in the 1920s, migrating in a Labor Brigade between temporary hard-labor jobs such as draining swamps and paving roads while molding themselves into a group ready to settle on its own piece of land. In this transitional stage, they incessantly thrash out the great and fateful questions bearing on the nature of communal life, both as an ideological and structural principle and as a daily practice in their own systems of relationships. They are exercised, for example, by the emergence of hierarchical and power relations between individuals and the group; the ethics of male–female relationships, the construction of new gender arrangements relating to couples, families and motherhood; the threat to intimacy and individuality presented by the intensive but open group life that they were living, and so on.

Notwithstanding its renewed exposure of these relevant and troubling questions, the novel had a lukewarm reception. Nor was this first kibbutz novel written by a woman kibbutz member marked as an innovative and groundbreaking publication in the kibbutz community. This lack of any kind of fanfare seems to have consigned it to oblivion, especially from the point of view of scholarly attention. Thus, for example, Gershon Shaked's series of studies on the "homeland literature" of the Mandate period makes no mention at all of this novel, not to speak of discussing it in surveying the kibbutz literature produced by the likes of Reichenstein and Maletz. In other words, from the point of view of Shaked's historiography in his monumental *Hebrew narrative fiction 1880–1980*, Levine's *Time of tents* might as well not have been written or published.[24]

Nor was *Time of tents* Levine's first novel. She had already published two earlier novels in the 1940s, *Between frontiers* (Bein gevulot, 1944) and *Barbed wire on the Dniester* (Tayil 'al haDeniester 1945).[25] These two novels, bucking the unequivocal demand of the ideologues and movers of the literary leadership, do not deal with the kibbutz or with the various stages of kibbutz settlement. Levine, as a woman and a writer, allowed herself to treat subjects of her own preference, even if they fell outside the consensus to which others felt bound by the reigning poetic doctrine. To be sure, her novels revolved around fellow members of the Hashomer Hatza'ir movement in Eastern Europe on the eve of World War II, but in the early 1940s, when she wrote them, stories of the movement outside Palestine

24 Levine's entire corpus of stories and books goes unmentioned by Shaked. On this see Berlovitz 2003b: 342–343, 348–347.

25 These two novels were published under the name of Emma Levine, while *Time of tents* was published under the name of Emma Talmi-Levine.

did not evoke much interest, nor did the war, as the reverberations of the rampaging Holocaust had thus far barely penetrated the consciousness of the Jews in Palestine. Nevertheless, Levine – in the liberated sphere of her "metaphorical exile" – chose to devote her time and her literary output to "marginal," extra-consensual subjects. These novels were a charged amalgam of fiction and documentation; on the basis of a massive quantity of firsthand information, including personal testimonies, documents and letters, Levine constructed a dramatic and heartrending web of plot lines setting out the saga of a group of figures who persisted, under inhuman conditions, in organizing and communicating between Hashomer Hatza'ir units in Poland and Romania, keeping alive their longing to fulfill the dream of a new life in Eretz Israel.

Strange to say, Levine, in her prefaces to *Between frontiers* and *Barbed wire on the Dniester*, presented them as documentary rather than belletristic works (Levine 1944: 8; 1945: 5). Not only that, but she returned to this self-presentation years later, when she again described herself in *Time of tents* as a chronicler rather than a novelist (Keshet 1995: 92). Why did she belittle herself as an author? In her collection and reworking of documentary material, she was behaving no differently than Shlomo Reichenstein, whose *Beginning* was based on speeches made by Menahem Elkind, Yitzhak Tabenkin and Shlomo Lavi in connection with the political rupture that led to the splitting of Kibbutz Ein Harod,[26] or the literary couple Alexander and Yonat Sened, whose 1951 book *Land without shade* (Adamah lelo tzel) was written as a commissioned chronicle of the establishment of Kibbutz Revivim and what happened there during Israel's War of Independence. But Reichenstein and the Seneds viewed themselves as authors and novelists from the outset, while Levine presented herself merely as a chronicler. To what extent did her gender influence this belittling of herself as a writer, even though she was considered an influential leader in the other areas of her activity in kibbutz society?

II Women literary leaders: The poetic trap

In order to answer this question, we must trace Levine's dialogue with the community of women writers that had begun to come together upon the establishment of

26 Reichenstein incorporated into his novel ideological discourses expressing the content of actual speeches made by Elkind, Tabenkin and Lavi. That is why Shaked (1988: 292) describes his writing as that of a historian seeking to present things as they actually were, whether or not this accorded with the literary format.

the monthly women's journal *Devar hapoʿelet*, and with its editor, Rachel Katznelson. This dialogue may clarify not only Levine's conception of herself as a woman writer but also that of most of the writers who took part in this lone women's periodical in the labor movement sector in mandatory Palestine.

Levine frequently contributed sketches, stories and articles to the various publications of the kibbutz movement, and she also served as editor of the journal *Hedim*. In *Devar hapoʿelet*, she appeared in the "From the mouths of babes" (*Mipi hataf*) section, which featured discussions by kibbutz children,[27] and as a writer of essays on culture, the holidays and so forth.[28] However, she did not publish her prose stories in this forum, because of the "literary" policy set down by Rachel Katznelson. As we have seen, Katznelson intended the periodical under her editorship to be a vehicle of expression for the laboring woman as she was – a place for this anonymous and voiceless public to say what was on its mind. The response to this invitation was surprising in its scope. At a meeting of the secretariat of the management committee of the Histadrut in 1937, at which the continued publication of *Devar hapoʿelet* came up for discussion, Beba Idelson, the secretary of the Women Workers' Movement, reported that the editorial office had been flooded with some 150 letters, sketches, personal confessions and memoirs in its first two years (1934–1936). On this basis, the Council of Women Workers, in 1939, weighed the publication of an additional journal for urban women laborers, because "the scope of *Devar hapoʿelet* is too narrow to contain everything that is sent to the paper."[29]

According to Lilia Bassevitz, who was Rachel Katznelson's right-hand woman, the contributors would send their letters unsigned, or signed only with their first names, "and it was no accident," as she said, that these letters, published on the back pages, were enormously popular and usually read first (Bassevitz 1935: 27). Notwithstanding this success, Katznelson remained steadfast in her refusal to publish "poetic" works by women laborers who sought to turn their hands to literary writing. "Not for this did we we create *Devar hapoʿelet*," she declared in 1944, "so that it would become just another literary forum. We created it for

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27 Levine taught for years in nursery and primary school. Apart from her 1943 book *We Kindergartners* (Anaḥnu yaldei hagan) or *Purim in Elul* (Purim be'Elul), she published stories for children in *Mishmar liyeladim*, the children's weekly published by *'Al hamishmar*, the newspaper of the Hashomer Hatzaʿir movement.

28 See, e. g., her article "On our lifestyle: The holiday, attire, the dining hall and talk" ('Al signon ḥayeinu: Heḥag, tilboshet, ḥadar ha'okhel vesiḥah), *Devar hapoʿelet* 3(1): 17–20 (April 5, 1936).

29 In its first four years, *Devar hapoʿelet* came out once a month as a supplement to the newspaper *Davar*, so that there were twelve issues a year, with eight pages per issue. See Schechter 2004: 311.

matters of real life." In 1941, upon completing the first seven years of the paper's publication, she noted with satisfaction that of the hundreds of women who had published their writings in it, there were but "a few literary writers" (Shechter 2004: 312, 311, 304).

Interestingly, none of the paper's editors protested against this rigid policy. On the contrary; they loyally facilitated it. Thus, Bassevitz, addressing potential contributors in guidelines published in the paper, wrote: "I would like us ... not to be bound by convention. ... What befits women is a different, more personal type of writing. Not articles, but 'sketches,' 'letters,' 'memoirs'"; and so: "each should write about herself: Myself – at work; myself – in public life; myself – in the family; myself – as a mother" (Bassevitz 1935: 27). In other words, even as she encouraged and prodded women to write, she limited and channeled their output toward stereotypical women's writing. This dogmatic counsel demands scrutiny. The consistent policy laid down by Katznelson and Bassevitz of exclusively publishing "personal writing" may have enhanced the "literature of the labor movement" with the "voice" and "self-expression" of the silent majority, but it also resulted in the muzzling of women's literary potential and held back the development of women's prose writing in the mandatory period into canonical literature.

Katznelson sought the democratization of women's writing, and in this she went along with the literary doctrines of Gordon and Berl Katznelson, who had spoken of the "labor literature" as something to be produced by every worker. However, unlike Gordon and Berl, who also simultaneously encouraged the production of a literary canon, Rachel Katznelson continued to generate non-canonical literary practices for the purpose of broadening the "labor literature." That is, apart from the project of documenting the collective image of the "laboring woman" by means of personal writings by women, a genre that became established in the newspaper as pertaining specifically to women,[30] Rachel Katznelson tasked women with writing and documenting what was going on with the members of the laboring sector at large.[31] In meetings with women of a literary bent, she offered them her assistance, if only they would harness their talents and skills to documenting the labor enterprise in Palestine.

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30 Gordon 1925: n. 35. Speech made by Berl Katznelson at the laborers' assembly regarding the Am Oved publishing cooperative, Berl Katznelson Archive, Beit Berl College. This genre typifies the collections of writings by labor movement women that were published as books: *Writings by women laborers*, *Women in the kibbutz*, and also Hasia Drori's *A home in the moshav* (Bayit bamoshav, 1962) and Bracha Habas's *Women of valor* (Benot ḥayil, 1965), as noted by Shechter (2004: 269).

31 Rachel Katznelson, in *Devar hapo'elet* 1(1): 1 (March 1934).

That is what happened with the young Rivka Alper. Her *Throes of revolution* was one of the first novels published by a woman in Palestine, and, according to her biographer, it was received favorably and drew interest and invitations from various periodicals to write stories for them. However, Alper had trouble choosing between the laboring life and the "fever to write," and as she was serving as a part-time secretary at *Devar hapo'elet*, she was besought by Katznelson and Rachel Yana'it to channel her writing toward documenting the stories of women in the women's farms, training farms and kibbutzim, leading her to produce *With all our souls* (Bekhol nafshenu, 1944) and *Girls in the meadow* (Banot banir, 1946). Yearning still to engage in her own creative writing, she bowed once more to Katznelson's urging her to write historical and biographical novels about the settlements in Palestine; the result was *Settlers on the mountain* (Hamitnaḥalim bahar, 1944) and *A chronicle of one family* (Korot mishpaḥah aḥat, 1955).[32] The same thing happened to Bracha Habas, who, in the context of her work at *Davar* and *Devar hapo'elet* wrote some fifty documentary works, but "not the one book that she wanted to write ... the book of her dreams."[33]

Over the years, Katznelson's support for these writer-reporters produced an impressive stock of chronicles of the labor movement narrative, from its very beginnings through the continued development of the labor sector (including its institutions, leaders, enterprises and achievements), but it simultaneously established and affirmed the role of these writers not as creative artists, but as "keepers" of the masculine pioneering enterprise. Simone de Beauvoir wrote in *The second sex* of the respective transcendent and immanent roles assigned to men and women on the basis of gender (De Beauvoir 1953: 96–97): Where the man is the "creator" and innovator, the woman faithfully "maintains" him, whether as the birthing womb perpetuating his seed or as the sustainer of his work, appropriating it as her own.

De Beauvoir's discussions of the woman "who creates nothing new" represent her dialectical attitudes regarding woman and her limitations as a free and creative creature, oppressed as she is by the nature/culture and body/mind binaries. This dialectic also exposes the problematic nature of Katznelson's activity as a militant leader struggling hard and tirelessly to promote the status and rights of

32 *Settlers on the mountain* sets out the history of the Cohen family, headed by family matriarch Leah, which settled on lands at Motza in the period of the first *'aliyah* and founded the settlement there. *A chronicle of one family* tells the life story of Rachel Danin, a native of Jerusalem who moved with her spouse to Jaffa at the beginning of the twentieth century, established a family and became one of the first women to settle in Tel Aviv.

33 Judith Hendel, "My Bracha" (Berakhah sheli), *Devar hapo'elet* 33(8): 275 (August 14, 1968).

women members of the labor movement,[34] while simultaneously demurring from the potential of the woman creative artist – as nature, body and eros – to produce canonical literature;[35] in this regard, she stood weak-willed and subdued before the masculine consensus.[36]

Emma Levine, too, belonged to the intimate group of writers at *Devar hapo'elet*, in which she participated from the first issue. She belonged not to the inner circle of Rachel Katznelson's close friends, who were all women of the second *'aliyah* (Mania Shochat, Rachel Yana'it, Devorah Dayan), but to the secondary circle of women of the third *'aliyah* (Lilia Bassevitz, Yocheved Bat Rachel, Rivka Alper) and those associated with the Kibbutz Artzi movement established by Hashomer Hatza'ir (Rivka Gurfein). The members of this group of writers were in total agreement regarding their activity within the ideological and cultural climate thus created, in which they promoted the women's political agenda formulated by Katznelson. In light of her activity in this milieu, it is understandable that Levine, willingly or not, would have donned Katznelson's anti-canonical poetic attitude toward women's writing, and even when, by dint of her literary talents, she succeeded in producing three novels (formulated and developed, as we have seen, on the basis of interviews and documents), she chose to disparage herself as a writer and present her works as chronicles rather than as *belles lettres*.[37]

This was not true of other writers who belonged to the labor sector and wrote for *Devar hapo'elet*, including kibbutz members like Shulamit Bat Dori, Rivka Gurfein, Ruhama Hazanov, Yehudit Mensch and others. These writers, notwithstanding their use of documentary sources, saw themselves not as maintainers

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34 Tamar Shechter (2004: 132–254) credits Katznelson with engendering a cultural and educational revolution among the women of the labor movement sector and creating a unique type of laboring Hebrew woman.

35 Dan Miron (1991: 262–269), who presents Katznelson as a brilliant essayist who produced marvelously knowledgeable and analytic writing on literature and literary criticism, describes her, in light of her diaries, as a frustrated writer. Yearning to live a life of the spirit, of the imagination and of creative writing, she forced herself to suppress these inclinations, arguing that literary work would cut her off from reality and threaten her socialist values.

36 At the tenth meeting of the WWC in June 1934, Katznelson noted that the issues that concerned women in their writing were considered marginal by men, and they should therefore refrain from dealing with them and certainly not publish such writings. *Devar hapo'elet* 1(4) (June 26, 1934).

37 It is noteworthy that Levine's first two novels, *Barbed wire on the Dniester* and *Between frontiers*, published, respectively, in 1944 and 1945, were the first creative works published in Palestine to deal with the Holocaust, in the form of the realistic novel. The first poetic response was *Diary in the dust*, a collection of poems published by Zvi Arad in 1946, following his encounter with Rozka Korczak, a survivor of the Vilna Ghetto. See Keshet 1995: 136.

but as creative writers, giving life to situations, story lines and fictitious characters of their own by way of their writings.

Indeed, the 1940s and early 1950s were fruitful years for kibbutz literature, judging not only by the publications generated by male writers,[38] but also by those of women writers. Several more novels, apart from the three published by Emma Levine, were written by women at the end of the 1940s and in the early 1950s, to be published in that decade. These include *Fences* (Gederot, 1950) by Ruhama Hazanov (1912–1994, Ein Harod), which tells the story of the farming settlement of Gedera as seen through the eyes of a family of settlers that had endured many tribulations; *Childhood in the sun* (Ne'urim bashemesh, 1954) by Rivka Gurfein (1908–1983, Ein Shemer), which centers on a group of immigrant children in a kibbutz during the war years and in the early period of postwar illegal immigration to Palestine; and Yehudit Mensch's coming-of-age novel *Youth* (Ne'urim, 1958). In the 1940s, writer and playwright Shulamit Bat Dori was also still publishing her short stories. Six of them were put together thirty-five years later to form her book *Nothing like this will ever bloom again* (Kazot lo tifraḥ le'olam, 1980).

The items catalogued above show that despite the social, gender and language difficulties encountered by kibbutz women in their efforts to express themselves, a community of writing women nevertheless emerged within the kibbutz movement, preparing fertile ground for the production of a rich and varied literature. In other words, kibbutz women did produce *belles lettres* throughout the entire Mandate period, from sketches and short stories to novellas, novels and plays; but these writers, not to speak of their works, were hampered, excluded and retrospectively obliterated from the public's literary memory, not only by the male literary leadership but also, as we saw above, by women literary leaders (see Berlovitz 2003b: 331–334).

Thus, these women writers were not even mentioned, not to say discussed, in the historiographies of the literature of the period – for example, in the studies of Joseph Klausner, Aharon Orinovsky Ben Or, or, as we have seen, Gershon Shaked. Even scholars of kibbutz literature have not taken the trouble to deal with them. Kibbutz literature has been the subject of a number of MA theses and doctoral dissertations in recent years, but even then, they have not dealt with the women kibbutz writers of the Mandate period.[39] Only since the 1990s has some interest

38 To the publications of Reichenstein, Maletz and Yonat and Alexander Sened, we must add Zvi Arad's first novel, *A man's home* (1951).

39 See, e. g., Knaani 1986; Hadomi and Shur 1990; and works like Gorny 1970, Tziony 1974 and Hadomi 1975.

in these writers begun to emerge, as scholars like Shula Keshet, Reuven Kritz and Ori Kritz have begun wiping the dust off their works.[40]

III On the nature of kibbutz women's narrative fiction writing in the Mandate period

The dominant presence of the male pioneering experience in kibbutz literature returns us to the question of whether one can also speak of a female pioneering experience in kibbutz literature, or whether women writers internalized the male experience to the extent that they simply replicated that narrative and retold it in their own words. Or perhaps they, too, as historian Gerda Lerner put it, lived double lives, simultaneously taking part in the general (male) culture and leading their own cultural lives as women (Lerner 1979: 52, 54). Taking this idea a step further, feminist literature scholar Elaine Showalter suggests reading women's writing as a "double-voiced discourse" (Showalter 1981: 201). According to this model, the woman writer narrates herself in parallel story lines, oscillating constantly between them: the "dominant" narrative, in which she follows after the consensual male voice, and the subversive, "silenced" narrative by which she seeks to manifest her own voice and her own world.

The notion of the double narrative is valid for the works of kibbutz women writers as well, but the relative proportions of the "dominant" and "silenced" narratives vary from one writer and one text to another. The "male voice" is more dominant in some works, while the "female voice" wells up in others. As we saw above, the urge to sound women's voices spurred some beneficial ventures in the labor movement, such as publication of the *Writings by women laborers* and *Kibbutz women* collections and of the women's periodical *Devar hapoʿelet*, But the urge to sound those voices as an alternative, particularly in relation to their own kibbutz experiences, also spurred them to tell of themselves as creative individuals, even as they stayed within the collective communal framework. In the following discussion, I shall endeavor to clarify the nature of kibbutz women's narrative fiction writing, with the help of three poetic categories that may help distinguish it from that created by men: (1) stories from the "women's space"; (2) the demythification of the pioneering male hero; and (3) the depiction of the pioneering woman as a *Bildungsroman*.

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40 See Kritz and Kritz 1997; and the sections on Rivka Alper, Emma Levine, Sarah Gluzman, Ruhama Hazanov and Yehudit Mensch, in Berlovitz 2003a: 52–79, 124–141, 142–169, 170–184 and 210–221.

(1) Stories from the "women's space"

The sociology of space teaches us that this word refers not only to material existence but also to a significant dimension of social organization and power relations in society (including the hierarchies created by inequalities of class, ethnicity, gender, etc.; see Urry 2004 and Blumen 2005). The kibbutz, by virtue of its socialist-Zionist mission, was meant to be an agricultural space organized in such a way as to sustain a life of physical labor grounded in the soil and the surrounding landscape, and to instantiate a social life of egalitarianism and mutuality. Instead, however, it was constructed from the start as a hierarchical gendered space that was split into center and periphery. Women, as one might expect, were stereotypically located in the peripheral region, working in services like the laundry, the kitchen and the clothing storeroom. And even if a woman did manage to worm her way into the "male space" or even to fulfill a central administrative role (such as managing the work roster) or agricultural task (in the cowshed, the chicken coop or the vegetable garden), her status and function would ever and again be peripheralized, so that she could never become an interesting enough element to take a place as a heroine in the showcase of kibbutz literature.

In order to familiarize ourselves with the gendered division of space in the kibbutz, and with the movements of kibbutz women across this divide, we must turn to kibbutz literature by women, which chose to deal precisely with those peripheral regions and their marginal subjects ("which hold no interest for the men," as Katznelson wrote in 1934[41]). Nevertheless, these writers pushed not only for the canonization of that subject but also for the canonization of their literary texts – that is, for kibbutz women no longer to be relegated to the framework of the sketch, the diary or the chronicle, but to take their rightful place in the belletristic poetic framework.

The most outstanding works to make this choice and to present this kind of writing are the stories and plays of Shulamit Bat Dori. Bat Dori made it her business to ring out the voice of the kibbutz woman for all to hear: her experiences, her roles, her designs and her dilemmas as a woman, a mother and a spouse, her values and her critical thoughts both about herself and about (male) kibbutz society. Bat Dori's writings present, first and foremost, women who are soberly aware of their inconsequential place in the kibbutz and their exclusion from its hegemonic leadership. Nevertheless, despite their frustrations and grievances, they remain imbued with the ideological consciousness of kibbutz members, and ultimately they reconcile themselves to the burdens and irritations of their everyday lives, not infrequently with affection.

41 In *Devar hapo'elet* 1(4) (above, note 36).

In a skit entitled "Warp and woof" [Sheti ve'erev], we meet Hannah, sitting in the clothes storeroom and mending a T-shirt to the sound of wild music: "So you're all disappointed. What? After a musical introduction like that, you'd surely hoped to see something more interesting, and all you have before you is an old-time woman kibbutz member, doing her job in the clothes storeroom" (Bat Dori 1980: 131). This kind of ironic self-deprecation recurs in the setting Bat Dori describes for another Hannah, this one working in the laundry: "The big tank was growling and moaning ... next to it hummed the electric wringer ... in fact, it seemed at that moment in the laundry that all the inert things were alive, while the only live creature was sitting inertly in a corner" ("Exclamation point and period" [Siman keri'ah unekudah], *ibid.*: 13).[42]

Nevertheless, even if these women figures in their peripheral spaces (the clothes storeroom, the laundry) seem to mock themselves by way of the men's "gaze" and to measure themselves continually against the "men's space," Bat Dori creates a "women's space" that is uniquely their own, one in which women, anxious or serene, sullen or joyful, straight-talking or pouring out their woes, come together to represent a collective biography of kibbutz women, one that also includes chapters (hard-bitten or heart-rending) on the relationships within the women's shared environs. Indeed, alongside the misunderstandings and quarrels that might be expected among them, there is also a great deal of mutual empowerment. In this "women's space," Bat Dori reminds us, it is far from obvious that the women will be close, and not every woman is always an object of friendship; but even so, when she does get some aid and support from the kibbutz surrounding, it will most likely come from the milieu of women that surrounds her.

Take, for example, the story "In the dark of the afternoon" (Be'afelulit she'ot hatzohorayim, 1948), which centers on Sarah, the woman in charge of the work roster. Sarah has held this position for years, enjoying the responsibility and power she has garnered, to the point that the community is her very self: It is "a living organism that had entered into her bones," "infiltrated her blood" and become her baby (Bat Dori 1980: 119), likened in her imagination to a young child clinging to its mother: "She held the farm, all of it, in her hands, as it swooned in the blazing late-summer heat ... feeling the heaviness of the craniums of fruit, drooping and wilting ... feeling the thirst of the tender shoots ... the desolation of a barren field crying out for the plow." But then her own little daughter dies suddenly of an illness for which she did not receive the proper care, and Sarah collapses, abandons her role and as though as a matter of course goes back to

42 The "live creature" was the laundress, whose robotic work with the machines obfuscated what was human about her, reducing her to an unidentified creature, perhaps living, perhaps not.

rejoin the "women's space." Only when she has done so does she come to a sober understanding that her ambition to excel in her communal role had drawn her away from fulfilling her role as a mother, and that to avoid being like all those other nervous mothers and burdening the kibbutz by demanding extra help, she had neglected her daughter's care and healing.

This tangle of maternal guilt, and the emotional crisis brought on by her having to choose between loyalty to the kibbutz and to motherhood, are understood wordlessly by just one other woman, who persists in coming to Sarah's room. Most of the other women have held themselves aloof from her ever since the early years of the kibbutz, when she was unbending in her insistence upon high work standards and wouldn't stoop to any kind of meeting with them that wasn't practical and efficient. Now Sarah is indifferent to those around her (including her spouse and older son), but the constant presence of the other woman in her dark, stuffy room, murmuring next to the bed from which Sarah refuses to rise, draws her out of her frozen state to try to open the window of her cabin to the light.

The murmuring voices of kibbutz women, channeled by Bat Dori into narrating their gray and grinding reality, again well up to audibility in her story "Its number is – six hundred and eighty-two" (Misparo – shesh me'ot shemonim ushtayim). This short story (1945), is included in Bat Dori's collection of short stories (1980). Here Bat Dori acquaints us with the kibbutz kitchen and with the woman, Hava, who is responsible for this irritable and testy machine that she must somehow feed, morning and evening, "an enormous body with three hundred heads." Bat Dori makes this kitchen the center of the world, checking in with it constantly, from predawn to midnight, in the crazed rhythm of the person who must keep to the schedule and tirelessly pursue "the fleeing hours of the day." In the midst of this volcanic hell of burning ovens, bubbling cauldrons and quarreling workers stands Hava ("like an embattled turret"), constantly battered by complaints, criticism, shouts, and spur-of-the-moment demands for additional orders and portions, all without enough staff to deal with them as she makes last-minute efforts to get what she needs.

Hava presents herself as "just one of the people," and as such she is obliged to respond to every request of the kibbutz leadership. So does she accede to the command that she take over managing the kitchen and tear herself away from the orchard. When she is asked why she didn't fight to stay where she was, she answers: "There was a need ... ultimately someone's also got to work in the kitchen ... after all, the kibbutz can't survive without it."

So, too, does she accede to the kibbutz secretary's request to have a young woman, a veteran of the partisans, stay overnight with her in her cabin, after a frantic and wearisome workday. Hava, exhausted, decides not to start a conversation with her guest, in an effort to calm herself with a few hours of much-needed rest.

However, the visitor has a hard time falling asleep, and the drowsy conversation that develops between them gradually makes clear to Hava the extent to which she serves as a role model and symbol of a pioneering woman to the young people of the labor movement. She may never get any positive feedback or even a good word for her work, but this chance guest, a partisan and Holocaust survivor who is the epitome of a heroine, proves to her just how much a random meeting of this kind has the potential to empower them both with a strength they have no idea they had. And so, after a sleepless night, with the coming of a pale and weary dawn, each of them goes back to her own uncertainties and hardships, but with the benefit of a mutual infusion of encouragement.

The British anthropologists Shirley and Edwin Ardener sought to demonstrate graphically what "women's space" is, by diagramming a model in which "the boundaries [of women's] culture and reality overlap, but are not wholly contained by, those of the *dominant (male) group*" (Showalter 1981: 200, referring to Ardener 1977: 3; emphasis in Showalter – YB). This model, which is meant to explain "both how [women] are perceived by the dominant group and how they perceive themselves and others" (*ibid.*), sketches two intersecting circles. The greater part of the "women's circle" overlaps the "men's circle," so that it is identified and dominated by it, but the residual crescent lies outside of the men's boundaries. Ardener called this the "wild zone" – wild, that is, from the men's point of view, so that even if, "spatially, experientially, or metaphysically" speaking, there is a women's culture functioning there, it doesn't exist for the men. As Showalter declares, it is this "wild zone" that is the address of feminist criticism; this is "the place for the revolutionary women's language, the language of everything that is repressed, and for the revolutionary women's writing," the place to "bring into being the symbolic weight of female consciousness, to make the invisible visible, to make the silent speak" (Showalter 1981: 201).

The "women's space" in the kibbutz, too, is transformed from invisibility to visibility and from silence to speech only when written and narrated by the women writers of the kibbutzim. And even then, this has required the intervention of feminist research, given that the partial and biased depiction of the pioneering woman to be found in the narrative fiction of male kibbutz writers was for so many years the only one to be transmitted and read. Even if women figured in the novels and short stories of Natan Bistritzky, Yehuda Yaari, Reichenstein and Maletz, these male writers could serve as their "mouth" or "voice" only to the extent of their own understanding and interpretation, stamped as it was by the stereotypical "monster/angel" polarity (Gilbert and Gubar 1976: 16–27).

Thus, with the addition of women writers – the more so as full-fledged authors – to Israel's cultural corpus in general and to that created by the pioneers before the establishment of the state in particular, the kibbutz narrative has

become more charged, multi-layered and comprehensive. To read women authors like Bat Dori, Levine, Gurfein, Mensch and others is to broaden the boundaries of that narrative by bringing in a different set of experiences and perceptions – those of the women in the kibbutzim.

(2) The demythification of the pioneering male hero

The heroine in Bat Dori's stories and plays is a self-aware woman, attuned to her surroundings, and even if her life is identified and dominated by the male space, she does not hold herself back from analyzing, critiquing and even protesting against what is said and done in it (see, for example, the harsh words that Hannah, the woman in charge of the laundry, has for the deceptive masculinity of Gabriel, the kibbutz's writer; Bat Dori 1980: 36–46). Indeed, what distinguishes Bat Dori's writings, and those of the other kibbutz women writers, is their soberly reflective narrative realism, which often imbues them with a melancholy spirit while shooting critical darts between the lines.

The women's narrative reality, as opposed to that of the men, is free of rhetorical pathos and of any effort to tell the story of settling the land as a larger-than-life myth. As we saw above, this narrative, notwithstanding its focus on the gray and Sisyphean quality of that reality, has no pretensions to heroism of the "it is good to die for our country" or "there's no conquering the top of the rock without a grave on the slope" variety.[43] Instead, we have the self-deprecating apologetics of the poet Rachel: "One tree I planted on the way ... one narrow path to my feet yields" (Rachel, "To my land," in Bluwstein 1974). We thus find that the identification of the women's writing with the dominant male culture not only does not signal mimicry or replication; it engenders a creative alternative of its own, which lies not in the overlapping area of those parallel, intersecting circles, but in the "wild zone." Or to put it another way, the authentic experience of women in the kibbutz, expressed by "shed[ding] for you, a secret tear to see the shabby clothes you wear" (*ibid.*) rather than by offering "in praise, heroic deeds" (*ibid.*), must necessarily challenge or diminish the heroic myth of settling the land, as we shall

43 The phrase "It is good to die for our country" was said to have been uttered by Joseph Trumpeldor as he lay dying of his wounds in the battle for Tel Hai in 1920; "There's no conquering the top of the rock without a grave on the slope" comes from a poem by Shlomo Sokolsky commemorating Shlomo Ben Yosef, who was hung by the British Mandate authorities in 1938 for his role in a revenge attack upon Arabs. In the periods leading up to and following the establishment of the state, both quotes were widely invoked in the educational effort to inculcate a sense of patriotism in the country's young people. (Translator)

soon see. This narrative realism is particularly distinctive of Emma Levine's *Time of tents*.

Time of tents is the story of an ideological journey – the journey of a pioneering group on its way to becoming a kibbutz, roaming from place to place as a "labor collective" while waiting to be allocated land for settlement, and meanwhile endeavoring to clarify to itself all the basic questions relating to the shape its members' lives will take in this strange and alienating land. First and foremost, they have to work out the nature and significance of the collective that they are meant to be creating within the enigmatic framework of the "group," on the basis of labor movement values and a "togetherness" of which they have no prior experience, within a rather homogeneous company of young men and women who are all similarly lacking in experience and knowledge. Levine's dwelling on these questions more or less dictates that her novel will be an experimental one of reflection and inquiry, a character that comes to expression both in the book's content and in its formal poetic structure.

A distinctive and foundational structure in the novel is that of the circle, which is revealed to the group one day as they sit down together, seemingly at random, and discover that they are in the round. In this constitutive scene, they come to consciousness of the circular form and how they are constructed by its symbolism and significance. Haltingly, they try to formulate the meaning of their "togetherness":

> They all sat down in a circle. There are no angles in a circle, and no one sitting in a corner. The circle is a symbol. A quiet voice said from a corner: "Right now, we have begun to live. *The bodies* that are meant to create the kibbutz *have not all come together properly yet. We'll have to wait a little longer.* We're just starting to live." Avraham spread his arms as though to embrace the whole circle ... Miriam said: "The opposite! *There's no equality yet? Let there be equality!*" ... "*We can't build ourselves on declarations!*" ... Dina's fingers quivered in the air. ... "*My father yelled 'God!' ... and slapped me for serving my own Messiah*" ... "I would like," Shlomke was heard to say ... "*Not to have anything at all of my own.*" (Levine 1949: 146–147; emphasis in the original – YB)

The circle thus formed, tentatively and hesitantly, goes on to stamp its mark on the entire novel, developing the plot-line of the wandering kibbutz as a collective hero seeking out the group's practical, daily "communality." In Levine's novel, the questions are raised and the answers given by the whole group, including its pioneering women members, since gender demarcation is more restrained in the social non-hierarchy of which she relates. Levine, with her radical labor-movement consciousness – and in contrast to the male writers of the Hashomer Hatza'ir movement – takes the women members out of the group's margins and places them alongside the men at the center of the plot, their equals in dominant

presence and communal activity (the characters of Guste, Dina and Miram are good examples). In other words, the women in the group, like the men, are individual characters in their own right, but they are simultaneously capable of representing, to varying extents, the new prototype of the female pioneer – a trait not often found in novels by the movement's male writers. To be sure, the female characters in novels by male writer-pioneers are often portrayed as women of strong opinions, who had chosen to leave their homes and families to take their own ideological path in life, over the opposition of their worried and disapproving parents. Nevertheless, upon arriving in the land, these sturdy women found themselves not only subordinated in their pioneering activities to those of their male comrades, but also designated by the latter to serve their own needs and those of their enterprise, first and foremost as the "national womb" expected to ensure their mission's continuity (see, e. g., Bistritzky 1926: 167, 80, 180–181, 202).

It goes without saying that in Levine's novel, the female pioneers, the "new women," rebel against the masculinization of the kibbutz project and, in their own quiet, restrained way, make known their own views and their disagreements with the male consensus. Thus, for example, the characters Dina and Miriam insist upon retaining control of their own bodies. Dina rejects the dictate of Nahum, her partner, to bring children into the world, as a compensation for the loss of his dream of becoming an artist. When, setting his violin down in a fury, he asks her, "How many children shall we have," she answers him bluntly, "We won't," and she explains: "We haven't got enough yet for ourselves ... It would be irresponsible" (Levine 1949: 252). This rational, responsible answer suddenly exposes the extent to which Nahum, adored and esteemed as he is by all, has let down both the group and the woman at his side, in insisting like a domineering "patriarch" that she satisfy his immediate demand to raise a child in the transient circumstances of the "time of tents." Dina, meanwhile, not only resists his high-handedness but also assumes the authority to block his egoistic whims and restore things to balance. Nahum, astonished by this unanticipated opposition, readies his darts to hurt and humble her, but Dina is unrelenting and, despite her own misery, unforgiving. She closes up into herself and shuts herself off from him for days.

Miriam, too, is not quick to respond to Eliyahu's eager advances toward her, especially when he tries to stake a claim to her as though he could take it for granted. Thus, when he demands that she wear the dress he likes every day, she answers: "On Friday, I'll get a dress from the common stock and wear it, and you'll like it because I'm wearing it ... and not the other way around." And when he insists that she not cut off her braids (despite the difficulty of keeping them clean), she reminds him forthrightly: "Do *I* have the right to decide or not? You're not in charge of me!" (*ibid.*: 242–254; 198).

Indeed, the voices of the pioneering women, diverging as they do from the male consensus, increasingly penetrate Levine's novel not only on the gender level, but also on the national one. Thus, one woman, cuddling her "Hebrew" infant, expresses her desire nevertheless to murmur her maternal blandishments to him not in the nation's Hebrew tongue, but in the "language of exile" (Yiddish); how can she speak them in the language of the Bible, when "all those lovely things" that she wants to tell him were "hidden away by the writers of Scripture, because they were men"? The same is true for Jewish–Arab relations, as one of the women members of the group feels moved to thank the Arab neighbor who has saved her and her comrades from a brush fire. While they, the men, jeer at him in their fanatic devotion to the Hebrew national movement, rejecting his help – "That outstretched hand is accursed!" – she, the woman, prays for the day when they may nevertheless "create something" good here: "neighborly relations, perhaps" (*ibid.*: 320; 112).

The broad space granted by Levine to the subversive expressions of her women pioneers enhances the significance of her own choice, as expressed in her efforts, conscious or not, to undermine the poetics propagated by the men. Gershon Shaked, in his chapter "The Cry of Revolution," asserts that the movement for establishing pioneering settlements in Palestine, which spurred the third *'aliyah*, saw the socialist revolution and the Zionist revolution as two sides of the same earthquake that had rocked the Jewish people with Europe's collapse in World War I, sending large parts of it in mass emigrations across the seas – among other places, to Palestine. In Shaked's opinion, it is understandable that this traumatic but promising "revolutionary experience" was seen "not merely as a social revolution," but as an "ecstatic" one (Shaked 1988: 42; Kurzweil 1966: 15).

This visionary ecstasy was absorbed, to one degree or another, into the works of the kibbutz authors as well, so that alongside their determination to narrate and document the real substance of kibbutz life as it was, they also made use of linguistic and rhetorical means to create emotional, ecstatic scenes that hoisted the drab, weary everyday lives of the pioneers, and their struggles with suffering and loss, to the level of meta-realistic, transcendental phenomena, which as it were had the power to explain the incredible by means of symbols, rites and myths. Yehuda Yaari, in his novel *Like glittering light* (Ke'or yahel), actually gives the name Tel Meir – "Shining Hill" – to the spot where his pioneers have settled, likening it to a "temple" of light in a murky vale (Yaari 1945: 202, 143, 155), where the dazed young settlers envision themselves as prophets shouldering their hoes, sanctifying themselves for a Zionist national ascension by means of affliction unto death.

A similarly mystical pioneering experience of suspension between construction and destruction in the course of the effort to build up a group dynamic enough to realize the dream is served up, with even greater mythic intensity, in Bistritzky's novel *Days and nights* (Yamim veleilot). In it, in language redolent with scriptural allusions and biblical pathos, the socialist-Zionist rites and symbols of the kibbutz are observed with the fervor of a messianic mission oscillating between affliction and sacrifice, purification and cleansing, on the model of Jesus of Nazareth (Bistritzky 1926: 212).

In neither of these novels is there any room for the pioneering woman in this male ecstatic mystical experience, nor does she figure symbolically as a prophetess or apostle, or in any other ritual or cultic role. The pioneering enterprise, as a metaphysical, religious sacrament, was demarcated and set aside for men alone, and as such, by their very gender, only they could approach the spiritual and transcendental mystery whose miraculous power somehow worked the incomprehensible wonder of the upbuilding of both people and land. Just as in the space of Jewish Orthodoxy women are pushed into an enclosure at the back of the synagogue in order to distance them from the holy ark and the ritual center, so it was here as well. In their novels, the budding representatives of the early kibbutzim created, from the ground up, an excluded "women's section" of their own (as though they had never heard of the basic principles of socialism).

No wonder, then, that Levine rejected these literary models. She rejected them because of their chauvinistic treatment of the image and status of women in the society of the early kibbutzim, and because of their exploitation of quasi-religious mystical mechanisms (with all their inherent symbolic-ritual pathos) for the purpose of mythical empowerment of the male.[44] In so doing, she seems to have been trying to demystify the metaphysical kibbutz narrative, to bring it down to earth and dissolve the "earth/heaven synthesis" (see Ofrat 1980: 78–80). By this poetic act of demythification of the kibbutz project, and with it of the "new man" (the male pioneer), Levine goes back to make her own connection with the land, taking the story of the Exodus from Egypt as the archetype against which to measure the journeying of the little commune, the *kevutzah*.[45]

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44 See also the warning of Meir Yaari, one of the leaders of Hashomer Hatza'ir, in his 1923 article "Disconnected symbols."

45 The story is structured as a journey advancing by way of the conjuncture of scenes that stand in their own right, without necessarily evolving from one to the next. Feminist research has shown this type of modular, mosaic-like structure to be more characteristic of women (while the linear structure is more characteristically male). Showalter (1986) has compared this type of writing to "piecing" a quilt.

(3) Portrait of the pioneering woman as a Bildungsroman

In the literary arguments that took place in the kibbutz, one of the questions that was debated was whether kibbutz writers must persist in writing only about the kibbutz, or whether one might broaden the scope and draw from other life surroundings as well. It was none other than the women writers who advocated for focusing on the kibbutz, for its fecund and fascinating power. Thus, Gittel Mishkovsky asserted that "our lives [in the kibbutz] are an unstoppable source of true experiences," while Miriam Singer declared that the encounter with the kibbutz had roused her to an unquenchable creative flow: "Life was rich, and I wrote ... I wrote in the nights; I wrote in the vineyard and in the midst of my workday" (Mishkovsky 1943: 15; Singer 1956: 52–53).

At the same time, the women writers felt liberated enough to freely choose narrative genres that did not revolve around the kibbutz and did not represent the individual along with the group, breaking away from these themes into narratives that were drawn not from life in Palestine but from the "exilic" past and their own personal biographical stories. This "diversion" from the poetic consensus prevailing in the kibbutz reappeared among women writers who turned to the genre of the *Bildungsroman* – the coming-of-age narrative – which served them as a laboratory for examining the emergence, development and initiation of the figure of the pioneering woman as a social-cultural product of socialist Zionism.[46] By way of this kind of writing, they were able to analyze and reflect upon the nature of that figure, her distinguishing marks, how she expressed herself and how she served as a model for women in the labor settlements. Three novels of the *Bildungsroman* genre revolving around pioneering women were published after the establishment of the state: Sarah Gluzman's *Walls of iron* (Ḥomot habarzel, 1940), Yehudit Mensch's *Youth* and Rivka Gurfein's *Stars over the garden* (Kokhavim me'al hagan, 1964), while Alper's *Throes of revolution* and Gluzman's *To the border* (El hagevul, 1938) were published during the Mandate period.

To be sure, the *Bildungsroman* is essentially a genre that revolves around "manhood"; its plot lines steer a developmental model that sets before the youthful initiate an "ideal of manhood" as he moves toward formulating his own identity and sense of belonging.[47] According to the genre's narrative convention, the

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46 Another novel that departed from the literary consensus in the kibbutz was Ruhama Hazanov's *Fences* (Gederot, 1950).

47 The *Bildungsroman* developed as a popular type of narrative in Germany at the end of the eighteenth century, though it was only defined and named as a genre at the end of the nineteenth century by the philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey, who based his poetic model on Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (The apprenticeship of Wilhelm Meister, 1795).

young man's journey of maturation toward his own "selfhood" begins in earnest only once he has made his way into the wide world, casting off his protective family ties, confronting unfamiliar and threatening situations and undergoing various intellectual, moral, professional, romantic and sexual trials in his course of self-discovery (Kurzweil 1973). As for the young woman, the course of her initiation is truncated almost before it begins, leaving her only to wake up and open her eyes like Sleeping Beauty to the man who will "redeem" her by her marriage to him. All this brings her, of course, only to a reality burdened with obligation to home, family and husband, with no chance of advancing or enhancing her own individual "self" (Rosowski 1983).

The coming-of-age novels produced by kibbutz women writers, however, manifest a different type of female journey: the journey of a woman who would become a pioneer, whose narrative, in seeking her "self" as a socialist Zionist, paralleled that of the male initiate. To be sure, the life paths of heroes like Alper's Batya (*Throes of revolution*), Mensch's Doreen (*Youth*) and Gurfein's Rachel (*Stars over the garden*) differ greatly from one another, presenting us with inimitable and distinctive portraits. Nevertheless, their process of maturation takes place in a shared historical, social and ideological context – that of World War I in Europe, the Communist revolution in Russia and the pogroms that scourged east European Jewish communities of the period. That is: In the harsh conditions of a world descending toward chaos, the budding woman pioneer, as a child and a young girl, must confront a series of trials and tribulations and channel them toward establishing her own individual identity and way of thinking.

The identity thus established presents us with an open-minded, curious young woman, attuned to the sweeping ideological discourses of the time, of socialism, Zionism and women's suffrage, with which she contends in the framework of youth movements and underground organizations. Her ambition to acquire an education, both general and professional, simultaneously breaks her subjection to Jewish culture's traditional, accepted codes where it comes to women, leading her, as in the male apprenticeship model, to shake off the ties of home and family and set off to seek herself in her own ways. These paths take her on a voyage of self-discovery as a woman (her body and sexuality), of clarifying her place in society and of defining her identity and sense of belonging as a "new Hebrew woman" in Eretz Israel. It goes without saying that this course of seeking and discovery is strewn with obstacles, with times of failure and embarrassment, searching and false starts, and with trials on the spiritual, creative, romantic-sexual and, as we have seen, ideological-political levels.

However, the image of an independent, active woman pioneer[48] fades with her arrival in Palestine, falling off even in the works of the kibbutz women writers. The dream of a Zionist revolution for women – along with that of the Zionist social revolution – appears to have ended abruptly as they encountered the reality of a labor movement dominated by men that hastened to exclude women as full and equal partners, both at work and in the leadership. This rude awakening came to expression in a similar outcome in all the coming-of-age stories by kibbutz women – one of silence, or, basically, of no outcome. Thus, if the conventional "ending" of a *Bildungsroman* is that of the hero realizing his goal,[49] so that the pioneering *Bildungsroman* – whether it tells of a man or of a woman – would be expected to conclude with the hero's arrival in Eretz Israel, to continue working toward the dreamt-of creation of a "new man" and a new society (as in Yaari's *Like glittering light*) – that doesn't happen in the novels by women. The pioneering women writers seem to refuse the ending that is set up for them, and in all their coming-of-age novels, that ending is cut off. The novel's plot channels the woman to initiate along the expected course of adventure, struggle, discovery and disappointment, but when she finally overcomes all these and manages to get on the boat that will bring her to Palestine – the story ends. The women's apprenticeship narratives never cross the sea; they never arrive in Eretz Israel and never tell of their heroine's self-fulfillment and fulfillment of her goals in the promised land (Berlovitz 2001).

The question, then, is why these "apprenticeship journeys" end in contravention of the rules of the genre. In the eyes of the women writers, did arrival in Eretz Israel represent a "fall" for the woman pioneer, rather than her "rise" (*'aliyah*)? After all, these novels might have been expected to represent a pioneering woman's utopia, not only epitomizing the model of a pioneering woman, with all her superior qualities as a visionary and activist, an enlightened laborer, a leader and a woman of the people, but also tracing the stages of her emergence where nothing like her had existed, and how she had succeeded in breaking out

48 See, for example, the novels of Alper and Gurfein, in which the female characters of Batya, an engineering student, and Rachel, completing her studies in the faculty of agriculture, stand out as undeclared leaders of the movement's organizations in the Diaspora.

49 Kurzweil (1973) defines an apprenticeship narrative in which the hero fulfills his goals as a *Bildungsroman*, and one in which the story ends without success or in the hero's failure as a "development novel."

of the oppressive obscurantism of Jewish society in the Diaspora to become a "new woman."[50]

Beyond that, these novels should have served as a kind of testament of the women's labor tradition in Palestine – a testament left by the generation of the mothers, who experienced and tested this model with their own bodies and souls, to be entrusted and handed down to the daughters' generation for imitation and appropriation. However, as we have seen, they chose instead to do without the "happy end" of fulfillment of the dream of arrival in the land. As it were, they instead cried out in protest: Why ever should we go on to tell the story of the awful gap between the dream of the pioneering woman and its collapse in the reality that we encountered? Why ever should we go on to tell the woman's story, in the face of her betrayal and humiliation at the hands of her male pioneering comrade? Together, back in the old country, they had woven the dream of a life of equality and brotherhood,[51] but he had denied that covenant upon their arrival in the new land, leaving her, abandoned and frustrated, to carry on nevertheless with making her contribution to the hierarchical setting that had arisen in the settlements, in the kibbutzim as well.

Conclusion

In this article, I have sought to examine the writing by women that developed in the kibbutzim in the pre-state period, with its features and distinctive marks, within the literary context of the Jewish labor-movement sector in Mandatory Palestine. The texts (canonic and non-canonic) that stood before me were written mainly in the formative years of the state-in-the-making, between 1920 and 1948. The conclusions drawn from this study are as follows:

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50 See, for example, the coming-of-age story of Dina in Levine's *Time of tents*. Dina struggles against an oppressive father who not only forbids her to join "the movement" but imprisons her for months on end. Taking nothing with her and bidding no farewells, she succeeds in escaping and coming to Eretz Israel with the members of her *hakhsharah*, with whom she has been preparing to create a new pioneering settlement.

51 All the coming-of-age stories written by women tell of the gender equality that had prevailed in the framework of the movement in the Diaspora. Thus, Mensch's *Youth* (1958: 167–173) describes sensitive Doreen's struggles to meet the demands of physical labor, while her friends, both female and male, try in every way to support her, urging her on, teaching her and strengthening her. For example, in a scene where they go out of town to excavate, Doreen succeeds, with their help, in doing her share of the digging and pushing a wheelbarrow loaded with earth.

A. Creative works by women persisted in being written in this period, despite the restrictive conditions that might have thwarted and silenced them, such as:

1. The expectation of a laboring woman, mother and kibbutz member was that she devote herself entirely to the small kibbutz community to which she was duty-bound, leaving no time or place for herself.
2. The secondary, marginal place of women in Jewish society in the Diaspora had prevented them from gaining an elementary education in Hebrew culture and language, so that they began without the basic tools required to realize their ambition to write in Hebrew.
3. The literary expressions of kibbutz women evoked no interest among the labor movement's literary leaders, who gave them no support and didn't see them as partners in their literary endeavors.
4. The women leaders of the labor movement, too, especially those involved in the journalistic and literary media, resisted the efforts of would-be women prose writers, on account of their affinity for the male-dominated poetic ideology that advocated the production of a democratized "everyman's" – and, consequently, every woman's – writing. While this policy of "popular" writing generated a large population of women writers and readers, it also blocked any efforts on their part to publish elitist writings. Thus, if belletristic writings by kibbutz women did manage to be written, and even to find ways of gaining public notice in the society of the *yishuv*, this must be seen as a significant female and artistic accomplishment.

B. Belletristic writing by kibbutz women in the Mandate period emerged as a distinctive literature in its own right, marked both by its voice and by what it had to say. Despite the exclusion of these works and their writers from the realm of male literary endeavor, not only did they not bow meekly to that endeavor; they rejected any possibility of imitation or slavish adherence to it. Even when their characters turn out, not infrequently, to be central figures in the kibbutz, such as the woman in charge of the work roster or of the dining hall, they insist on using them to highlight the marginal milieu inhabited by women. Thus, by their means, we are introduced to situations from the world of women in the kibbutz, to which we would never have been exposed without them.

C. The literature written by women in the kibbutzim had the ability to represent not only the place of woman in the collective (over against their interiorized world), but also her attitudes toward the collective; that is, toward the male as the builder of a society, a people and a country, and toward his mythification and that of his endeavor. That literature demonstrates once more how its own marginality and inferior position could be manifested as power and strength, in diminishing the

mythification of the male and posing the image of the new woman as an alternative. For so does it give form to the ultimate pioneering woman whom the pioneering male writer, so caught up with his own self-representation as the "new man," could not be bothered to represent; and so does it mark out and develop a character of its own – as a dual-voiced literature, at once covert and overtly protesting, deploying a realistic, confessional style in the struggle between clenched teeth and melancholy, and a literary structure organized on the basis of a mosaic plot pattern. So does it formulate its own, female ethos of living in the land, wielding a kind of female biblical archetype to lend significance to the bond between the pioneering settler and the earth she trod, from which the male pioneer, by dint of his own myths, had tried to uncouple her.

Lesley Hazleton (1977), in her chapter "Zionism and manhood," discussed an additional element in the male pioneer's conception of his exclusive position in the Zionist revival – that of his erotic appropriation of it. Isaiah's prophecy of consolation (well known, of course, to the Bible-toting pioneers) describes the return to the promised land as an act of sexual possession: "Nevermore shall you be called 'Forsaken,' nor shall your land be called "Desolate" ... As a youth espouses a maiden, your sons shall espouse you" (Is. 62:4–5; the Hebrew word *ba'al*, rendered "espoused" in the NJPS translation, connotes both material and sexual possession as well as taking a woman in marriage). On this basis, Hazleton argued that psychoanalytic historian Jay Gonen (1975) was on firm ground in representing the encounter between the pioneers and the land as Oedipal in nature, and the Zionist revival as founded upon the Oedipus/Jocasta archetype of the lost son wedding his mother. Hazleton protested against this archetype. "What role was there for women in this scenario of sons and fathers fertilizing the motherland?" she asked; and furthermore, "while Zion played Jocasta to the male pioneers' Oedipus ... What archetypical images could it arouse in a woman's mind?" (Hazleton 1977: 93).

It goes without saying that the present study has also endeavored to respond to the questions posed by Hazleton and to direct her attention, as it were, to the documentary, memoiristic and literary writings produced by pioneering women. Though composed before the establishment of the state, those writings were consigned to oblivion, from the point of view of public and scholarly awareness of them and of their absence from the textbooks and historiographies of Israeli literature.

D. If Hazleton had been aware of the literary productions of pioneering women, she would also have become aware of a further, different and dominant bond that developed between the pioneering woman and "mother earth" – a bond constituted not according to the Freudian Oedipal theory, but along the lines

of Nancy Chodorow's theory of the "reproduction of mothering." According to Chodorow, children's female or male self-consciousness takes shape not over against the mother's female identity (as Dorothy Dinnerstein would have it), but within the mother's consciousness over against the sex of her children. Mothers tend to experience their daughters as resembling them, and so they produce and reproduce them as similar to themselves, in their feelings, their bodies, their femininity and their motherhood. Thus, if the son's sense of himself is clarified by means of individuation, separation and an earlier dissolution of the symbiotic bond with the mother, the girl's continuing bond and intimate identification with the mother affirm more fluid borders to her sense of a distinct, independent "self."[52]

These states of consciousness are expressed as well in the scheme of images relating to "mother earth." The male pioneer's bonds with her – symbolized as a young woman, a bride or a birthing woman – are always characterized by a demarcation that emphasizes his difference from and superiority over her.[53] The pioneering woman, by contrast, affiliates herself with the land out of a sense of intimate, mother–daughter identification, not infrequently as a substitute for her relationship with her biological mother (see Ratok 1989), in the sense of seeing herself as providing support and succor to a mother who is old, emaciated and poor.[54] At the same time, this symbiotic bond is so mutual that it is sometimes not the mother who reproduces her image in the daughter, but the pioneering woman who reproduces herself in Mother Earth; thus, in Bat Dori's "In the dark of the afternoon," Sarah, manager of the work roster, enfolds the "place" (the kibbutz)

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52 According to Chodorow, it is the mother who takes care to push her sons away from her at an early stage, thus enabling them to develop the borders of their "selves" and entrench their identity as men, belonging to a different category from herself. On this see Brunner 1983 and Friedman 1996.

53 "The land of Nuris! Is that not the name of a bride? ... Like a bridegroom giving himself over into the bosom of his bride." See Tsur 1988: 33–34. The Nuris bloc – so called by its Arabic name – was purchased for settlement with the support of the Jewish National Fund in 1920. In his poem "On the Hills of Sheikh Abrek," Alexander Penn wrote: "O land, my land / merciful unto my death ... / I have consecrated thee unto me with blood / that ran scarlet and then was stilled." In another poem by Avigdor Hameiri, "In the Light of the Beginning," the speaker implores: "Give me your body: O suffering, human earth / Perhaps by you I'll beget the King Messiah."

54 See, for example, the poems in Rachel Bluwstein's "Mother Earth" cycle, in which the land is repeatedly characterized as an old, sad, emaciated woman ("O my land, why / is your visage so wasted and distressed?"). Batya the engineer in Alper's *Throes of revolution* visualizes herself as a woman wandering hesitantly in the fields, with old mother earth giving her strength and encouragement.

like a babe in her bosom, while Alper's (1944a) Sarah Efrat is as proud of her vegetable garden as of a baby in its cradle: "Two high hills, and the garden as though rocking in its cradle between them."

The writing women of the kibbutzim might best be represented not by the Greek Oedipus/Jocasta archetype, but by the biblical archetype of Ruth and Naomi. The two women reproduce each other not only as survivors, but also as fecund and fecundating women. Not for naught is it said that "a son is born to Naomi" (Ruth 4:17) and not to Ruth, who actually birthed him; for by way of Ruth, the woman pioneer, the old, desolate mother, Naomi ("I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty" – Ruth 1:21) – Mother Earth – is "fertilized" and even bears a first fruit. According to the literature produced by women "writing the kibbutz" in the pre-state period, the pioneering woman has a "place" and a "vision" of her own on the national scene. She, too, makes the people and the land bloom; she, too, is well capable of giving them expression and voice, and by doing so she not only creates an alternative to the mastering, conquering male pioneer, but also loosens his exclusive hold upon the kibbutz narrative.

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