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## **Nationalization of Motherhood and Stretching the Boundaries of Motherhood:**

### ***Shelihot Aliyah* and Evacuees in Eretz Israel in the 1940s\***

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*This article was written when I stayed at Brandeis University, as a Hadassah-Brandeis Institute Scholar-in-Residence, summer 2007. I would like to thank Prof. Shulamit Reinharz, Prof. Sylvia Barack Fishman and the HBI research center for their generous support.*

In this paper, I will be examining the perceptions of motherhood, as they developed during the late 1940s – in the midst of the national struggle for independence. I will be relying on two case studies where mothers, who were “recruited” by the emerging nation, were temporarily separated from their children. The first case concerns women who were called to help in Jewish refugee camps in Europe after the Holocaust. While on their mission, these mothers temporarily left their own children. The second case treats mothers who were not evacuated with their children from their settlements during the War of Independence and remained at the front line.

These situations led to the development of new perceptions about women and motherhood, which were shaped and matured throughout the national struggle for independence. This paper focuses on the shaping of these perceptions and the way they were apprehended by mothers and society.

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This article was translated by Fern Seckbach.

I would like to thank Prof. Margalit Shilo and Dr. Yael Guter for their important comments

Analysis of the test cases adds yet another element to the research discussion dealing with changing representations of motherhood deriving from a variety of reasons, and the idealization of motherhood during emergency circumstances.

## **Motherhood, Nationalism, and Zionism**

### ***Motherhood***

Motherhood, which is currently defined as a way of thinking as well as a discipline worthy of study, has stimulated great interest over the course of history, and is the focus of contemporary sociopolitical debates.<sup>1</sup> In recent years there has been a noticeable continuous growing interest in the history of motherhood, spotlighting the perceptions of motherhood and their complexity.<sup>2</sup>

The prevailing opinion in research today is that perceptions of motherhood are a derivative of social and gender construction and not only a biological issue. This means that there are diverse social and historical variations of motherhood, and that the meaning of motherhood changes over time.<sup>3</sup> In ethnically and socio-economically diverse communities, differing cultural and material conditions have influenced the maternal perceptions, as well as religion, ethnic identity, modernization and urbanization.<sup>4</sup> Women's personalities and their origins also affected the formation of motherhood perception, as well as the symbolization of motherhood and the images linked to it.<sup>5</sup> In many societies perceptions exist about "good motherhood," described as caring, unselfishly for the children, whereas "bad motherhood" is perceived as selfish and neglecting. These myths and ideologies do not necessarily reflect reality, but are capable of influencing society's perception of motherhood and the mother's own self-perception. In reality tension exists between individual feminine experience and motherhood as a symbol.<sup>6</sup>

Historical emergency situations, such as war, offers a rare opportunity for reconstructing gender roles anew, forming new perceptions of motherhood.<sup>7</sup> In this article I will present a new perception of motherhood that was shaped and formed alongside the Jewish traditional model, while also challenged by it. This article aims to contribute to the understanding of the social basis of motherhood, by creating a firm basis to this approach.

### ***The Mother in Traditional Jewish Society***

Judaism, like other religions, is not only a religion but also an ideological way of life affecting broad registers of life, including Motherhood.<sup>8</sup> Judaism assiduously maintained separation between the roles of women and those of men and assigned a different status to each sex. Traditional Jewish society was a patriarchal one, where men took the lead in both family and community, whereas the home was considered the realm of women. The traditional place of the woman was in the bosom of her family – a social destiny that also had a religious basis. The Jewish community stressed the value of the woman as the mother who gives birth and raises the children. The ideal Jewish mother, is devoted to her children while muting her own existence.<sup>9</sup>

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, European Jewish society experienced an upheaval. In the wake of a combination of economic problems and the rise of anti-Semitism, the spread of education and secularization, radical movements developed in the Jewish community, and women began to fill public positions.<sup>10</sup>

In her studies Paula Hyman asserts that women were an integral part of the changing of Jewish society in Europe. Social changes originating in massive immigration, exposure to education, emancipation and modernization, the psychological theories that developed in the twentieth century, as well as the emerging of feminism, influenced Jewish women. They were exposed to a new,

challenging world, and fresh representations of motherhood began to appear alongside the stereotypical image of the “yiddishe mama.”<sup>11</sup> The mothers presented below came from this background and their new perceptions were the direct outcome of these changes.

### ***Motherhood and Nationalism***

Many studies deal with the links between gender, motherhood, and nationalism, and from them we learn that the redefinition of motherhood is particularly significant in a period of national revival.<sup>12</sup> Thus, as argued by Mary Nash, to understand the shaping of feminine identity one must be familiar with the national context and the characteristics of national-cultural identity.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the different types of “nationalism,” and in spite of the individual perceptions of women, there is great similarity in the way nationalism fashions motherhood. The national discourse emphasized the important role of women by iconising them as a national symbol insuring the continued existence of the nation and preservation of its honor.<sup>14</sup> Discernible, therefore, in national societies is the construction of the woman as mother-of-the-nation, responsible for its physical, cultural, and social development.<sup>15</sup> In a new nation, the women who were identified with motherhood passed on to their children the new socio-national function.<sup>16</sup> According to George Mosse, when a nation is born, women are expected to give birth to the nation’s children. While the men are transformed and become “new men,” the women retain in their traditional role.<sup>17</sup> And yet, a rise in the importance of motherhood leads to a reevaluation of the woman in the new national society, even if her role did not change.<sup>18</sup>

### ***Gender and Motherhood in Yishuv Society in Palestine***

To understand the experience and hesitations of the mothers in this article, one must understand the social context in which they operated.<sup>19</sup> Societies and national

movements that aspired to a new social order strove to create a “new man” as well as a “new woman”, a view that was also adopted by Zionism. Apart from striving for the return of the Jewish People to Palestine (the Jewish name for Palestine was *Eretz Israel*), Zionism also tried to create a new society and a “new man,” with masculine characteristics, the opposite of the “effeminate” Diaspora Jew.<sup>20</sup> The new Zionist society in Palestine (called in brief here “*Yishuv* society”) that took shape during the years of British rule (1918–1948) sought ways to put into effect social and nationalist aspirations. This society also strove to establish new gender relations and advocated abandonment of the Diaspora and the traditional Diaspora way of life.<sup>21</sup>

*Yishuv* society consisted of immigrants, mostly European families, working towards political revival and modern life in Palestine.<sup>22</sup> The issue of immigration highly influenced the perception of motherhood.<sup>23</sup> The background of the immigrants coming to the country was traditional, but also influenced by secular education and socialist movements. Despite believing in socialistic ideas and an aspiration for equality between the sexes, *Yishuv* society was mainly patriarchal in its orientation towards the family.<sup>24</sup> Zionism, which sought to cut itself off from its Jewish sources, continued to act in accordance with the traditional concept that esteemed the perception of the mother as the basis of family and of society.<sup>25</sup>

The family in the *Yishuv* nurtured the traditional patterns where women were charged with raising children. They were valued in public as equals contributing to the collective goal of building a nation, so motherhood in the *Yishuv* was a private endeavor with national collective significance. Most of the women who immigrated to Palestine came from traditional Jewish society, and were above all wives and mothers with total responsibility for their family's needs.<sup>26</sup> However, Pioneer women came to Palestine out of national-Zionist motives, eager to participate in the rebuilding of the

land. Their dream was to become part of a new socialist society, in which women would have a place equal to that of men.<sup>27</sup> They demanded equal rights and duties and were willing to take part in any kind of work. Yet the women who immigrated to Palestine encountered procedures that limited their possibilities.

National identity and traditional individual identity centered around motherhood combining to produce the New Hebrew Woman and Mother in Palestine.<sup>28</sup> As we will see later, both identities played an important role in a time of national revival. The dilemma of the New Hebrew Mothers was therefore in the constant pull between those identities.

As Paula Hyman demonstrates in her studies, even Jewish immigrant women who emigrated from Europe to the United States also grappled with the conflict between their traditional identity and the new reality.<sup>29</sup> But the centrality of the national ideology in Palestine during the 1940s intensified the conflict that raged not only between tradition and modernization but also between the national-feminine identity and national motherhood leading to complex constructions of motherhood.

## **Sources**

In searching for feminine-motherly voices I was helped by a variety of sources, most of which came from various archives and constitute the basis for this study. The initial material included official texts written about and by the women – letters, official reports, protocols, press cuttings, and journals.

This documentation is not free of methodological problems: not much primary material was preserved owing to the destruction wreaked by the war. Important issues did not even warrant a mention in addition to “intentional silences.” I attempted to fill the gaps by means of written memoirs and oral history that graced this study with a personal touch.

The use of oral history is found at the heart of historical gender research.<sup>30</sup> A prominent researcher in this field is Luisa Passerini, who makes extensive use of oral testimonies in her studies on women in fascist Italy and through those narratives illustrates the interrelationship between past and present.<sup>31</sup>

In oral documentation the narrative becomes alive through facial expressions, tones of voice, and silences.<sup>32</sup> Yet, even this documentation is not problem-free: passage of time leads to forgetfulness, with a tendency towards subjectivity, and a distortion of memory.<sup>33</sup> Despite these problems, the use of oral testimonies is vital in providing support for issues described in other sources and for the shedding of light on subjects not documented in writing.<sup>34</sup>

One may view the phenomena discussed in this article as “individual cases” of issues relevant to the shaping of motherhood that recur in various contexts in society in general and in Zionist society in particular: women’s struggle to penetrate the public sphere in a national context; women’s education; representations of motherhood in times of emergency, and the shaping of motherhood in changing times. The influence of modernization, education, and industrialization redefine perception and roles of motherhood. Tension between work and family and other issues have been discussed by researchers in a variety of disciplines, and even by women from diverse societies. Their conclusions matched their worldview of their social and political world. Yet the “individual cases” under discussion in this article are historically unique. Their distinction is hidden within the historical context that intensified the conflict over motherhood. This intensification derived from the personal and familial price demanded of them, which was the direct result of an exceptional historical situation. The uniqueness of this phenomenon itself can serve to attest the unusual delimitations of the perceptions of motherhood in the time of

national struggle. The first case presented here deals with the departure of women on missions to Europe as *shelihot* (emissaries) to help the remaining Holocaust survivors there.

### **Nation's Emissaries – Are They Nation's Mothers?**

At the end of WWII hundreds of thousands of Jews, the Holocaust survivors, remained in Europe. Many of them (some 250,000) were concentrated in Displaced Persons camps in the American and British Occupation Zones in Austria and Italy but mainly in Germany. The camps operated from 1945 to 1949. Until the establishment of the state of Israel the gates to Palestine were almost totally barred to the survivors owing to British policy. With the creation of Israel in 1948 the DP camps emptied out. The organization of the survivors in DP camps was accompanied by wide-ranging Jewish and Zionist activity.<sup>35</sup>

In 1945–1948 the *Yishuv* sent about 400 *shelitim* [emissaries], men and women, to the DP camps, most of them to the American Occupation Zones in Germany, and a small portion of them to other European countries. The Zionist emissaries concentrated on preparing the survivors towards their future life in Palestine while also providing humanitarian aid.<sup>36</sup>

Close to half of the emissaries were women. Upon their arrival in Europe, they encountered Holocaust survivors the majority of whom were the only remaining members of their families. The survivors were housed in temporary camps under harsh conditions, uncertain about their future and dependent on external factors.<sup>37</sup> The emissaries operated under these challenging conditions and shaped their identity within them.

These *shelihot* [female emissaries] worked mainly with children and other young survivors. They helped with their rehabilitation, provided them a Hebrew

Zionist education, and organized their immigration to Palestine. Some of these *shelihot* were mothers themselves, and their departure meant they were leaving their families for a long period of time – in most cases, for a minimum of one year. They devoted themselves to the care of Jewish children in the Diaspora.

According to Irit Keinan, the delegation from Palestine, which left for the DP camps in 1946, was comprised of practically the same number of mothers as of single women.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, the percentage of married men in the mission, all of them fathers, was significantly higher than that of single men. This phenomenon illustrates the gender distinction that is common in national societies, where men represent patriotism – they carry the new national identity, whereas the women are mothers.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, for generations, women were raised believing that motherhood was a holy vocation, and their identity revolved mainly around motherhood and the family.<sup>40</sup> Maternal identity intensified in the Zionist society as in many national societies and was perceived as a means for attaining national goals.<sup>41</sup> The fact, however, that mothers did leave on such missions tells us that the national needs led to some breaches in this approach.

The average age of the mothers in these missions was 39.6. It can be assumed that it would have been difficult for younger mothers to leave, as they needed to care for their young children. However, some young mothers did join these groups. Although it was painful for all the mothers, the call of the hour was more powerful than one's own difficulties, as we gather from Henya Bar's testimony. Bar, a kibbutz<sup>42</sup> member, wanted to partake in the missions to help Europe's Jews while the war was still raging. At that time she was childless. In 1946, when she was asked to depart on a mission, she already had a three year-old child:

The request came that I leave on a mission to work in a refugee camp [...] the Movement [the Kibbutz Movement, L.R.] was pressuring me: “The time has come for you to help.” To tell you the truth, at the time, with a three year-old son [...], the decision to leave on a mission was very hard for me. The kibbutz decided that Yitzhak Tabenkin [head of the movement, L.R.] would be the arbitrator, and he decided that I had to go on the mission. In those days, it was impossible to appeal a decree of the Movement, so I started preparing for the mission.<sup>43</sup>

It was also difficult for the older mothers to leave on a long-term mission. Ruth Hektin, a kibbutz member in her forties, was asked to leave on a mission among refugees, but family considerations made it very hard for her:

Suddenly, my son, [...] went to work in the illegal immigrant ships [ships carrying holocaust survivors to Palestine despite the prohibition by the British authorities]. My daughter-in-law was in the last stages of her pregnancy. I went to Shaul Meirov (Avigur) [in charge of illegal immigration, L.R.], and I said: “Look, Shaul, [...], push off my departure until after the birth. Someone has to stay with his wife [...].” Particularly since Batya had no mother. And Shaul said: “Ruth, you are going, and Yitzhak is going, and you’ll be informed when your grandson is born.”<sup>44</sup>

Hektin left on the mission, in the course of which she was notified of the birth of her grandson.

Hektin presents a conflict between devotion to her family and devotion to her kibbutz. Her statements were made long after the events took place. The question arising is whether Hektin, at that time, waged a true debate with herself between her

maternal feelings and her national ones, or whether she initially leaned towards the national task – as discerned from her personal biography replete with her enlisting for national tasks. Perhaps her inner struggle appears more intense when viewing it across a span of time and from a different perspective of reality.

Yet regarding the above, the sources indicate that the mother-emissaries agreed with the national call of the hour. Some of them had reservations, others agreed to leave without hesitation, while still others even initiated their departure in response to the national need.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, we are witnessing a phenomenon whereby male society is making the decisions relating to motherhood and is determining its boundaries. As a result, women's role did not change but was transferred to a new setting – the national one.

Nationalism determines that the needs of a group is more important than those of the individuals. The nationalization of the individual took place in every sphere. The family, which in Jewish tradition had deep religious and general significance, was subjugated to the needs of the all-superior nation.<sup>46</sup> This led to a re-definition of motherhood.

In national societies where women constituted an integral part of the national endeavor, their role – motherhood – was well known and defined. However, in this case, we are not simply dealing with mothers who were satisfied with raising their children, while instilling in them the new values of the nation;<sup>47</sup> nor are we dealing with the expansion of individual motherhood to national motherhood – which stems from the adoption of motherhood as being important for the nation.<sup>48</sup> In the case of the emissary-mothers, the individual mother became the “national-mother” to the children of the Diaspora. It is then perhaps possible to try to see the phenomenon as a case of the *transformation* of individual motherhood into national – a concept I have

found apt for the situation in which the female emissary became a mother to the Diaspora children; it was as if she preferred them to her biological children who were temporarily left alone.

Viewing individual motherhood as a national goal, is challenged by a phenomenon seldom mentioned – the transformation of individual motherhood into national motherhood for ideological reasons in response to the call of the hour. This could be categorized as a new type of “national motherhood.”

The phenomenon of “national motherhood” is linked to the lifestyle of some of these mothers. The majority of the emissaries were kibbutz members. The concept of national motherhood and children as belonging to the group is found in kibbutz ideology, where children were vital for the continuation of the kibbutz. Generations of Jewish women viewed motherhood as their main vocation, but as they joined the Zionist revolution, new sacred goals, both national and social, were adopted. The attitude towards birth and children changed. Giving birth was no longer a private concern but a national duty and a means towards achieving national goals. Establishing a second generation was viewed by kibbutz society not as a female mission but a national one, particularly since the kibbutz was at the forefront of the Zionist enterprise.<sup>49</sup> This meant that parents were recruited to carry out national missions. Kibbutz institutions, such as joint education and children being raised and educated together in the children’s house, actually enabled the parents to depart for prolonged missions.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, city mothers who left on similar missions often placed their children in *kibbutzim*.

At the three stages of a mission (the separation towards departure, the yearnings, and the return) one may discern the conflict and the high price the mother was forced to pay for going on a mission. The fathers, too, grappled with the

difficulties of separation from the family, undergoing yearnings and anxiety.<sup>51</sup> Yet one may assume that owing to the traditional gender concept rooted in *Yishuv* society, in a time of national struggle the place of the children is with their mothers, the departure of fathers was more common and perceived in a different light.

### **Separation**

The aim of the emissaries' missions was highly important in the eyes of the mothers who were prepared to suffer the pain of separation to fulfill a national goal. This is, for example, how Manya Nadel, a mother and emissary to the DP camps justified the pain involved in being separated from her family: "Beautiful work is being done here and I do not regret leaving [to go] so far away."<sup>52</sup>

The words of Hannah Guri-Rivlin also attest to this, from the opposite direction. Guri-Rivlin, a kibbutz member and mother of a three year-old boy, was sent on a mission to Hungary in 1946. At first, she had nothing to do, since no clear goal was set for her mission. The lack of national significance and goal made her feel the separation from her son had been pointless: "Look, I left a small boy at home, I want to work, otherwise there is no meaning and no justification for the huge effort involved in the separation."<sup>53</sup> In other words, separation was hard but the national aspects made it meaningful.

Zvia Lahar-Hershkowitz, a kibbutz member, had lost her husband Eliahu who had fought in the Jewish Brigade in the British army. During the entire length of her three-year mission, she missed little Gideon, the son of her friend.<sup>54</sup> Gideon was also the reason why she asked to terminate her mission: "I felt the need and that it was my duty to take care of Gideon, Tita's son. Gideon sent me many letters. He [...] asked me to return home. This desire of his was very important."<sup>55</sup>

In contrast, however, to her desire to respond to the child's request and to return to Palestine, following a long mission, stood the nation's need that called for carrying out hard work in the DP camps. The national institutions requested that she continue her work. Lahar-Hershkowitz complied with the call of the hour:

By that time, I really wanted to return to Palestine, but I understood the demands of the institutions, and the truth is that I agreed with them – our mission to the displaced persons' camps was extremely important at that precise moment. We were responsible for thousands of survivors who were completely lost ....<sup>56</sup>

The sense of national responsibility was stronger than the women's individual aspirations. The mothers agreed to the nationalization of motherhood at a time of national struggle.

The sense of being on a mission stemmed from the knowledge that these were hard times, both in the transit camps and in Palestine. It meant caring for every child of Israel rather than only for their own. *Yishuv* society agreed with this, and large parts of society contributed to these efforts. Children were also required by the adults to carry the national burden, and they were expected to relate to the separation from their mother with understanding and love. Their status as individual children was below that of the "children of Israel," but their effort was also recognized and appreciated by the adults. Zeev Rimon, a kibbutz member and a masculine-emissary to the DP camps, confirmed this view by sharing that "the true emissaries were the wives and the small children we left at home...."<sup>57</sup> These words reflect society's dual message in relation to the departure of women as emissaries – on the one hand, women were expected to leave their own children and work with and for the children

of the nation; on the other hand, mothers who remained at home with their children, enabled their husbands to leave as emissaries, were deeply appreciated for it.

Owing to the limitations of space of this article I cannot deal with the children's response to their mothers decision. I shall only point out that Zionist education demanded that the Hebrew child demonstrate bravery and patriotism.<sup>58</sup> The mother's "relinquishment" on behalf of the children of the nation was part of that. Yet it is reasonable to assume that the children's reaction to the mothers' leaving was complicated.

### ***Longing for the children***

It is assumed, based on documents, that as the mission continued, the mothers' longing for their children grew. Manya Nadel missed her family so much: "the separation from the home is harder for me than I thought it would be."<sup>59</sup>

In most cases, however, the emissaries who reported about their mission on a regular basis seldom wrote about their longing. Their silence in the documents shows that the national struggle cast a shadow on natural feelings of motherhood. It could be that the immeasurable suffering of the survivors, which they witnessed, made their yearnings seem very pale, and this could weaken the stamina of a society that was striving to carve out a masculine image, both physically and emotionally immune, particularly at a time of national struggle. This probably resulted from the kibbutz education and from coming to terms with the ideology according to which a child belonged to society as a whole, thereby downplaying "natural" maternal feelings. The emissaries, however, often spoke of how they missed the kibbutz and the Movement and of how they were greatly concerned by the trying events taking place in Palestine.<sup>60</sup> Their writings reflect the mothers' focus on their attachment to national society and the downplaying of their traditional role in the family.

### ***Returning Home***

I did not find many testimonies reflecting guilt feelings on the part of the “abandoning” mothers. Upon their return the mother spoke of the fact that their sacrifice had been worthwhile and that they were pleased at being reunited with their families. Henya Bar, who had taken on many tasks in the course of her mission, thereby delaying her homecoming, said upon arriving back: “The return home, meeting my young son, my husband, fully compensated me for the effort we put in during this year.”<sup>61</sup>

Yet, the mothers’ choice almost certainly demanded a price that was noticeable not only in longings for their children but also in the influence that being totally cut off from their mothers had on the children, who were oft-times very young and who grew up without a mother beside them for lengthy periods. This issue is worthy of in-depth study on its own.

The emissaries temporarily cut themselves off from their identity as individual mothers and nurtured their identity as national mothers. The development of a new national mother identity, totally distinct from the individual mother’s identity, is also found in the chapter of the evacuation of children and mothers from settlements during the War of Independence.

### **Not Mothers Only**

Inherent in wars and revolutions is the potential for change in the place and role of women in society.<sup>62</sup> Frequently over the course of a war, the centrality of traditional motherhood is reinforced. The need for mothers – who create the future generation of the nation – grows with the increase in the casualties of war.<sup>63</sup> But the War of Independence in Palestine, which took place in 1948, also fashioned a new perception of motherhood.

### ***The Mothers' Position***

The War of Independence erupted in 1948, and the national struggle for the establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine reached its peak. This war turned entire areas into battlefields, which meant that the rural settlements in the periphery were on the front line and subject to constant attacks. The fate of the children living in these settlements was on the agenda. The *Yishuv* leadership demanded that every settlement defend itself until the last person fell and was against the evacuation of children. The presence of children was a sign of stability. The residents, who preferred to live at home rather than on a military base, also forced the children to remain on the settlements.<sup>64</sup> The children, however, were also perceived as a burden, whose presence impinged on safety preparations: the members were busy protecting the children, and were thus unavailable for defending the settlements themselves. The shelters, which were prepared for receiving the wounded, filled up with children, making them unbearably crowded. In addition, the issue of supplies was also critical.<sup>65</sup> As the situation worsened, concerns for the children's safety grew.

Due to the lack of clear guidelines relating to the evacuation of settlements, each community made its decision independently, based on the needs and perspective. Some settlements decided to evacuate the children to the relatively safe home front, thereby leaving unanswered the question of the mothers' place – Should they remain with their children? Were they “property of the nation”? And who should decide on this matter?

The mothers, infused with national aspirations, were faced with a dilemma: should they be evacuated with their children or should they remain on the front? This dilemma actually reflected two views of motherhood, which they shared – the traditional view of the individual mother, which called for their remaining beside their children, and the new view of the national mother, which called for their joining the

front line. According to the latter view, women's presence on the battlefield represented national motherhood, whereby female, motherly attention was to be devoted to the settlement's members rather than to one's own children.

During the war, fierce battles were taking place in the south. It was decided that the children from kibbutz Ruhama would be evacuated. One kibbutz member, a nurse and a mother of three, was asked to remain on the kibbutz, as her skills were required. Such a decision, which implied that a mother did not belong with her children during such hard times, was unbearable to her: "As a nurse, I saw myself as being on a mission" she reported, "and then, I experienced a cruel dilemma. It never occurred to me that motherhood would conflict with my profession and responsibilities."<sup>66</sup> At the last moment, she decided to be evacuated with her children:

I thought they should understand me, and not make a decision I was unable to follow [...] All my impulses rallied together, only mothers can explain, an urge to protect the chicks. I know that they didn't expect me to do what I did [...] I felt *I owed it to my children* [...] I felt *my friends were condemning it*<sup>67</sup>

This mother's story illustrates two perceptions of motherhood that coexisted during that period: the traditional concept, whereby a woman's main identity consists in being a mother and her place is with her children. According to the new concept, however, a mother's place is not necessarily with her children – mothers have an independent identity, linked to national needs, whenever necessary. The dilemma of the woman from kibbutz Ruhama is the outcome of holding these two concepts jointly: her identity as a mother versus her own identity and her affiliation to the nation. In this particular case, it was the mother who made the decision, in opposition to the community's decree. In many other cases, the male-dominated society was to make the final decision, in accordance with its needs.

Despite the perception that held that individual motherhood should be reinforced under emergency situations, some women believed that they belonged on the front line, beside the male defenders. According to Miriam, from kibbutz Masu'ot Yitzhak, who was pregnant at the time:

It seemed wrong to me that mothers wanted to leave because of their child. *I thought that doing such a thing was very un-national.* Later on, when I became a mother, of course, I looked at this completely differently. But at the time, I was really angry that all the mothers left.<sup>68</sup>

Despite the many years that have passed, it seems that experiencing that anger is well remembered by Miriam. From her statements we sense self-criticism and a sober look toward the past, not necessarily a nostalgic one.

Zippora Rosenfeld, a holocaust survivor and mother of one, a kibbutz member, chose to remain at kibbutz Kfar Etzion with the defenders rather than leave with her son. Her longing for him intensified her confusion: “I am very confused. *I feel torn between my duties as a mother and my duties as part of a group under siege.*”<sup>69</sup>

Tension between the obligations of the mother to her children and between obligations to the broader community; the problematics involved in the dual feminine duty to motherhood and to the community – is a known phenomenon.<sup>70</sup> But the emergency situation prevailing in Palestine during the War of Independence forced the mother to choose between the two. The new choice of motherhood for the nation – and not necessarily the children – is unique and challenging.

The others did not understand her distress, the way she felt torn between her duties and her desire to remain with her comrades to defend the place they had built together, and her “natural” motherly instincts.<sup>71</sup> At that point, the kibbutz members

believed in equality between the genders and in the new motherhood, and that they expected women to exert their national identity.

This is also the case with Leah, a member of kibbutz Kfar Etzion, a mother and pregnant at that time, who chose to remain on the kibbutz rather than leave with her son. From the perspective of the time that has gone by she attested that her concept was that in the kibbutz children were growing up in the children's house anyway, they belonged to all, and that during difficult times for the nation, the child's place was not necessarily with his mother.<sup>72</sup> It may be that at the time Leah had reservations, but they were repressed over the years that have passed since then.

Hannah, from kibbutz Yavne also left her son behind, after evacuation, and returned to the kibbutz to work in the vineyard, as "It was clear to me that they needed me."<sup>73</sup> If the settlement needed her, her child probably did, too. However, just as in Leah's case, the new identity – synonymous with national identity – was stronger than the identity as a mother. Missing from the testimonies of Hannah and Leah is any mention of inner struggles. Alternatively, it may be that the very passage of time repressed reservations and harsh feelings such as guilt.

The children from kibbutz Kiryat Anavim near Jerusalem were evacuated with the nursery caretakers but without their mothers. One of the women who opposed evacuating the mothers with their children, said:

If they leave, this will destroy the settlement. What will happen to the chickens? Who will take care of them? Jerusalem, as you know, needs our eggs and milk, at least for the sick and the wounded.<sup>74</sup>

The call of the hour meant reality weighed in favor of the chicken, the settlement and Jerusalem, while the children came last. Retrospectively, this mother is not sure whether it was right to keep the mothers of small children in the kibbutz: "Luckily we

miraculously got out of it. Some tragedy could have occurred and the children would have been orphaned, without any parent.”<sup>75</sup> The constraints of the situation determined much of what happened. Yet, it may be that the assimilation of traditional motherhood influenced her narrative, which was presented by looking back to the past.

Similar to what happened with the emissaries, here too, the mothers’ separation from their children was painful. Some of the mothers left toddlers behind. There was no telephone, few radios, which meant that weeks would sometimes go by before mothers would hear from their children, or vice versa. However, the mothers were convinced that their children were being well taken care of and, for the most part, did not change their mind. One mother, Rivka Nedivi, a member of kibbutz Masu’ot Yitzhak, commented retrospectively that in the last days prior to the falling of her Kibbutz, she did not think she would remain alive. However, she was confident of the fact that her friends would take good care of her son.<sup>76</sup> Neither the life-threatening danger in which she had put herself, nor the danger of her child being orphaned, prevented her from choosing the national need and giving it precedence over her own motherhood. Rivka saw the alternative motherhood in the kibbutz as a legitimate option, enabling some of these women to dissociate themselves as individual mothers and to express their identity as national mothers.

Zippora from kibbutz Kfar Etzion longed for her child.<sup>77</sup> But in spite of the difficulties, she wrote she was unable to leave her kibbutz at such a difficult time. The national struggle was more powerful than her yearnings. These mothers are characterized by the fact that they longed for their children and wished to be mothers, while feeling a strong personal-national awareness. Zippora Rosenfeld paid with her

life for this choice when she fell together with her husband in the final battle at Kfar Etzion.

Research shows that a nation's view of motherhood as woman's main life goal is reinforced in times of national struggle, when the mother is responsible for ensuring the future of the nation.<sup>78</sup> The testimonies presented above show there were some breaches in this approach, as these women's new approach found its expression in their desire to contribute to the nation outside the framework of their individual motherhood. Their story could be a reflection of a "system gone crazy," which takes place in times of war. It is important to point out that most mothers did not identify with this approach. After all, most of the mothers who refused to leave with their children did, eventually, join them at some stage during the war. Although they shared some strong national aspirations, most of the women followed the traditional path, whereby they were responsible for taking care of their children, which represented the key aspects of their role even in times of national struggle. This phenomenon illustrates the way most women in the *Yishuv* functioned.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, most men in the end decided that the mothers' place was beside their children, a decision which had a tremendous impact.

### ***Society's position***

Society pondered about the place of motherhood. At first, it was not obvious that all the mothers would be evacuated with their children. In many locations, the caretakers were evacuated first, while the mothers and the other women remained on the kibbutz – i.e., on the front – where they were very much needed. In kibbutz Masu'ot Yitzhak, for example, mothers were allowed to decide for themselves whether or not to leave. Most of them asked to be evacuated with their children. However, two mothers, who were vital to the settlement, remained on the kibbutz. They believed their children

were in a safe place and were optimistic to their chances of being reunited with them shortly.<sup>80</sup> Many women refused to leave kibbutz Kfar Etzion, and it was decided that the children would be evacuated with a few women. A special committee was set up to determine which mothers would leave with the children, based on the children's needs and on the mothers' situation.<sup>81</sup>

At kibbutz Tirat Zvi, a list was drawn of the caretakers and other female workers who would be evacuated with the children, but they did not request that the mothers leave.<sup>82</sup> The fact that it was not decided to send away all the mothers from the various settlements is a reflection of the new approach to motherhood within society and among the mothers themselves. However, as the situation worsened, a general consensus emerged calling for all women to be evacuated.<sup>83</sup> The view according to which women were responsible for the continuation of the human species and therefore had to be with the children, as well as the traditional approach to gender, was reinforced.<sup>84</sup> In other societies as well there was a similar attitude towards the mothers. In her research on women in the Spanish Civil War, Mary Nash describes how motherhood served as a symbol for the defensive aspect of this conflict.<sup>85</sup> As individual motherhood becomes more important for the nation, esteem grows for women's traditional roles.

*Yishuv* society, which was uncertain regarding the place of women, transmitted an equivocal message. It was trapped – on the one hand, the development of a national identity among mothers was in the interest of society, a phenomenon known from other national societies; on the other hand, this national identity had the potential to divert the mothers from motherhood in a time of national struggle. Other societies, too, grappled with this issue, on the one hand, to encourage the participation

of the mothers in the war effort, on the other, to encourage motherhood and the bearing of children.<sup>86</sup>

The episode of evacuation, as noted above, is an example of national society's dual attitude regarding mothers' national identity. It even attests to the fact that the constraints of the hour were very significant in determining society's approach to women.

### **Conclusion**

The mothers' conflict presented in this paper did not derive from a national revolution. The personal background and the worldview of each one of the mothers were also influential. Strong ideologies, such as Zionism and socialism, offered traditional Jewish society new options, and as argued by Paula Hyman, women were part of that.<sup>87</sup> The mothers in *Yishuv* society were exposed to new ideologies and wanted to apply "a different" motherhood. These years were formative ones for women of the Western world, as well as in Palestine, including mothers, challenging their identity.<sup>88</sup> Conversely, also influential upon the mothers was the traditional image of motherhood.<sup>89</sup> That is the explanation for their dilemma, which was intensified because of its national facet.

Looking back at some of the testimonies, we can feel the reservations and conflicts they expressed. Other testimonies ignored these aspects, possibly influenced by the changing social reality, changing values, as well as repression of feelings. One may also draw conclusions from what was not spoken. I did not find testimonies of these heroines expressing regret for preferring nationalism over motherhood. Their yearnings were played down in their writings, and the muting of their natural feelings may indicate the lack of legitimacy at that time for demonstrating feelings that might

weaken the struggle. I found no authentic testimonies of mothers who opposed this step at the time or who criticized their friends who chose national motherhood. These silences can be considered statements by themselves. In that time choosing individual motherhood could have been understood as a non-national act liable to be detrimental to the national effort.

The events presented in this article reflect two seemingly opposite phenomena, but they share some common features: both the nationalization and the “abandonment” of the individual motherhood stemmed from women’s desire to express their national identity. They wanted to contribute to the building of the nation in an unmediated way, independent of their motherhood. In other words, both approaches may be viewed as the opposite sides of the same coin.

Few mothers adopted “pushing aside individual motherhood.” In fact, the traditional approach was the one favored. Whatever the case may be, *Yishuv* society was male dominant, and it was the men who determined where women belonged. The change in the role of motherhood derived from male patriarchy that forced a new reality upon the women.<sup>90</sup> Male dominance is particularly salient in times of emergency. *Yishuv* society in the 1940s was in the midst of a period of national emergency, and in line with the military-recruited model. Men were the commanders and women were the good soldiers who obeyed orders. It may be, that just as the feminist studies assert, men wanted to control motherhood so as to limit the power of women. But it is reasonable to assume that the constraints of the time were greatly influential.<sup>91</sup>

The “nationalization of motherhood” characterized the Soviet Union during the Communist era. The family model was unique and different from that in the West. Mothers were an integral part of the building of the nation, both as individuals

contributing to the empowerment of the nation, and by being mothers.<sup>92</sup> Contrary to the harsh model in the Soviet Union, the events related in this paper reflect an approach characterized by a certain level of “flexibility”, adapting to the needs of the moment. Contrary to traditional Jewish society, where the role of women remained unchanged, the approach to their place and role both theoretically and concretely were decisive and determined by men.

This article deals with the stretching of motherhood’s borders and motherhood’s becoming nationalized. It verifies the commonly accepted theories about motherhood in changing societies and establishes the concept of motherhood as a social construct. Moreover, this article proposes an additional perception of motherhood significant in a period of national struggle. It provides a theoretical contribution to the discussion of the idealization of motherhood in times of emergency by presenting alternative representations: one in the guise of the transformation of individual motherhood into national motherhood out of ideological motives; the other in the guise of the repression of individual motherhood owing to national need. Both patterns of motherhood removed the mother from her children and home for an extended period, harming individual motherhood.

The appearance of alternative representations of motherhood in times of emergency occurs for various reasons: familial, cultural, ideological, political, social, and personal context. Almost certainly, each, directly or indirectly, influenced the choice of an alternative representation of motherhood. Yet, it is necessary to stress the importance of the ideological motive. In Palestine and in the kibbutz in particular, this new motherhood burst forth on a new national-social platform, an ideological-socialist one. The command to the nation as a family – defined by the male-

patriarchal dominance – enabled some of the women to realize new ambitions in the realm of gender. The period between the Holocaust and the unprecedented revival of the Jewish people in Palestine contributed to the fact that this national identity was preferred over the traditional maternal identity.

Carol Gilligan's approach, where female identity is shaped in line with her affinity with others while she annuls herself, is also relevant in this case.<sup>93</sup> After WWII, DP camps were dismantled and the national goal fulfilled – i.e., the State of Israel was established, - the national need “weakened,” and a process of withdrawal took place in the shaping of the mothers’ identity. They returned home to their traditional role, as requested by society, a phenomenon familiar also from other societies.<sup>94</sup>

Motherhood in time of war, therefore, does not necessarily bear witness to the adoption of new concepts.<sup>95</sup> And yet, emergency situations do act as a gender springboard for women. It is reasonable to claim that the nationalization of motherhood breached an opening for the mothers, enabling them to carry out activities outside the realm of their home. Women knew and recognized their strength and ability to develop. One can assume that this self-recognition represents an important stage in the formation of the mothers’ individual identity.

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<sup>2</sup> S. Jay Kleinberg (1999) The No-Win Mom: Motherhood in Twentieth Century America, *Women's History Review*, 8, p. 387.

<sup>3</sup> Andrea O'Reilly (2004) Introduction, in *From Motherhood to Mothering: The Legacy of Adrienne Rich's of Woman Born*, Andrea O'Reilly (Ed.) (New York: State University of New York Press), p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Glenn, Social Constructions of Mothering, pp. 3–5, 20; Katarzyna Sierakowska (2005) Maternity in Inter-War Poland: Visions and Realities, *Women's History Review*, 14, pp. 119–31.

<sup>5</sup> Patricia Grimshaw, Jim Hammerton, and Eileen Janes Yeo (1999) Introduction, *Women's History Review* 8, 2, p. 193; Mary Nash (1995) *Defying Male Civilization: Women in the Spanish Civil War* [Women and Modern Revolution Series] (Denver: Arden Press), p. 48; Jane C. Ollenburger and Helen A. Moore (1992) *A Sociology of Women: The Intersection of Patriarchy, Capitalism and Colonization* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ; Prentice Hall), p. 49; Susan Sered (Spring-Summer 2000) Introduction: Mothers and Icons, *Nashim*, 3, p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> Grimshaw, Hammerton and Yeo, Introduction, p. 193; Beverly Birns and Niza Ben-Ner (1988) Psychoanalysis Constructs Motherhood, in Birns and Hay (Eds), *Different Faces of Motherhood*, p. 47.

<sup>7</sup> Susan R. Grayzel (1999) *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood and Politics in Britain and France During the First World War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), p. 86; The Holocaust disturbed the traditional gender relations. Margarete Myers Feinstein (2007) Absent Fathers, Present Mothers: Images of Parenthood in Holocaust Survivor Narratives, *Nashim*, 13, p. 156, 158-161.

<sup>8</sup> For the Islam, see: Harway and Liss, Arab Mothers in Morocco, in Birns and Hay (Eds), *Different Faces of Motherhood* p. 97.

<sup>9</sup> Sylvia Barack Fishman (1993) *A Breath of Life: Feminism in the American Jewish Community* (New York: Free Press), pp. 201–5; Paula E. Hyman (1998) East European Jewish Women in an Age of

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<sup>10</sup> Moshe Mishkinsky (1994) The Woman's Role in the Jewish Labor Movement in Russia [in Hebrew], *Proceedings of the Eleventh Congress of Jewish Studies*, II, 2, pp. 49–51.

<sup>11</sup> Paula Hyman, Introduction (1986), in Steven M. Cohen and Paula E. Hyman (Eds) *The Jewish Family: Myths and Reality* (New York and London: Holmes and Meier), pp. 5, 8.

<sup>12</sup> Review of studies dealing with this topic, see Eileen Janes Yeo (1994) The Creation of 'Motherhood' and Women's Responses in Britain and France, 1750–1914, *Women's History Review* 8, 2, pp. 203–5; Yeo, *Creation*, p. 202.

<sup>13</sup> Mary Nash (1996) Political Culture, Catalan Nationalism and the Women's Movement in Early Twentieth-Century Spain, *Women's Studies International Forum* 19, 1–2, pp. 45–54.

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<sup>15</sup> Jan Indy Pettman (1996) Boundary Politics: Women, Nationalism and Danger, in *New Frontiers in Women's Studies: Knowledge, Identity and Nationalism*, Mary Maynard and June Purvis (Eds) (Britain: Taylor and Francis Publishers), p. 187.

<sup>16</sup> Nira Yuval-Davis (1997) *Gender and Nation* (London: Sage), p. 626, 630..

<sup>17</sup> George L. Mosse (1996) *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (New York: Oxford University Press), pp. 8, 101–2.

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<sup>22</sup> Deborah S. Bernstein (1998) Daughters of the Nation: Between the Public and Private Spheres in Pre-State Israel, in Judith R. Baskin (Ed.) *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*, p. 291. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press).

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<sup>25</sup> Smadar Shiffman (2003) Motherhood under Zionism, *Hebrew Studies* 44, p. 143.

<sup>26</sup> Bernstein, Daughters of the Nation, pp. 293, 306.

<sup>27</sup> Deborah Bernstein (1987) *The Struggle for Equality: Women Workers in the "Palestine" Yishuv* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad), p. 27.

<sup>28</sup> Deborah Bernstein (1993), Between Woman, Man and the Homemaker – Woman and Family among Jewish Urban Workers at the Time of the *Yishuv* [in Hebrew], in Uri Ram (Ed.) *Israeli Society: Critical Perspective* (Tel Aviv: Breirot), p. 88; Margalit Shilo, Ruth Kark, and Galit Hazan-Rokem (Eds) (2002) *Jewish Women in the Yishuv and Zionism: a Gender Perspective* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi); Miriam B. Raider-Roth (2002) The Plough Woman: Identities in the Making, in Mark A. Raider and Miriam B. Raider-Roth (Eds) *The Plough Woman: Records of the Pioneer Women of Palestine* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press), pp. lx-lxxiii.

<sup>29</sup> For example, Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation*.

<sup>30</sup> Joanna Bornat and Hanna Diamond (2007) Women's History and Oral History Developments and Debates, *Women's History Review* 16, 1, pp. 19–39.

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<sup>32</sup> For instance, Myers Feinstein, *Absent Fathers, Present Mothers*, p. 160.

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- <sup>37</sup> Keynan, *Holocaust Survivors and the Emissaries*, pp. 39, 41, 78–83, 148.
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- <sup>41</sup> Yeo, *Creation*, pp. 201–18; Nagel, *Masculinity and Nationalism*, pp. 242–69.
- <sup>42</sup> Kibbutz=Cooperative agricultural settlement, changed family patterns and stood for common care of the children.
- <sup>43</sup> Henya Bar (1989) in [no ed.], *Shelihut la-Gola 1945–1948* [Mission to the Diaspora] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad), p. 516.
- <sup>44</sup> Ruth Hektin (1990), *Kivrat Derekh Sheli* [My Part of the Way] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad), pp. 63, 69.
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- <sup>52</sup> Manya Nadel in a letter to Hans Beyth (July 4, 1947), Central Zionist Archives (hereafter CZA), Jerusalem, S75/4583 [in Hebrew].
- <sup>53</sup> Hannah Guri-Rivlin, *Shelihut la-Golah*, p. 232
- <sup>54</sup> The son of Mordechai Tita Laxberg, her second husband. Lahar-Hershkowitz, *Nitzanei Tikvah*, pp. 21–22.
- <sup>55</sup> Gideon, their only son, fell during the Six-Day War. Ibid, p. 22.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 23.
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- <sup>61</sup> Henya Bar, *Shelihut la-Golah*, p. 521.
- <sup>62</sup> Nash, *Defying Male Civilization*, p. 49.
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<sup>66</sup> Anonymous (9.5.1986), Kibbutz Ruhama in Search of Arms during the Evacuation of the Children [in Hebrew], *Hashavua*, 1557, p. 7.

<sup>67</sup> My emphasis, L.R., *ibid*.

<sup>68</sup> My own emphasis. Miriam Livneh's interview by Dolly Ben-Eliezer (May 13, 1993), Religious Kibbutz Archives, Gush Etzion, 1948.

<sup>69</sup> My own emphasis. Dov Knohl, in Yohanan Ben Yaakov (1978) *Gush Etzion: Hamishim Shnot Ma'avak ve-Yetzirah* [Etzion Bloc: Fifty Years of Struggle and Creation] (Jerusalem: Kfar Etzion Field School: The Religious Kibbutz), p. 270.

<sup>70</sup> Einat Ramon (Spring-Summer 2000) Equality and Ambivalence: The Political Repercussions of A.D. Gordon's Maternal Ethics, *Nashim*, 3, 74–105; Markowitz, Millenarian Motherhood, pp. 106–38.

<sup>71</sup> Simcha Raz (1951) *Ha-Har ha-Kadosh* [The Holy Mountain] (Tel Aviv: Bitan Hasefer, p. 94; Motherly love is a cultural invention, see Elisabeth Badinter (1985) *Ve-Gam Ahavah: Historia shel Ahavah Imayit me-ha-Me'ah ha-17 v-ad ha-Me'ah ha-20* [Mother Love: Myth and Reality – Motherhood in Modern History; translated from French] (Tel Aviv: Ma'ariv Library), pp. 98–103.

<sup>72</sup> Interview of Leah (October 10, 1999) (in Hebrew).

<sup>73</sup> Interview of Hannah Yair (March 6, 2001) (in Hebrew).

<sup>74</sup> Member of Kiryat Anavim. In Talmi, *Be-Kav ha-Esh*, p. 30.

<sup>75</sup> Member of Kiryat Anavim. In Talmi, *ibid*.

<sup>76</sup> Rivka Nedivi and Rachel Doron's interview by Dolly Ben Eliezer (May 13, 1993), Religious Kibbutz Archives, Gush Etzion, 1948 [in Hebrew].

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<sup>78</sup> Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality*; Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation*.

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- <sup>94</sup> Nitza Berkovitch (Sept.–Dec. 1997) Motherhood as a National Mission: The Construction of Womanhood in the Legal Discourse in Israel, *Women's Studies International Forum*, 20, nos. 5–6, pp. 605–19; Nash, *Defying Male Civilization*, p. 5

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<sup>95</sup> Nash, *Defying Male Civilization*, p. 5.