

LOYALTY, BELONGING,
AND THEIR DISCONTENTS:
WOMEN IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE IN JEWISH
AND PALESTINIAN CULTURAL DISCOURSE

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Women's Issues in Times of Public Struggle

In societies that perceive themselves as enmeshed in national struggle, the place of female figures who make it into the public sphere—such as political activists, members of women's organizations, and, by extension, imagined women in literary works—is problematic. There is a tension between women's issues, which are perceived as being concerned with "private matters," and the public good, a tension which—during hard times, when the whole public is seen to be threatened—creates suspicion, expressed in the demand that women show some kind of "membership card" affirming their loyalty to the group and its cause. The cause may be defined differently for each group and era, but it is always set against women's "egotistic self-fulfillment." These suspicions and demands may be directed even at women whose concern is not—or not exclusively—with women's issues. They are associated with a certain basic mistrust of women in general, such as is often reflected in the characterization of female literary stereotypes like the *femme fatale*.

This article is taken from an ongoing study of Middle Eastern women who make it into the public sphere in what are perceived as times of national struggle. I shall concentrate on Palestinian Arab and Jewish women, mainly in the first half of the twentieth century. For the Jews, this is the period of the pre-state waves of Zionist immigration and the proto-state Yishuv (the organized Zionist Jewish community of Palestine), culminating in the creation of the State of Israel. For the Palestinians, the same period marks the emergence of the struggle against Zionism, up to and after the *Nakbah*

Loyalty, Belonging, and Their Discontents

(tragedy) in 1948. I will demonstrate the tensions surrounding women in the public discourse, as documented in various types of sources, including press statements, diaries, interviews and polls, historical research, and literary works. The final section will focus on two short stories, by the Palestinian writer Najwa Qa'war Farah and the Hebrew writer Yehudit Harari, the former dealing with the refugee problem and the crumbling of the Palestinian family as an outcome of the creation of the State of Israel, the latter with life in the early Zionist settlements in Palestine.

My research reveals that a connection obtains in the political, cultural, and literary discourse of both societies between the problem of women's loyalty and the separation between the public and the various private spheres. The perception of national struggle enhances the importance of the group as a whole and its general cause, and with it that of the public sphere and of men, who occupy that sphere almost entirely and identify themselves—and are identified—with the group and its cause. Women are left outside, in the various private spheres. I will furnish examples of this phenomenon later on, but first we need a workable theoretical model of the social/political spheres in Middle Eastern states that will facilitate a mapping of the spaces that women occupy, and those that they do not, or rarely do.

A Theoretical Model

The search for a theoretical model suitable for our region that will tackle the problems in the cultural perceptions of women's place in the national arena is not an easy one. Though quite a number of theories are available for the Western world, I am dealing with a somewhat different set of parameters, more familiar to scholars studying the Third World. Not only is there little room in non-Western societies for acceptance of such feminist slogans as "the personal is political" (this is, of course, also true at times for the West), but—more importantly—the very dichotomy between the public and the private spheres needs some modification in this context. In between the public and the private are several layers of society that are more private than public but contain elements of both, among them the family cell, which is quite unlike the Western nuclear family in its size and function. These layers are especially pertinent with regard to women, as they may turn out to be the only extra-private, or semi-public, spheres that women occupy.

Hanita Brand

Just as a typical Middle Eastern house may have a courtyard belonging to several families—or branches of the same family—hidden in the middle of the building, rather than (or in addition to) a garden around its periphery, so do Middle Eastern societies have several spheres in which women take part in a shared, semi-communal life, in between the public and private spheres. This social structure allows women to have extra-private activities but at the same time may facilitate restrictions on their participation in the public sphere proper.

One theory that can be modified for the Middle Eastern case is that put forward by Carol Pateman in her critique of the contractarian model and its discourse on “civil society.” Pateman criticizes the main narrative of the social contract theory as promulgated and taught in the West from the days of John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau until its latter-day resurgence with the advent of the New Right and New Left. In *The Sexual Contract* (1988),¹ she describes how this narrative views the social contract era as having superseded patriarchy, inaugurating “the civil order of constitutional, limited government”—the world of civil law, civil freedom, equality, contract, and individuality:

Social contract theory is conventionally presented as a story about freedom. One interpretation of the original contract is that the inhabitants of the state of nature exchange the insecurities of natural freedom for equal, civil freedom which is protected by the state. (p. 2)

Three of Pateman’s main points of critique pertain to my research. First, with other leftist and feminist critics of the contract theory, she points out that not all citizens of the modern state, as framed by this model, enjoy genuinely equal standing. This inequality is attested by employment contracts and marriage contracts since these are involved in the mechanisms that regulate several types of unequal relationships, such as social, financial, and sexual ones. Secondly, she notes that the individual citizen is envisioned exclusively as male; though in this regard she tends to exonerate Rousseau (who more than once referred to the duty of a wife to serve her husband), she does say of John Locke that “[his] individual is masculine” (p. 21). Pateman’s third point of critique is the most fundamental and novel: When the contractarian narrative replaced the patriarchal one, it did not really cover all the terrain

left by patriarchy, because it referred only to the public sphere. Only there does civil society reign:

[Not only do] women have no part in the original contract, but . . . they are incorporated into a sphere that both is and is not in civil society. The private sphere is part of civil society but is separated from the “civil” sphere. (p. 11)

All three points treat the boundaries of the theory’s application. However, Pateman also critiques the very essence of the contractarian model, particularly with reference to women. Earlier critics of the model had already characterized the *social inequality* framed in employment contracts as a relationship of exploitation. Pateman adds that the *sexual inequality* framed in marriage contracts is definable as a relationship of domination and subordination.

Since no contractarian model was ever involved in Middle Eastern concepts of imagined communities, the critique of regnant conceptions of civil society in this and other Third World areas also needs to be modified. Pateman’s model, in line with Western cultural discourse, envisions the allocation of citizenship and rights to individualized citizens. The kinds of modifications required if we are to apply it, or any other Western model, to our area are in the very nature of the debate over the equal standing of citizens—*seen as individuals*. As already noted, Middle Eastern society cannot be clearly divided into a private sphere on the one hand and a public sphere on the other. While a clearly marked public sphere does exist, there are several layers of private or semi-private spheres in which citizens reside. The latter take precedence over the Western notion of the citizen as an individual entity. Suad Joseph, who has studied the status of women in Islamic and especially Arab societies, remarks that “notions of a relational or a connective self are particularly common in many Middle Eastern countries.”² Accordingly, she proposes “the mediation of citizenship through subnational communities”³ as a suitable alternative to the Western model of civil society.

A few cautionary remarks are in order here regarding the suitability of the modified model to the two societies with which this study is concerned. Throughout most of the relevant period, neither had independent national status, laws, and governing bodies enabling it to define and confer the status of “citizen.” My interest, however, lies in the *cultural-semiotic discourse*

Hanita Brand

regarding nationality, equality, and women, and on that level models of citizenship were indeed functioning. As for the comparison between Palestinian Arab and Jewish women, their initial situation in the two societies differed. While many members of the proto-Israeli society of the Yishuv belonged to an elite *avant-garde* of young people detached from their families and traditional milieu, the Palestinian society was a traditional one functioning within a larger area of similar ethnicity and behavior. Thus, the Jewish women initially enjoyed a much greater degree of independence and equality. This situation changed eventually with the transformation of the Yishuv into a more conservative society toward and after the creation of the State.

Yet despite that initial difference, and irrespective of current assessments of the nature of Israeli citizenship, the Yishuv does fit the above theoretical model as it is modified for the Middle East. There, too, the citizen (or rather, the future citizen) was understood as a connective entity belonging to a subnational community, rather than as an individual. One need only think, in this respect, of the division between the “old” Yishuv—the mostly ultra-Orthodox Jewish community whose existence antedated the arrival of the Zionists—and the Zionist “new” Yishuv. Even within the Zionist camp, those who arrived in the context of particular waves of immigration, especially the first and the second Aliyahs, constituted subnational communities. For example, Yaffah Berlovitz and Nurit Govrin continued their studies of the First Aliyah⁴ beyond the specific years connected with it, thus rendering the division of the Aliyahs a matter not of a period, but of a community to which one—and one’s offspring—belonged. Govrin traces notions of the First Aliyah in literature up to the present.⁵

To return to our theoretical model, issues of inequality relating to the connective citizen are generally divided into those associated with affiliation to a religious community and those associated with the family. Religious subnational communities constitute an organic aspect of citizenship identity in the region, both legally and in cultural and political discourse; as Joseph says: “Membership in a religious sect has been, in practice, a requirement of citizenship in most Middle Eastern states.”⁶ However, I do not believe that this should be set entirely in opposition to Western understandings. Such scholars as Anthony Smith and Benedict Anderson include religious affiliation in their general definitions of nation-states and nationalism in general.⁷ In the present context we shall concentrate on the second category of mediation, that of the family.

The Mediation of Women's Citizenship via the Family

Suad Joseph emphasizes the importance of “the family as the basic unit of membership in the political community,” deducing “that it is persons’ *status* as members of families that qualifies them for citizenship.” She concludes:

Given the centrality of patriarchal connective idioms in many Middle Eastern political, economic, religious, and social cultures, this implies the transportation of patriarchal connectivity into the practices and discourses of citizenship.⁸

Thus, once the family rather than the individual enters the equation, patriarchy enters with it, fostering women’s inequality. If the family is a condition of citizenship in the Middle East, women’s access to the public sphere may be blocked. To be sure, this does not necessarily describe the status of Jewish women in the new Yishuv from a strictly legal and political point of view. But in the cultural discourse, *all* women in the area, Jewish and Arab alike, were viewed as belonging to their national groups via membership in families—actual or imagined—rather than directly, as men were. This in itself opened the possibility of discrimination and exclusion, suggesting that a woman’s proper place was in the home, not in the public sphere.

This tendency to associate women with their role in the family rather than, or at the expense of, their citizen status in the public sphere was particularly evident in Palestine, even in comparison with other Middle Eastern countries. Ela Greenberg, who studied the portrayal of women in the Palestinian press in 1920s and 1930s, writes:

Unlike women’s magazines in Beirut and Cairo, which encouraged their readers to take part in political and social life, Palestinian newspapers concentrated on encouraging women to fill the roles of wife, mother, and housewife.⁹

A survey conducted in 2000 by Hilal Khashan, in which Arabs of several nationalities, including Palestinians, were asked about their attitude toward resolving the conflict in the Middle East, verifies the importance of the family in this respect even today. Most interviewees noted the family and

Hanita Brand

education as the two major agents in formulating their attitude towards the conflict and Israel.¹⁰

Regardless of the size, structure, or significance of the family in the respective societies under review, there is ample evidence that women in both were seen through the prism of the family; that is, that they were associated with the private and semi-public spheres rather than the public sphere. This was usually to the women's detriment, though at times the family was not only a source of discrimination against women. As we shall see, there were those, such as Qasim Amin and Menachem Ussishkin, who attempted to soften the opposition to women's cause in the public sphere by invoking their important role in the family. But these were attempts to suggest women's advancement to an audience that was against it.

In her research on the participation of Arab Palestinian women in public activities during the British Mandate period, Ellen Fleischman notes that the Arab Women's Executive Committee, founded in Jerusalem in 1929, had as its members women from the most influential families in town. Several of them were wives of the members of the Arab Executive Committee, founded nine years before, whose members were exclusively male. In fact, the women's organ was created in the home of Auni Abd al-Hadi, a member of the Arab Executive Committee, whose wife, Tarab, was a founding member of the Women's Committee.¹¹ The circumstances of the creation of the women's organ suggest that it was actually created and handled by the men's Committee rather than being an independent initiative of the women themselves. To this day, the family-dependent nature of Arab women's activities has not changed much, as we can see from the research done in 2000 by Yvette Batrice. She writes:

It should be noted that most women who take part in political activities are only doing so to please their husbands or relatives, who belong to the same trends.¹²

Some of the data pertaining to the Arab Women's Executive Committee suggest not only family dependence, but also Pateman's elaboration on sexual inequality as a relationship of domination and subordination. Fleischman remarks that the women's Committee split in 1938 and 1939 "along the lines of the Husseini-Nashashibi [family] rivalry, despite protestations to the contrary."¹³ In a 1985 interview, Matiel Moghannam, a founding members

Loyalty, Belonging, and Their Discontents

of the women's Committee who was married to a member of the men's Committee, was presented with this information and asked for her response. Moghannam recalled that the women in the Committee were united and felt like sisters. This indicates that the splits were probably not initiated by the women themselves but by the men. Indeed, Moghannam went on to say that the women "always combined . . . forces with . . . the Executive Committee of the men," and that the latter would "look over" the memoranda written by the women.¹⁴

We shall see in the following sections how the association of the family with the national cause also appears in texts originating in the Jewish community of the time.

The Male Gender of the Connective Citizen

Once we adjust the perception of the citizen, or future citizen, according to the connective model, there is also abundant evidence for Carole Pateman's second point of critique, which emphasizes the male gender of the connective citizen (and, consequently, for her first point, that not all citizens enjoy genuinely equal standing). In 1919, after a political meeting, Rachel Katznelson wrote some exasperated remarks in her personal diary about the ideological rifts that were tearing the Zionist workers' parties apart:

Isn't it that by *a man's attitude toward his work, his ability to protect his honor and look after his wife and child* [emphasis mine—H.B.], life achieves its worth? Now, what unifies the pioneers of defense and work, in the field and at home, is not important [to them any more]. Rather, they see their principles as the main thing. [They see] life and experience as nothing against these.¹⁵

These are the words of a woman who believed in the active role of women in the Zionist enterprise and who was herself involved in public activity, and they were written in her private diary, not uttered in public, where a woman might be expected to tone down her feminist ways of thinking. Yet even to herself, Katznelson thought of the Zionists and the workers as male, and not only in the grammatical sense: They were husbands and fathers whose duty was to protect their wives and children. Note the family connectivity:

Hanita Brand

In this description of the early Jewish labor movement, which is often seen as devoid of family ideals if not downright anti-family, one detects a strong verbal association between the macro (= the pioneers of defense and work) and the micro (= the family). One wonders exactly where and how Katznelson, as a woman belonging to this very camp, envisioned herself in this mental picture, which excludes women as active participants.

By contrast, one can quote the mental picture of a Zionist man, in which there is no interference between the self-perception of the citizen and the collective-historical image of the whole group. In Ze'ev Ya'avetz's 1888 description of his experience of first setting foot in Eretz Israel, there is nothing but continuity between the two: The person and the mythical dimensions are one and the same:

And I am not alone in this, since *every man of pure heart from among the children of Israel* [emphasis mine—H.B.], when setting foot upon the land which God swore to our forefathers, will have a new heart. The memories of our own lives are forgotten, giving way to the memory of our grandeur and glory in this place from olden times.¹⁶

Here, in a long historical chain, Man becomes one with other men, who together become synonymous with the Zionist *epopoeia*. First person singular glides easily into plural. The intent here is not to accuse Ya'avetz of excluding women; indeed, he was among the men who called for the participation of women in the work of Zionism, including labor in the fields. His words serve, rather, as an example of the easy association between the male citizen and the public image of the group and its cause.

This association of men with the public sphere and with the national and subnational groups and their causes explains why general cultural perceptions, when dealing with the group as a whole during the period covered by this research, automatically refer to men and often exclude women—at least flesh and blood women, as opposed to symbolic female figures.¹⁷ Thus, when Ellen Fleischman asked a Palestinian man if his mother remembered the Mandate period, he responded: “You should talk to my father. My mother doesn't speak so well, and besides, the women didn't do anything.”¹⁸ Fleischman, who at the time was just beginning her research on the participation of Arab Palestinian women in public activities during the period, felt it

important to include this answer in her study, as it revealed a fundamental attitude toward women's public activities.

Women's Arrival in the National, Public Arena

Pateman's third point about the restriction of civil society to the public sphere can be traced in Middle Eastern cultural-semiotic discourse in the strong connection between the male gender of the connective citizen and the dichotomy between public and private; that is, between the national, public arena, reserved for men, and the various private and semi-private spheres. Since women's lives have historically been restricted to the latter, those who do make it onto the national, public scene are seen—and see themselves—as newly arrived in the realm of civil society and of men. They are outsiders joining the men in the group's struggle, not “rightful owners” of the cause. The following announcement was published in the press by the Arab Women's Association in Palestine on the date of its founding, November 15, 1929:

The Arab women enter the realm of public politics and work side by side to support their men in their [masc.] national struggle on behalf of life, freedom and independence. . . . We've left our houses for the arena of public life, breaking old customs.¹⁹

Arabic, like Hebrew, has a gendered language system. Grammar and text come together here to reveal, poignantly, the ascription of the national struggle to the men; the women see themselves only as supporters.

One might think this attitude peculiar to the Arab women, who, as they say, had not often left their homes. However, I have found similar attitudes expressed in statements by Jewish women who were active in public life. Expressing Pateman's third point of critique almost verbatim, Lilah Bassevitch, a prominent member of Kibbutz Ein Harod, remarked: “We will live in both worlds: in the world of women, and in the world of society.”²⁰ I have come across complaints about this state of affairs in statements by both Arab and Jewish women.

The confluence of male gender with a monopoly on the public sphere comes to expression in the literature of both societies in a marked tendency

Hanita Brand

to place male heroes at the center of stories portraying the group's cause and struggle. This is true not only of literature written by most male authors but also of that written by most Arab women. Even those whose stories often have heroines, such as Najwa Qa'war Farah, Asia Shibli, and Samira Azzam, introduce male heroes when their stories address themselves, directly or symbolically, to national themes. Samira Azzam uses male characters in her stories that center around a house or home symbolizing a national home, or around loyalty to one's origin. Asia Shibli, a younger writer, has a story entitled "Khuyut al-fajr," (Streaks of dawn) with a very enigmatic male character at its center. He is losing a fight against his enemies—symbolized by ugly dogs and a watchman—because he has become separated from his friends. Female figures appear only as anonymous victims, torn to pieces by the dogs. In a story by Qa'war Farah entitled "Qissat al-jil" (The story of a generation), a *fallah* who initially seems reactionary for denying freedom to the women of his home turns out to be an authentic, moral figure in comparison with the debauched Jewish men and women of Haifa.

We do find heroines in stories on national themes by Jewish women writers; Nechama Puhachevski, for example, has a whole gallery of them. But an additional trait emerges in both literary corpuses when dealing with the characterization of female figures in such contexts. It pertains to the discourse on loyalty.

Women's Loyalty in the Public Discourse

Pateman's model does not treat the discourse on women's loyalty in the public arena (though she does refer to the topic of women's loyalty in the *private* sphere, that of the family, as elaborated by Rousseau), but it does provide a key to understanding it. Since women are incorporated in the private sphere, which is separated from the "civil" sphere, their appearance on the national arena is a novel phenomenon. If they are perceived as newly arrived on the public scene, as not really or naturally belonging there, this gives rise to suspicion and doubt about their loyalty to the national cause, and to an internalized demand to prove themselves worthy of the group's trust—among other things, by demonstrating their adherence to traditional roles. Deniz Kandiyoti has noted how the issue of women's appropriate place and conduct functions as a boundary marker in Middle Eastern discourse

on the topic of authenticity. “Women and the family,” she says, “retain a privileged place in the articulation of anxieties about integrity and difference.” According to Kandiyoti, it is “Islamic movements or state-supported fundamentalisms” that are most likely to denounce women’s emancipation as alien and impious.²¹ My own research, however, reveals that such an attitude also characterizes the discourse of most secular nationalisms.

Here, too, the literature of the proto-State Jewish Yishuv and that produced by Palestinian writers in the same period exhibit similar traits. For example, treacherous woman characters appear in several stories by Hemda Ben-Yehuda. The woman’s disloyalty may extend beyond her personal love life to the national context, as it does when she becomes the cause of her husband’s leaving the country. One of Ben Yehuda’s stories is even entitled “Habogedet” (The treacherous woman).

The theme of women’s loyalty was sensitive enough to be invoked in the context of attempts to advance women’s status. Menachem Ussishkin, speaking in 1903 at Zichron Ya‘akov to the first gathering of representatives of all the Jewish subnational communities, stressed this point in his effort to convince the participants to allow for the inclusion of women:

Only when our daughters are loyal to us, only when they educate good and loyal children for us, only then will we indeed be able to return to our borders.²²

Nechama Puhachevski uses a similar argument,²³ as does the Islamic reformer Qasim Amin in his groundbreaking book, *Tahrir al-mar’ah* (Woman’s emancipation):

It is a known fact that the child lives up to the age of perception [i.e., around 7 or 8] only among women. He is surrounded all the time by his mother, sisters, aunts, their maids, and their female friends, and sees his father only occasionally. If the surrounding in which he grows is good, then his education will be good. If the surrounding is bad, so will be his education.²⁴

In all these examples, women are important only as auxiliaries to their husbands or sons. They are seen as betraying the public cause if they do not fulfill their roles as wives and mothers.

Hanita Brand

The same theme reappears in statements made by women's organizations in both societies. When Zlikha Shihabi, president of the Arab Women's Association in Palestine, headed a delegation to the Arab Women's Conference held in Cairo in 1944, she was asked by the Egyptian women to join them in a declaration of women's rights. As reported in the newspaper *Filastin* on December 13, 1944, she responded by emphasizing her loyalty, stating that women in Palestine "would not demand more rights than what is allowed by Islamic law and the holy Qur'an" and that "demanding political rights for women is before its time." The Jewish Women's Association for Equal Rights, campaigning in 1918–1919 for women's suffrage for the General Assembly (a campaign the Jewish women hadn't believed would ever be necessary), also found it necessary to stress their loyalty:

The Hebrew Woman in Eretz Israel knows how to protect her rights not out of boredom, not in order to toe the line of the modern Suffragist Movement spreading now in the world, but because of her wish to take equal part in building the land.

When the women's parties united for the sake of this struggle, they announced:

We, the Zionist women of Eretz Israel, abiding by [*nikhna'ot*—literally, 'submissive to'] the rule of the Zionist Union, have thus far stood up for our rights peacefully and quietly, without any noise or disturbances.²⁵

Here, though the women emphasize their loyalty and obedience, there is nevertheless a hint of threat. If the need arises, they may not always be so subdued and obedient.

"A Slap in the Face" and "The Call of the Ruins"—Women's Engagé Literature

I have chosen two short stories, Yehudit Harari's "Setirat lehi" (A slap in the face, 1932)²⁶ and Najwa Qa'war Farah's "Nida' al-atlal" (The call of the ruins, published in a 1956 collection),²⁷ to exemplify how the themes discussed above work themselves out in women's writing from the period, in connection both with their female characters and with the public aspects of the

writers' own careers. Both stories categorize their writers as *engagés*; that is, their texts express loyalty to the group and its national cause. Qa'war Farah writes explicitly in the preface to *Durub wamasabih* (Roads and lamps), the collection in which the story was published, that an author is someone who has a message or mission²⁸ to convey to the people. Nevertheless, both also display the impact of public pressure—though it is internalized rather than experienced as alien or exterior—to toe the line of the national ethos. This occurs when each writer, in her own way and for her own reasons, at some point directs the story beyond the group's cause toward an additional cause, which does not nullify the group theme but might be seen as weakening it.

Both stories also handle the national theme through the prism of the family and consequently emphasize women's failure at acting in the public sphere. Suffice it here to mention their main plots. In Harari's story, a girl named Yehudit sets out to search for her father, a leader of the Yishuv, who has disappeared while traveling the dangerous roads on a mission for the national cause. She will endure public shame for daring to undertake such a public initiative. At the center of Qa'war Farah's story is a Galilean family whose members have become separated in the wake of the creation of the State of Israel. The men—father and son—are wandering as refugees in Transjordan, while the daughter, remaining on her own after her mother's death, has become a refugee inside Israel. The story will stress the daughter's inability to cope on her own and the son's role as a future savior from the Palestinian tragedy.

Both stories, which are closely related to their authors' biographies (Harari's heroine bears her own name, Yehudit), express protest. In Qa'war Farah's story, it is a Palestinian political protest. Following the creation of the Jewish state, the Palestinian family has crumbled, with some of its members turned into refugees, while others, though they remain near their ruined villages, are strangers who do not belong there any more. Thus, the daughter who roams to her former home is arrested for unauthorized presence in the area. In Harari's story, the protest is feminist. The heroine's father slaps her in the face in front of everyone in the *moshavah* (settlement) for going out, unaccompanied, to search for him. Her good name, her reputation in the little community of Rehovot, which is all she has in the world, is destroyed in one fell swoop; and the punishment, moreover, is unmerited, since she had only followed her mother's request. Notwithstanding its feminist angle, however, Harari's story does not go against the national cause. Far from it:

Hanita Brand

The girl's problem is that she is not allowed a share in the Zionist *epopoeia*, in which her father is an acknowledged hero.

The mother in Harari's story is a helpless figure who rarely leaves her home and has a tendency to react to every kind of hardship or danger by crying and fainting. The rendering of the figure of the mother as failing to fulfill her part in the national mission (whether or not it is autobiographical, and here some interesting observations lie beyond the scope of the present discussion), conforms, as we have seen, to the way female characters were fashioned in much national literature of the day; another Hebrew example is to be found in Hemda Ben-Yehuda's "Otan hatziporim" (The very same birds). In Qa'war Farah's story, it is the daughter who is helpless. She roams alone, devoid of the protection of her family's men, and so falls prey to harassment by an Arab youngster and to harsh treatment by Jewish soldiers.

The male part of the family receives the greatest attention in "The Call of the Ruins." The whole destiny of the Palestinian people is made to rest on the shoulders of the brother, Samir, the story's sole hope and center of gravity, and also the only character in it to receive a name. The father, roaming with him, bequeaths to him alone the past tradition and future goals of their people. He mentions his daughter, characterized as a victim in the story's present, only to emphasize the magnitude of the Palestinian *Nakbah*. Reminiscing about their happy past, he remembers his gladdest day, when she ran to the fields to tell him the good news that he had just been blessed with a son.

This emphasis on maleness and its connection to the national cause, together with the rendering of female characters as weak and impotent, may be seen as a consequence of the women writers' loyalty to their national ethos and its cultural idioms. Furthermore, both plots unfold outside the home—that is, in the public sphere. In "The Call of the Ruins," the father switches his first-person speech from singular to plural in declaring that this is no time to live alone and stay away from his people. "A Slap in the Face" is basically a negative initiation story of a girl struggling, in vain, to gain a place in the public sphere, where Zionism is "happening."

Another aspect expressive of loyalty to the group cause in both stories is their treatment of the landscape. Here the "nature-versus-culture" dichotomy so often invoked in feminist literary critique is mobilized to serve the national cause. In Harari's story, the Zionist, cultivated landscape is

Loyalty, Belonging, and Their Discontents

rendered in romantic terms reverberating with biblical expressions. In contrast, the highways and roads beyond the Zionist settlements are described as desolate, dangerous, almost ominous, bruising and cutting the heroine's feet. The same dichotomy works in a diametrically opposite direction in Qa'war Farah's story. The idyllic depiction of an abundance of blooming gardens, evoking the garden of Eden, and the use of classical, flowery styles are reserved for the story's Palestinian past tense, while the Zionist present has turned these same places into ruins and danger zones, threatening to those who roam them.

Signs of Public Pressure

Both stories show evidence not only of willing loyalty to the national cause but also of succumbing to public pressure, which is manifest in specific passages that seem headed in a direction contrary to the general drift. The effect of this pressure in each story is to weaken its personal message while forcing a nationalistic message upon it.

In Harari's story, this effect is apparent in the characterization of the Zionist father, who is made out to be a hero even though the way he treats his children is far from ideal, and in that of the Arab neighbors, whose treatment of their daughters is depicted as a warning sign to the Zionist families. An even stronger example, however, is to be found in the ending of the story. After the slap in the face, the heroine, who has been humiliated in public, is brought to a condition resembling that of her mother. She is at home, confined to bed, crying and feeling sick and helpless. Only the next day does she realize that the true circumstances of her conduct have been clarified. Her father comes to her bed, kisses her hand, and begs her forgiveness. The story ends with her feeling engulfed by happiness: "I am good, courageous . . . and father is alive, alive!"²⁹

This optimistic note seems somewhat contrived, since the story's emphasis is on the girl's public humiliation. The private apology, after the heroine has been reduced to a miserable, helpless female condition comparable to that of her mother, does not adequately resolve the plot's complication. One may well imagine, however, that in the atmosphere of the 1930s, when the story appeared, there was every reason for the author to bring the story to a happy

Hanita Brand

ending, rather than leaving a negative impression of the heroic father (who was reminiscent of Harari's real father, an important leader of the Yishuv).

Najwa Qa'war Farah's story reveals similar signs of succumbing to public pressure. The author, a Christian with a deeply religious *weltanschauung* (she married a priest) that was influenced by romantic-theosophic ideals, expressed her ideals and beliefs in the stories and poems she wrote, and "The Call of the Ruins" is no exception. The father's speech is punctuated with phrases like "it is better for us to suffer wrong than to cause wrong, for the evil deed is foul," and he lays the blame for the *Nakbah* on the human heart rather than on "the British, the Arab leaders, or the Jewish leaders."³⁰ However, Qa'war Farah's spiritual inclination to pronounce a message of Christian forgiveness was at odds with the Palestinian message of revenge. Here we come across evidence of an actual change in the body of the text. Avraham Yinon, who translated the story into Hebrew, notes:

The last words of the father are printed on a piece of paper containing three lines, pasted on the original text, after the printing of the book was finished. In the lines behind the pasted note one can still detect that the words reflected a message of mutual tolerance (based on righteousness and mercy), which the father bequeaths to his son, addressing him to act upon it. But apparently the author has changed her mind, and ended the father's speech with a harsher tone.³¹

Here are the pasted lines:

I do not wish to teach you revenge, for how miserable is the life of the avengers. But at the same time, I do not want you to neglect [the task of] demanding what is owed to you. You have to demand that justice will be done for you and the others. There is no peace without justice, and there is no mercy and no pity before justice is rendered.³²

The original text, without the pasted note, reads:

I do not wish to teach you revenge, for how miserable is the life of the avengers. But I do want to teach you forgiveness, for righteousness and mercy will follow forgiveness. If you keep this bequest of mine, I shall not fear death, nor shall I fear leaving you alone in the world, for verily

shall I know that you will always make friends, admirers, and fellow travelers for the road.³³

Here, clearly, words of Christian forgiveness were supplanted by words of Palestinian revenge. I have no information regarding the circumstances of the switch or the identity of the switcher, but whatever they were—and there may be several interesting explanations here—we are faced with physical evidence of a tension between public pressure from the group and the spiritual direction of the story.

Conclusion

As we have seen, in the cultural discourse of the Middle East during the first half of the twentieth century, men largely monopolized the public sphere. This, coupled with the separation between the public and the various private spheres, created a complete identification of men—as the only legitimate carriers of the national message—with the group cause, leaving very little room for women. As they emerged from the private spheres, women were therefore measured by the standard of loyalty to the group. Not only can we find signs of subordination and domination in the treatment of women in the public discourse, but they were also regarded with mistrust and suspicion. Pressure was exerted upon them to prove their loyalty and belonging. They responded to this pressure in ways that can be traced and analyzed in a variety of historical, cultural, and literary documents.

Notes

1. Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1988), p. 11.
2. Suad Joseph, “Gendering Citizenship in the Middle East,” in idem (ed.), *Gender and Citizenship in the Middle East* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2000), p. 24.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
4. Yaffah Berlovitz, *Lehamtzi eretz, lehamtzi ‘am: Sifrut ha’aliyah harishonah* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hame’uhad, 1996); Nurit Govrin, *Devash misela’: Mehkarim besifrut eretz Yisra’el* (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense, 1989).

Hanita Brand

5. Nurit Govrin, *Shorashim vetzamarot: Rishumah shel ha'aliyah harishonah basifrut ha'Ivrit* (Tel Aviv: Papyrus, 1981).
6. Joseph, "Gendering Citizenship" (above, note 2), p. 12.
7. Anthony Smith discusses the religious overtones to be heard in nationalist ideologies in his book *National Identity* (London: Penguin, 1991); Benedict Anderson traces nationalisms as emerging out of previous religious communities in his renowned work, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1993).
8. Joseph, "Gendering Citizenship" (above, note 2), p. 24.
9. Ela Greenberg, "The Cradle in One Hand, the Nation in the Other: The Portrayal of Women in the Palestinian Press, 1920s–1930s," *Hamizrah hehadash*, 43 (2002), p. 49 (in Hebrew).
10. Hilal Khashan, *Arab Attitudes toward Israel and Peace*, Policy Focus, Research Memorandum no. 40, August 2000 (Washington: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2001).
11. Ellen Fleischman, *Jerusalem Women's Organizations During the British Mandate: 1920s–1930s* (Jerusalem: PASSIA, 1995).
12. Yvette Batrice, *Al-mar'ah al-Filastiniyah fi Isra'il: Waqi' watahaddiyat* (Haifa, 2000), p. 98.
13. Fleischman, *Jerusalem Women's Organizations* (above, note 11), p. 28.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 38 and 47, quoting an interview conducted by Julie Peteet and Rosemary Sayigh in Washington on August 10, 1985.
15. Rachel Katznelson-Shazar, *Adam kemo shehu: Pirkei yomanim ureshimot*, ed. Michal Hagiti (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1989), p. 212.
16. Ze'ev Ya'avetz, "Temunah me'erezt Yisra'el," in *Mikhtav mimar'ot ha'arezt* (Warsaw, 1892), p. 3.
17. Female mythological symbols may be invoked to represent the struggle, but these will be detached from the existence of real women in the group.
18. Fleischman, *Jerusalem Women's Organizations* (above, note 11), pp. 7 and 43.
19. Quoted in Fleischman, *Jerusalem Women's Organizations* (above, note 11, p. 27), from the newspaper *Al-sirat al-mustaqim*, November 15, 1929.
20. Quoted in Margalit Shilo, *Hazehut hamishtanah shel ha'ishah ha'ivrit hahadashah be'erezt Yisra'el* (Jerusalem: Institute for the History of the Jewish National Fund, 1998), p. 24. No date is given, but the quotation appears in a chapter on the Mandate years.
21. Deniz Kandiyoti, "Women, Islam, and the State," in Juan R.I. Cole (ed.), *Comparing Muslim Societies: Knowledge and the State in a World Civilization* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), p. 247.
22. Menachem Usishkin, "Irgun Hayishuv: Hartza'ah bikhnesiyat Zikhron Ya'akov," in *Sefer Usishkin* (Jerusalem, 1924), p. 84.

Loyalty, Belonging, and Their Discontents

23. Before she married and emigrated to Eretz Israel, Nechama Puhachevski (under her former name of Nechama Feinstein) published an article to this effect in the January 27, 1889, issue of the newspaper *Hamelitz*. Quoted in Govrin, *Devash misela* (above, note 4), p. 133.
24. Qasim Amin, *Tahrir al-mar'ah* (Cairo, 1899), pp. 63–64.
25. Both quotes are in Shilo, *Hazehut hamishtanah* (above, note 20), p. 27.
26. Yehudit Harari, “Setirat lehi,” in Yaffah Berlovitz (ed.), *Sipurei nashim benot ha'aliyah harishonah* (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Tarmil, 1984), pp. 158–166.
27. Najwa Qa'war Farah, “Nida' al-atlal,” in idem, *Durub wamasabih* (Nazareth: Al-Hakim, n.d.), pp. 65–71.
28. The Arabic word is *risalah*, which also means prophecy, a message from God.
29. Harari, “Setirat lehi” (above, note 26), pp. 165–166.
30. Qa'war Farah, “Nida' al-atlal” (above, note 27), p. 69.
31. Najwa Qa'war Farah, “Keri'at hahoravot” (Hebrew transl. by Avraham Yinon), *Hamizrah hehadash*, 15/1–2 (1965), p. 166.
32. *Ibid.*
33. Qa'war Farah, “Nida' al-atlal” (above, note 27), p. 69.