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From *The Madwoman in the Attic* to *The Women's Room*: The American Roots of Israeli Feminism

The woman novelist must be an hysteric, for hysteria is simultaneously what a woman can do to be feminine and refuse femininity, within patriarchal discourses.
Juliet Mitchell, *Women: The Longest Revolution*¹

Female hysteria seemed to be on the wane, as feminism was on the rise [...] The despised hysterics of yesteryear have been replaced by the feminist radicals of today.
Elaine Showalter, *Hysteria Beyond Freud*²

ISRAELI FEMINISM HAD TO BE reinvented in the 1970s. About half a century had passed since the Suffragettes of Jewish Palestine won the vote in 1920; by the 1970s, intervening events—primarily the Holocaust, the establishment of the State, and its prolonged state of siege—have turned the struggle and the achievements of those “New Hebrew Women” into a dim memory. The familiar images of female soldiers and even a female Prime Minister [who was not a feminist!] did little to change the life and status of “the woman in the street.” “From the time of Independence until the Six-Day War (1948–1967) the status of women was, for the most part, a non-issue,” is the succinct summary of sociologist Dafna Izraeli in her 1987 *Encyclopaedia Judaica* feature essay on “The Status of Women in Israel.”³

This summary may sound paradoxical to anyone somewhat familiar with the ideological roots of the Zionist movement, which was bound up with 19th-century socialism and nationalism. The former had openly propagated—at least in theory—both social and sexual equality for women. However, as recent sociohistorical studies in Israel have shown, not a little was lost in the translation from ideological platform to lived experience. In

the view of contemporary scholars, cogently recapitulated in the term “the Equality Bluff,” the prestate Zionist women’s movement had not fulfilled its own expectations in either the urban settlements or even in the *kibbutzim* [collective farming communities].⁴ Nor did the legendary Palmach, apparently, despite the long-held perception to the opposite. As told only recently by one of its most notorious fighters, Netiva Ben Yehuda (b. 1928), the distance between the inscription on its “flag” and the reality in the ranks of Israel’s War of Independence in 1948 was rather immense.⁵

Still, this belated hindsight should not make us lose sight of the ethos (some would say mythos) of equal rights, as it was experienced by both fathers and mothers of the pioneering, founding generation. Nor should it make us belittle the political as well as cultural early “conquests” made by some of these women—Manya Schohat (1880–1959) and Rachel Katznelson-Shazar (1885–1983), for example, and, of course, the writer Dvora Baron (1887–1956) and the poet Rachel (1890–1931).

The force of this ethos was still felt in the early decades of the State, at least in some segments of Israeli society. English readers may be familiar with this ethos through the much publicized image of the Israeli female soldier, often photographed with a gun in her hand. In the late 1950s this image found its fictional expression in the popular, rather facile novel *New Face in the Mirror*,⁶ written in English (and published in America!) by Yael Dayan—today the Chair of the Israeli Knesset Committee on the Status of Women. She was then known as the young daughter of Israel’s charismatic Chief of Staff, the victorious commander of the 1957 Suez Campaign, and *the* symbol of Israeli male chauvinism, Moshe Dayan. The novel projected a female macho stereotype that in reality was neither “feminist” nor that common. It reflected, however, precisely that paradoxical Israeli ethos that made “feminism,” as it came to be known in the United States in the sixties, seem redundant, as if it were something “*we* have *always* known” (albeit under the rubric of “the woman question”), a latter-day product of a Western “luxury” culture that had finally awakened to some of its social(ist?) blind spots.

On the other hand, we should not forget that, by the 1960s, socialism (or social-Zionism) had already lost its broad popular base in Israeli society. The post-World War II immigration from Europe and the Middle-Eastern countries had more than doubled the population of the young state and had drastically changed the country’s demographic and cultural makeup.⁷ From that point on, a large portion of the Israeli population was *unaffiliated* with prestate ideologies. For this community, both “old” and “new” feminisms were anathema—a forthright subversion of their traditional (mostly Orien-



Yael Dayan, author, 1960
Courtesy of the Government Press Office.

tal and/or Orthodox) ways of life. When the pressure of life under constant military siege is added to this socio-cultural complex, it may become clear that, socially speaking, “Western” feminism could not have had a warm reception in the Israel of the 1960s and 1970s, despite a *pro forma* adherence to the indigenous, social-Zionist women’s movement. When this new trend was introduced by recent Anglo-American immigrants, it was typically viewed as alien to Israeli culture.

Nevertheless, it was this “alien” import that was indispensable for the initiation of the Israeli feminist movement. Ironically, this took place precisely in the period between the wars, when Israel was led by the non-feminist Prime Minister Golda Meir (1969–73). In the words of Dafna Izraeli,

The issue [of the status of women] reappears between the wars—1968 and 1973—when an anticipated labor shortage and the emergence of the feminist movement stimulated public interest and debate.⁸

Significantly, the “woman issue” first shook up the Israeli public arena in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War, with the election, in November 1973, of the recent American immigrant Marcia Freedman to a seat in the Knesset. The trials and tribulations of Freedman’s short-lived parliamentary career (she did not run again after one term) are extensively documented in her memoir, *Exile in the Promised Land* (1990).⁹ Yet although her unsuccessful attempt to import American feminism into Israel (and into the Knesset) would come to fruition only in the 1980s, her Israeli sojourn in the 1970s illustrates a fundamental aspect of Israeli feminism: its American (or Anglo-Saxon, as all English-speaking immigrants are called in Israel) component (which was crucial in the 1920s as well¹⁰).

Before Freedman’s “rise” to parliamentarism (on the ticket of the newly-formed Citizen’s Rights Movement, spearheaded by lawyer and civil rights activist Shulamit Aloni), she had organized in Haifa consciousness-raising groups, which originated in seminars on feminism that she and Marilyn Safir had taught in 1970 at Haifa University.¹¹ This (mostly) “Anglo-Saxon” feminist enclave thrived throughout the 1970s, peaked with Freedman’s election, and dissolved toward the end of the decade, shortly before Freedman herself returned to the States (1981). Several English books on Israeli women were generated by this group.¹² Both illustrate clearly the gulf between the Israeli female self-image and the way it was perceived by “Anglo-Saxon” feminist eyes.

Mention should be made, however, of an “indigenous” feminist activity that was simultaneously brewing within the politically radical left-wing cells of Jerusalem (led by Leah Zemel and Michal Tsofen). Its political anti-Zionist positions prevented it, though, from reaching wider circles or successfully cooperating with the women’s movement that was slowly emerging in Haifa and Tel-Aviv, led by Esther Eilam. The dichotomy between a broad-based women’s movement and the left-wing radicalism of some of its forerunners was, in the final analysis, also one of the reasons for the “exile” (both in Israel and out of it) of Marcia Freedman, who was “too left-wing” for many women activists in Israel. Nevertheless, Freedman and her fellow American feminists left their mark on Israeli feminism in its formative stages. Among the rest, Freedman initiated the 1977 republication of Sara Azaryahu’s 1947 *The Association of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights in Eretz Israel*, for which she wrote a preface.¹³ The same years also saw the establishment of a feminist press, *Hamin haSheni*, which specialized in translations of staple American feminist texts.¹⁴ In addition, the Canadian-born Israeli Tehiya Bat Oren published the first Hebrew book that in a way “translated” American second-wave feminism into Hebrew. *Shibrur ha’isha—le’an?* [The Liberation of Woman]¹⁵ bears the unmistakable stamp of Betty Friedan’s 1963 *The Feminine Mystique* (which has never been translated to Hebrew as a whole), applying its lessons to the Israeli situation. It poignantly expresses the frustration felt by women whose experience of the Yom-Kippur War was that of exclusion and marginalization. Similarly, in 1982, the first feminist analysis that specifically targeted the socio-political and psychological “catch 22” of women in Israel, *Nashim bemilkud* [The Double Bind], was the product of a team of five professionals led by Dafna Izraeli, another “Anglo-Saxon,” who later became the first Israeli to gain her “professorship” as a full-fledged feminist scholar.¹⁶

By the mid-1980s, the “New Israeli Woman” began to show hesitant signs of coming back to life. *Noga* [Venus], the first Israeli feminist journal, was established in 1980. Toward the end of the decade both the Hebrew University and Haifa University instituted programs for Women’s Studies, predictably headed by American-born scholars. Gender-related courses were offered in other universities as well. Israel Women’s Network (IWN), spearheaded by a retired professor of English, Alice Shalvi, was organized in 1984, combating, according to Shalvi, “a climate of opinion in which feminism was considered irrelevant because Israel was perceived as having already achieved equality between the sexes(!) . . .”¹⁷

In her retrospective musings marking the first decade of Israel Women’s Network (1994), Shalvi has put her finger on the paradox that is at the heart



P.M. Barak congratulating Prof. Alice Shalvi during the “Liebeher” Tolerance Award Ceremony in Jerusalem, 1999.
Courtesy of the Government Press Office.

of Israeli literary feminism of the last quarter of the twentieth century. This paradoxical “climate” did not control public opinion alone; it permeated the cultural arena as well. As I demonstrate in my study *No Room of Their Own*,¹⁸ this tension may be detected in the work of several novelists, the “foremothers” of the Israeli explosion in women’s fiction that began to sweep Israel in the 1980s and is still going strong. Prominent among these authors are Amalia Kahana-Carmon (b. 1926), Shulamith Hareven (b. 1930), Shulamit Lapid (b. 1934), and Ruth Almog (b. 1936), who have all struggled—in a variety of ways, to be sure—with the allure of what I call the “feminist romance,” while trying to stave off both the psychological and social powers that have resisted it. More often than not, they have done this via historical displacements, writing quasi-historical novels which are nothing more than “masked autobiographies.” The need to mask their newly imported feminist consciousness attests to the depth of an unarticulated conflict they must have experienced between that consciousness and the national consensus. Being both Zionists and (budding) feminists they have initially experienced the two ideologies as contradicting rather than as complementing each other. This uneasy coexistence expresses itself also in

the different ways in which they have overtly and covertly responded to American feminism.

Their responses to American feminism range widely, from an early open rejection (at least nominally), to an acknowledged debt of literary inspiration. The position of rejection belongs to Shulamith Hareven, who was also the first to write a “feminist romance,” or a “masked autobiography.” Published in 1973, her first novel, *City of Many Days*,¹⁹ had in a sense *anticipated* the public import of American feminism into Israeli parliamentary and cultural discourse. As I argue in detail in my book,²⁰ this novel subverts the stereotypical gender roles of the traditional society it lovingly brings to life, by unobtrusively suggesting androgynous gender constructions—Israeli versions of Virginia Woolf’s notorious androgyny. Simultaneously, however, it acknowledges the power of historical exigencies to undermine cross-gender equality. This acceptance of the imbalance of powers between the collective and the personal (including the feminist) ultimately obscures the feminist argument of this novel; but it also attests to the conflicted feminism of its author, who earlier on declared herself to be a “selective feminist” and denied the artistic validity of such category as “women’s literature.” The crux of this conflict came into the open in the only essay of this prolific essayist to address feminism directly. Significantly, it is *American* feminism as such that Hareven engaged in this essay.²¹ Tellingly named “*Shavim veshonim*” [Equal and Different], this early work may help us understand the complex twist on feminism that *City of Many Days* (apparently hatched in that very time) dramatizes.

The essay opens with a question, rehearsing a concern heard in some quarters of Israeli society at the time: Why isn’t there a Women’s Lib Movement in Israel as there is in the United States? Anticipating Homi Bhabha’s critique of colonialist discourse,²² Hareven sees this question as an act of cultural mimicry, stemming from lack of understanding of cultural difference. In her opinion, American Women’s Lib is a response to a process of objectivization typical of American culture, but irrelevant to Israel. (Golda Meir, another link in the “false” Israeli “equal rights” image, would have certainly shared this sentiment. Furthermore, in America this process is detrimental to men no less than it is to women. Since, in Israel, this process is much less severe, there is no need for a “corrective” in the form of feminism. Moreover, she asserts, in Israel there is no confusion of gender roles (as there is in America) because of the constant state of war and men’s military service.²³

We may no doubt raise a brow at this rationalization. The woman behind this essay is obviously an engaged person of clearly-drawn convic-

tions and priorities, yet “feminism” is not among them. Nevertheless, and despite this principled objection to the American import, there is no doubt that after a long hiatus, Hareven has lately come around to feminist concerns that were clearly inspired—whether she admitted it or not—by American feminisms. As shown below, this is particularly true for her latest novella, *Aharei hayaldut* [After Childhood], as well as for her critique of Freudianism, both published in 1994.²⁴

The literary career of veteran writer Amalia Kahana-Carmon, who has been awarded the Israel Prize for Fiction in the year 2000, tells a different story. To begin with, her poetics were affiliated with the Modernism of Virginia Woolf as early as the 1960s, when her first collection of stories appeared (*Under One Roof*, 1966).²⁵ In addition, she never mentioned “American feminism” as such. Nevertheless, a feminist turning point in her career took place precisely within that 1980s “climate of opinion” inspired by the American import, as described by Shalvi. It was in 1984 that the first of her acclaimed feminist essays was published—about three decades after she began publishing and not long after her first visit to the USA. And although one can still detect traces of Woolf’s rhetoric in her extra-literary arguments, there is clearly an added contemporary (we may label it “American”) tone in her conceptualization of the new direction she was taking in 1984. In an interview conducted upon the publication of her new novel(la), *Lema’lah beMontifer* [Up in Montifer],²⁶ she characterized this work as “a breakthrough . . . a different direction, a different approach,” comparing its role to that of “The Ladies of Avignon” in Picasso’s artistic development.²⁷ Here, she argued, “my characters try, for the first time, to do something about their reality . . . [They try get out of] their stoic inaction.”²⁸ To what extent this “call to arms” materializes in the fiction is a question we cannot address here.²⁹ Suffice it to point out, however, that one of the “new” narrative metaphors utilized in this novel—set in seventeenth-century Europe!—is the dramatization of the analogy between the marginalization (and the option for liberation as well) of women and blacks. And although Kahana-Carmon adds, perhaps in the spirit of Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, a third party to this analogy, the Jew, the woman/black analogy may have been directly inspired by American realities—as much as by the more than a century-old tradition of American feminist discourse, going all the way back to the nineteenth-century rhetorics of Elizabeth Cady Stanton.³⁰

The nature of this discourse may explicate her engagement not merely with American-inspired women’s liberation, but with a critique of masculinist aggression as well. This theme reverberates through the work of the other Israeli feminist foremothers published in the 1980s: Netiva Ben Yehuda, the



A portrait of author Amalia Kahana Carmon
Courtesy of the Government Press Office.

veteran Palmach fighter, who had waited for over three decades before exposing—in her Palmach trilogy, published between 1981 and 1991³¹—her own experience in (and scathing feminist critique of) the heroic epic of 1948; Shulamit Lapid, who, in *Gei Oni* (1982),³² questioned the place of women within the settlement myth of the early Zionists; and finally, Ruth Almog, who orchestrated all these themes in her 1987 prize-winning novel, *Shorshei Avir* [Roots of Air].³³ Since American feminism is clearly in evidence in this latest “installment” of the “feminist romance,” I would suggest that, what enabled Almog to go beyond her peers and take the unmasking of masculinism to unprecedented heights was her imaginative rewriting of two recent American feminist “classics,” which she has ingeniously adapted to the Israeli situation. As these sources were not at all recognized in the Israeli reception of *Roots of Air*—enthusiastic though it was—what follows is an attempt to correct this critical imbalance by an analysis of the American roots of *Roots of Air*.³⁴

Roots of Air is structured in two dissimilar parts, ranging from turn-of-the-century Palestine to 1960s Europe. Book I of the novel—“Madness Is the Wisdom of the Individuum”³⁵—is a dialogic narrative, in which two modalities alternate antiphonally chapter by chapter, demanding of the reader an analogical reading. In one, Mira Gutman, as a rather conventionally autobiographic narrator, recounts her atypical childhood in a typical *moshavad* [small farming town] in the early years of the state. In the other, told from an ostensibly “historical” (third person) perspective, she attempts to piece together the life-story of her maternal great grandfather, *Lavdovi* (or perhaps *Levadovi*, “Mr. Alonely”?), an eccentric Zionist of the First *Aliyah*. Her involvement with this father figure is not historical in the strict sense of the word. It is psychological and ideological, displacing contemporary concerns that reached their peak in the wake of the 1982 Lebanon War (Jewish-Arab relations and general attitudes toward power) to the historical events. It is this strand of the narrative that contains the seeds of the “virile, political” novel, in the words of the author herself,³⁶ that will come to fruition in Book II—“Anatomy of Freedom”³⁷—of the novel. Here the mature Mira finds herself in Europe of the 1960s, totally involved in “work and love,”³⁸ as well as in the 1968 students’ revolts and in the invaded and violated “free” Prague.

Almog allowed her heroine, then, both the closed intimacy of stereotypical female *Bildung* and the ostensibly open horizons of the male hero’s quest. Unlike any Israeli woman writer before her, she fully developed both the psychological and the socio-political matrices of her protagonist, making her the first Israeli heroine to narrate a complete life span—from child-

hood in a small town (modeled on *Zikhron Ya'akov*, as Almog has recounted), through urban adolescence in Jerusalem (significantly, the least developed of the “chapters” of her life), to an allegedly autonomous adulthood abroad. Thematically and generically, *Roots of Air* seems to have come as close as possible to the “malestream” of the Hebrew literary canon; a fact that has no doubt contributed to the warm reception it received from the literary establishment and the reading public alike.

At the same time, however, the novel sports some highly “feminine” features. Most significantly, Mira is the first Israeli female protagonist to be endowed with a mother who cuts an impressive figure, crucial to the shaping of her daughter’s life.³⁹ In this she is fundamentally different from Almog’s own earlier (and later!) heroines, who as a rule, suffer from a “father fixation” without the benefit of a viable maternal role model. Naturally, the father fixation does not totally disappear from this novel; rather, it is counterbalanced by the mother figure, whose role in her daughter’s development is the focus of the present inquiry. She is also different from other earlier protagonists, whose mothers were generally absent—either textually or psychologically. When maternity is represented, as in Lapid’s or Hareven’s work, it often functions symbolically rather than realistically.⁴⁰ Moreover, it rarely fully represents the psychological burden of the mother-daughter axis (Sara, the protagonist of Hareven’s *City of Many Days*, 1973, simply “ignores” her mother’s legacy, conveniently escaping it in her own turn by having sons only . . . as does Moran in *After Childhood*).⁴¹

This shift to mother-daughter relations deserves attention not only because of its novelty at the time, but because it makes Almog’s “take” on American feminism so complex and, in the final analysis, also subversive. It was precisely this psychological nexus, we may recall, that feminists on both sides of the Atlantic have unearthed from Freudian unknowability—to different ends, to be sure—since the late 1970s.⁴² At least one of the popular American pioneers of this theme was translated into Hebrew as early as 1980—Nancy Friday’s 1977 *My Mother/My Self*.⁴³ Yet the Israeli literary response was slow in coming. Almog’s foregrounding of the mother-daughter continuum may be therefore credited with ushering a new facet into the feminist literary discourse in Israel, as the spate of recent writing about this topic can attest.⁴⁴ This new facet has in fact reinforced the engagement with American feminism in Israeli fiction, as suggested by the following analysis.

The first clue to this engagement is the fact that Almog does not portray an idealized image of “Jewish” motherhood. Ruhama Gutman, Mira’s mother, is a frustrated artist and an hysteric, often on the verge of suicide. Indeed, in contrast to Hareven’s fascination with “sanity,” Almog is danger-

ously attracted to “insanity”; and while, for earlier authors, the thin line between the two functions mostly as a threat hidden in the margins, Almog has made insanity—and especially its feminine connection—a major focus of her *Roots of Air*. In fact, by making the mother both a frustrated artist and an hysteric, she has anchored her narrative at the heart of one of the major debates in Western feminist discourse—the relationship between the infamous “female malady” (hysteria), women’s creativity, and feminist survival (see epigraph, above). Since this debate is one of the issues that divide the American feminist camp from its Continental (mostly French) counterpart,⁴⁵ Almog’s take on this question is indicative.

In a way, Almog wrote another contemporary revision of *Jane Eyre*, that nineteenth century novel that has become the emblem of American literary feminism ever since the publication in 1979 of Susan Gilbert and Sandra Gubar’s pioneering study *The Madwoman in the Attic*.⁴⁶ Focusing not on the *Bildung* of the protagonist, Jane, but rather on the fate of her predecessor, the “mad” Berta, Gilbert and Gubar read her as the vehicle of the author’s disguised rage and subversiveness, which represented nineteenth-century women, who were all, metaphorically speaking, locked up in the attic, unable to gain liberation unless through self-imposed death (Berta, we may recall, burns down the house in which she is incarcerated, blinding her “master” along the way). Indeed, as told by scholar Elizabeth R. Baer, *Jane Eyre* has attracted several feminist rewritings throughout the 1970s, *The Madwoman in the Attic* being the sixth among them.⁴⁷ Almog may have learned her trade, however, from an even earlier revisionist, Jean Rhys (1894–1979), the West Indian author who “well before any of these women [scholars],” says Baer, “had spent ten years ‘revising’ *Jane Eyre* for twentieth-century readers. The revision is a novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*.”⁴⁸

In *Wide Sargasso Sea* (which was published in 1966 and translated to Hebrew in 1981),⁴⁹ Rhys has constructed the evolution of female madness via a “prequel,” as Baer calls it, to *Jane Eyre*, conjuring up the early life of Rochester’s first wife, Berta, the one we get to know in Charlotte Brönte’s novel only as “the madwoman in the attic,” so that her fate can serve as a sisterly warning to Jane not to repeat her own (Berta-Antoinette’s) mistakes.

In *Roots of Air*, Almog equipped her “Jane” (Mira) with a predecessor that would serve as her warning sign and thereby warranty her (Mira’s) survival. Except that in this case it is not a former wife of a future husband that fulfills this “sisterly” function (see the title of Baer’s essay); here it is the mother, Ruhama, whose madness and suicide are the signals heeded by her daughter, Mira.

Through the mother's hysteria and the daughter's struggle to escape her pathology, Almog seems to have created a "mother-daughter continuum" that would transverse the distance between the two different positions on female hysteria that are represented in the epigraph above by Juliet Mitchell and Elaine Showalter. Whereas Mitchell seems to agree with the French celebration of hysteria (e.g., Helene Cixous),⁵⁰ Showalter's position is clearly guarded. Her 1990s work significantly prefers "the feminist radicals of today"—apparently reading feminist activism as a solution to the female malady (hysteria) rather than vice versa.⁵¹

Almog seems to have anticipated Showalter's move. She has her "Jane" escape the lot of the "despised hysterics of yesteryear" (represented in this story by her mother, Ruhama) by becoming a radical of the 1960s. And although she sends her close to home, to Europe, her name clearly aligns her with the staple fictional representation of American feminist radicalism of the same period, Marilyn French's *The Women's Room*.⁵²

This novel is perhaps the most famous contemporary feminist *Bildungsroman*. Published in Hebrew in 1980, it greatly impressed Almog.⁵³ The name of its heroine is also Mira. Her story is told by her and about her simultaneously (namely, changes in narratorial perspective like the ones we find in Almog's novel). She narrates a whole life span in retrospect, tracing the evolution of "Mira" from a middle-class wife and mother to a divorced woman, now a successful Harvard student, who strives to "work and love" through the political and ideological maelstrom of the 1960s. The high point of her transformation is naturally 1968, but it goes downhill from there on. In the wistful narrative present, "Mira"—the accomplished Ph.D.—is a college teacher in a small town in Maine. Pacing alone on the wintry shores of Maine, trying to escape her nightmares and loneliness, and wondering if she is losing her mind, "Mira" decides to put the shadows of the past to rest by writing down the story we have just been reading.

How does Almog's Mira emerge from her stormy 1968?

The author's answer seems ambiguous. Yes, she allows her protagonist the freedom of choice (Book II is entitled "Anatomy of Freedom") and sends her off to Italy to study medicine. True, she releases her from the prison-house of the female private sphere—where "nothing interesting ever happens," according to her mother—and plunges her into the "colorful" world of international journalism and left-wing politics. At the same time, she immerses her in the discourse on freedom, both personal and political, of that generation (Behaviorism vs. Existentialism, Freudianism vs. Marxism, Marcuse vs. Fromm, possessiveness vs. ego boundaries, authenticity

vs. power relations), only to find out they are blind alleys.⁵⁴ She also involves her in one of the most intriguing love affairs of Hebrew literature, enabling her to conduct a dialogic discourse on love and female desire, while testing first-hand the practical in/validity of the rhetoric of freedom. The eccentric, unpredictable, and finally also unreliable Professor Jacques Berliavsky is one of the most exasperating, finely drawn character portraits in Israeli fiction. Yet one should not miss the irony implied by the title of Part A of Book II, “Freedom According to Jacques.”

This version of the “New Hebrew Woman” definitely has its fair share of work and love. But they do not dwell happily ever after. Nor do the protagonists. In a twist that is quite predictable for the sober realism of Almog’s Mira, “total, absolute love”⁵⁵ founders on the rocks of marriage.⁵⁶ And although the reason for this foundering is over-determined (her dependency, the vacuousness of his “freedom”), it clearly takes Mira one step further in the deconstruction of the masculine ideal. The hard lesson of her exercise in “freedom according to Jacques” is that “work and love” elude not only aspiring young females, they are rare in the male world as well. From this perspective, it is not Mira who has failed the test of the “virile, political” plot, it is the ideal that has failed her. The road to freedom, Almog’s Mira finds out, leads through a history of masculine violence and aggression, terror and rape (which she experiences first-hand).⁵⁷ Fraternity is taken over by fratricide, equality by oppression.

Almog’s protagonist stands alone in Israeli fiction of the 1980s in her endeavor actually to carry out, here and now, “classical” feminist expectations. But at the same time, the outcome of Mira’s “education” undoes or deconstructs the very ideal it has set out to achieve. Almog’s venture, the inscription of a female protagonist into “a virile, political novel” (her own wording) has turned out to be its own best refutation. That this endeavor takes place in exile, outside the borders of Israel, is of course part of the critique implied in the structure of this novel. For this “portrait of the feminist as a young woman” crashes against the unyielding realities of both the protagonist’s internal (psychological) and external (sociopolitical) worlds.

Furthermore, while piecing together the madwomen of yesteryear with the radicals of the present (of the 1960s) via the mother-daughter “discovery” of the 1980s, Almog exploded the gynocentric intimacy of this triple-decker narrative. Her Mira gets out of her “women’s room” to explore two androcentric ideologies of freedom: those of twentieth-century philosophies, from Existentialism to Laingian psychoanalysis, and those of

nineteenth-century nationalism, especially in the guise of the early Zionist pioneers in the Land of Israel. Her “Anatomy of Freedom” turns into an ironic critique of self-centered aggression, recalling, apparently not by chance, Robin Morgan’s *The Anatomy of Freedom* (1982), itself an (American) analysis of “Feminism, Physics and Global Politics.”⁵⁸ Significantly, she does this, among the rest, by tracing the mother’s age-old “female malady” to a male predecessor—Ruhama’s grandfather, Lavdovi. By juxtaposing “the mad Lavdovi” with his “co-believers”—the early settlers who were impervious to their own masculinist aggression—Almog has crossed over the gender boundaries of the feminist discussion, expanding its parameters to the question of male hysteria and madness at large—a gesture that unwittingly echoes the recent development in the work of Elaine Showalter, cited above.

Indeed, without this act of inclusion, the meaning of the final accords of this rich novel may elude us. Here Almog has Mira indulge in the rhythms, sounds, and fragrances of her near and distant memories. In a tapestry of free associations, her imagination shuttles back and forth between past and present, the real and the imaginary, finally replicating the very language that was earlier used to represent her mother’s unique bond with nature. With this, Ruhama’s madness is not only internalized; it is also redeemed. The Freudian (Greek) connotation of her name (*rehem*, womb, *hysteria*) gives way to its biblical (Hebrew) meaning (*rahamim*, compassion, love). Exhibiting the cadences of Freudian primary processes, of Lacanian pre-Oedipal Imaginary, or of Kristeva’s maternal Semiotic, these final pages hold the promise for artistic sublimation. We are not sure whether Mira will return from her exile (“I do not want to walk in the footsteps of my maternal great-grandfather . . . and be called a madwoman . . .”⁵⁹) or whether she will fare better in her future love choices, but we feel confident that she is able to “befriend” her legacy of madness and contain it within the “chaos” of artistic creativity.

Having Mira go not only beyond “the despised hysterics of yesteryear,” but even beyond their “replacement” in Elaine Showalter’s script (“the feminist radicals of today”), Almog still questions Juliet Mitchell’s claim that “the woman novelist must be an hysteric.” If her own actions are any measure, she would not let her Mira wallow in the hysterical self-pity of Marilyn French’s “Mira” at the end of *The Women’s Room*. Perhaps she would have her move from therapeutic autobiographical fiction to other genres and other interests.

Significantly, this is precisely the direction Almog has taken in her latest work, *Tikkun omanuti* [Invisible Mending],⁶⁰ a collection of heart-rending stories, meticulously executed, in which she artistically “mends” the life stories of a variety of characters—mostly children—who are socially marginal without necessarily being “mad” and/or female. With this, Almog seems to have completed a journey, begun about a decade earlier, from the option women were given by the feminist movement, as she said, “to relate to themselves as to a separate being that has her own problematics and interests,” to another object of observation, mentioned parenthetically in the same comments: “an object that is both separate and different, just like the child or the teenager.”⁶¹ Overcoming both the Oedipal fixation and the daughterly position, Almog has now embraced the mother in herself (“A woman is her own mother,” in Anne Sexton’s famous words), to move from hysteria to her story, and from her story to the story of children, both male and female, whose only redemption is an artistic mending by a loving maternal heart.

We have traveled a long distance from Hareven’s refusal of the social correctives suggested (and demanded) by early American feminism to the internalizing and questioning of its later phases by Ruth Almog. It would be perhaps fitting to round off this exposition by revisiting Hareven’s position two decades later. After a long period in which her work has been totally preoccupied with the Israeli political situation (and during which feminist issues seem to have gone underground), Hareven has come around full circle: in her latest novella and essays, published throughout the 1990s, she has joined, at least ideationally, the women’s peace movements and the critique of their nemesis—the aggressive (filicidal) androcentric tradition of the West. Tracing this aggression to monotheistic tyranny, she sees it stretching from the great religions to twentieth-century Freudianism and psychotherapy. Openly taking her cue from American post-Freudian revisionists,⁶² she has recently went so far as to argue for “Women’s Talent for Sanity,”⁶³ a position that aligns her with the growing American camp of *Maternal Thinking* and *Peace as a Women’s Issue*.⁶⁴

With these changes in the air, we should not be surprised to discover another completion of an American-Israeli journey: Marcia Freedman, whom we described as the first American who brought feminism to Israeli public attention, has recently declared an end to her American exile; she is now ready to make Israel her home again, this time importing an ostensibly new American contribution to feminist discourse—gender.⁶⁵

NOTES

*This essay summarizes some aspects of the research that underlies my study *No Room of Their Own: Gender and Nation in Israeli Women's Fiction* (New York, 1999), Gender and Culture Series.

1. Juliet Mitchell, *Women: The Longest Revolution* (London, 1984[1966]) 289.
2. Elaine Showalter, *Hysteria Beyond Freud* (Berkeley, CA, 1993) 327.
3. Dafna N. Izraeli, "The Status of Women in Israel," *Encyclopedia Judaica Year Book* (1986–7) 37–52.
4. Findings on this issue have been published in Hebrew since the early 1980s, ironically, mostly by women of "Anglo-Saxon" background.
For overviews in English see, Deborah S. Bernstein (ed), *Pioneers and Homemakers: Jewish Women in Pre-State Israel* (New York, 1992); Barbara Swirski and Marilyn P. Safir (eds), *Calling the Equality Bluff: Women in Israel* (New York, 1993); and Yael Azmon and Dafna N. Izraeli (eds), *Women in Israel: A Sociological Anthology* (New Brunswick and London, 1993), which includes a valuable bibliography. See also Ch. 8, "Zionism as an Erotic Revolution," in David Biale, *Eros and the Jews* (New York, 1992).
5. See Netiva Ben Yehuda's 1948—*Between Calendars* (Jerusalem, 1981); *Through the Binding Ropes* (Jerusalem, 1985); and *When the State Broke Out* (Jerusalem, 1991) [Hebrew]. Not accidentally, Ben Yehuda's Palmach trilogy coincided with the revisionist historical and sociological feminist research that also gained momentum in the 1980s. Yet, while her general subversion of the Palmah's mythological aura was immediately grasped, causing quite a great upheaval, most of the reviewers (even women) did not properly appreciate the great extent to which gender inequality is the deep trauma that has both motivated and structured her "novels." See Ch. 7 of my *No Room of Their Own*, and my article, "Hebrew Gender and Zionist Ideology," *Prooftexts* 20:1–2, Special Double Issue: *Through the Lens of Gender* (January, 2000): 139–57.
6. Yael Dayan, *New Face in the Mirror* (Cleveland and New York, 1959). For a cogent analysis of its "non feminism," see, Edna Ulman-Margalit, "Different Face in the Mirror," *Mikarov*, 2 (1998) 153–61 [Hebrew].
7. See Yonatan Shapiro, *Elit lelo mamshichim* [An Elite without Successors] (Tel-Aviv, 1984) [Hebrew].
8. Izraeli, "The Status of Women in Israel."
9. Marcia Freedman, *Exile in the Promised Land: A Memoir* (Ithaca, NY, 1990).
10. In a paper given in a conference on "Women in the Yishuv and the Early State" at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Jerusalem, June 1998), Hana Safran described the contribution of Dr. Rose Welt-Straus, a leader of American suffragism, to the suffragist movement in Jewish Palestine, which she had chaired from 1919 to 1939. See also Sara Azaryahu, *The Association of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights in Eretz Israel: Chapters in the History of Women in the Land, 1900–1947* (Haifa: The Fund for Support of Women, 1977) 53, 94–5 [Hebrew]. The American influence on the

political and social development in pre-state Palestine (via Hadassah and other organizations) is a broader subject and is beyond the scope of this essay.

11. See Barbara Swirski, "Israeli Feminism, New and Old," in Swirski and Safir, *Calling the Equality Bluff*, 285–302.

12. Most notoriously, Lesley Hazleton's *Israeli Women: The Reality Behind the Myth* (New York, 1977), and Natalie Rein's *Daughters of Rachel: Women in Israel* (Harmondsworth, UK, 1979).

13. Marcia Freedman, "Preface," in Azaryahu *The Association of Hebrew Women for Equal Rights in Eretz Israel*.

14. E.g., Barbara Seaman's *Free and Female* (New York, 1972). Another collection of translations from American feminism was published by the Israeli Feminist Movement: see Rina Shelef, Sara Sykes, Shlomit Kaufman, Honey Meir-Levi, and Marganit Weinberger (eds), *Isha, nashim, nashiyut* [Woman, Women, Femininity] (Tel-Aviv, 1975) [Hebrew].

15. Tehiya Bat Oren, *Shibrur haIsha—le'an?* [The Liberation of Woman] (Tel-Aviv, 1975) [Hebrew].

16. Dafna N. Izraeli, co-author, with Ariela Friedman, Ruth Schrift, Frances Raday, and Yehudit Buber Agassi, *Nashim bemilkud* [The Double Bind: The Status of Women in Israel] (Tel-Aviv, 1982) [Hebrew].

17. Alice Shalvi, *Networking for Women*, 8(1) (1995) 6; cf. Swirski and Safir, *Calling the Equality Bluff*.

18. Feldman, *No Room of Their Own*.

19. Shulamith Hareven, *City of Many Days* (Tel-Aviv, 1973) [Hebrew].

20. Feldman, *No Room of Their Own*, Ch. 5.

21. Shulamith Hareven, "Shavim veshonim" [Different and Equal], *Ma'ariv*, 24 September 1971 [Hebrew]. The title clearly alludes to the American Supreme Court decision of 1954 on the desegregation of the education system, in which the notion of "separate but equal" was declared to be a contradiction in terms.

22. Homi Bhabha, "Of mimicry and man: The ambivalence of colonial discourse," in *The Location of Culture* (Routledge, 1994) 85–92.

23. Shulamith Hareven, "Shonim ve-shavim" [The Dulcinea Syndrome] (Jerusalem, 1981) 179–89 [Hebrew].

24. Shulamith Hareven, *Sharei haYaldut* [After Childhood] (Tel-Aviv, 1994); Hareven, "Laius, The Father Repressed by Freud," *Ha'Aretz*, 9 December 1994.

25. Amelia Kahana-Carmon, *Bikhfifa ahat* [Under One Roof] (Tel-Aviv, 1966) [Hebrew].

26. Amelia Kahana-Carmon, *Up in Montifer* (Tel-Aviv, 1984) [Hebrew].

27. Orly Lubin, "HaSisma haNekhona" [The Correct Password], an interview with Amalia Kahana-Carmon, *Ha'Aretz*, 9 March 1984 [Hebrew]; for more details, see also Feldman, *No Room of Their Own*, Ch. 3. Kahana-Carmon herself elaborated on the effects of her visit to the United States in her response to my lecture at Tel-Aviv University on 10 January 2000. For details, see my article "Three Days before the Israel Prize," *HaDoar*, 4 February 2000, 15–16.

28. Lubin, *Ha'Aretz*, 9 March 1984.
29. Feldman, *No Room of Their Own*, Ch. 3.
30. Together with Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton was a fore-mother of American feminism in the nineteenth century. She learned her rhetoric from a black abolitionist priest. Kahana-Carmon herself elaborated on the effects of her visit to the United States in response to my lecture at Tel-Aviv University on 10 January 2000. See my report in "Three Days Before the Prize," *HaDoar*, 11 January 2000.
31. Ben Yehuda's 1948—*Between Calendars; Through the Binding Ropes*; and, *When the State Broke Out*.
32. See Shulamit Lapid, *Gei Oni* (Jerusalem, 1982) [Hebrew].
33. Ruth Almog, *Shorshei Avir* [Roots of Air] (Jerusalem, 1987) [Hebrew].
34. For a full critical apparatus, see Ch. 8 of my book, *No Room of Their Own*.
35. Almog, *Roots of Air*, 7–160.
36. See Leah Fuchs, an interview with Ruth Almog, *HaDoar*, 13 January 1989, 14–15 [Hebrew].
37. Almog, *Roots of Air*, 161–359.
38. I use this Freudian "formula" for mental health as a code for the equal rights aspiration of the second-wave feminism in America and elsewhere; see Feldman, *No Room of Their Own*, "Introduction" 39.
39. The emphasis is on "Israeli" not "Hebrew," for there are several treatments—rather ambivalent—of this subject in Dvora Baron's stories in *Parshiyot* (Jerusalem, 1951) [Hebrew], and *The Thorny Path* (Jerusalem, 1969) [Hebrew]; while Leah Goldberg epitomized it, not only in her 1946 autobiographic novel *Vehu ha'or* [And He/It Is the Light] (Tel-Aviv, 1946) [Hebrew], but in her life as well.
40. See Lapid, *Gei Oni*; Hareven, *After Childhood*.
41. Hareven, *City of Many Days*; and, *After Childhood*.
42. On the general shift from the Oedipal to the pre-Oedipal in psychoanalytic theory, see Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Berkeley, CA, 1978); Adrienne Rich, "Motherhood and Daughterhood," in her *Of Woman Born* (New York, 1976) 218–55. On the literary representation of this paradigm, see Cathy N. Davidson and E. M. Broner (eds), *The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature* (New York, 1980); Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and E. Langland (eds), *The Voyage In* (Hanover, NH, 1983); Marianne Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (Bloomington, IN, 1989); and Carolyn Heilbrun, "To The Light House: The New Story of Mother and Daughter," in her *Hamlet's Mother* (New York, 1990) 134–9.
43. Nancy Friday, *My Mother/My Self* (New York, 1977).
44. Most notoriously, Batya Gur's *Afterbirth* (Jerusalem, 1994) [Hebrew], and Eleonora Lev's *The First Morning in Paradise* (Tel-Aviv, 1996) [Hebrew]; but see also Dorit Zilberman, *Woman inside Woman* (Tel-Aviv, 1991) [Hebrew], and Ilana Bernstein *Provision* (Tel-Aviv, 1991) [Hebrew], to name but a few. See also the anthology, Maya Dvash and Shula Modan (eds), *Mothers and Daughters* (Tel-Aviv,

1997) [Hebrew], the first Israeli “statement” on the topic, a lag of two decades after its American emergence. Jewish American feminists may have had an earlier start; e.g., Kim Chernin, *In My Mother's House* (New York, 1983). See also Janet Handler Burstein, *Writing Mothers, Writing Daughters: Tracing the Maternal in Stories by American Jewish Women* (Urbana and Chicago, IL, 1996); Erica Jong, *Inventing Memory: A Novel of Mothers and Daughters* (New York, 1997).

45. The classic study of the transatlantic feminist fault line is *Gynesis* by Alice Jardin (Ithaca, NY, 1985).

46. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven, CT, 1979). The canonic status of this study is attested by the fact that its 20th “anniversary” is marked this year by a special session at the annual meeting of the MLA (December 1999).

47. Elizabeth R. Baer, “The Sisterhood of Jane Eyre and Antoinette Cosway,” in Abel, Hirsch, and Langland (eds), *The Voyage In*, 131–48.

48. *Ibid.*, 132.

49. Jean Rhys is one of Ruth Almog's favorite authors, and *Wide Sargasso Sea* (New York, 1966) one of her favorite novels (private communication, March 1998; see also an earlier interview Almog gave to Naomi Aviv, “Love's Defeat,” *Kol Ha'ir*, 10 October 1986) [Hebrew].

50. The quote is from her *Women, The Longest Revolution* (London, 1984) 288ff. As for Cixous, see her classic manifest, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” *Signs*, 1 (1975) 875–93.

51. Elaine Showalter, “Hysteria, Feminism, and Gender,” in Sander L. Gilman, G. S. Rousseau and Elaine Showalter, *Hysteria beyond Freud* (Berkeley, CA, 1993) 286–344.

52. Marilyn French (New York, 1977). The Hebrew translation by Shulamit Ariel was published by Sifriat Poalim and Sh. Friedman (Tel-Aviv, 1980).

53. Almog, personal correspondence with Yael Feldman.

54. Almog, *Roots of Air*, 176, 182, 190–6ff, 237ff.

55. *Ibid.*, 189ff.

56. *Ibid.*, 218ff).

57. Mira's experience bears out Robin Morgan's analysis of “the sexuality of terrorism” in her *The Demon Lover* (New York, 1989), another staple text of American feminism. The presence of “rape” in Israeli narratives of female subjectivity demands a separate discussion. In any case, its centrality to the plot here resembles the one that takes place in *The Women's Room*.

58. Robin Morgan, *The Anatomy of Freedom* (New York, 1982).

59. Almog, *Roots of Air*, 358.

60. Ruth Almog, *Tikkun omanuti* [Invisible (lit. Artistic) Mending] (Jerusalem, 1993) [Hebrew].

61. Ruth Almog, in her column “Playing without Cards,” *Ha'Aretz*, 1985 [Hebrew].

62. See her references to the American critics of Freud in Hareven, “Laius, The

Father Repressed by Freud.” Cf. Feldman, “‘And Rebecca Loved Jacob,’ But Freud Did Not.”

63. Shulamith Hareven, *Yedi'ot Aharonot*, 2 May 1997, 26–27 [Hebrew].

64. Sara Ruddik, *Maternal Thinking* (Boston, MA, 1989); Harriet Harman Alonso, *Peace as a Women's Issue* (Syracuse, NY, 1993). For more details, see Feldman, *No Room of Their Own*, Ch. 6.

65. See Tom Segev, “Marcia Freedman Is Coming Back,” *Ha'Aretz* (30 July 1999) B12 [Hebrew]. “Gender” is of course far from being new, even as a feminist concept, but may still benefit from Freedman’s vigorous “promotion” in Israeli discourse. See my essay “Hebrew Gender and Zionist Ideology.”