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Jewish Women in Pre-State Israel

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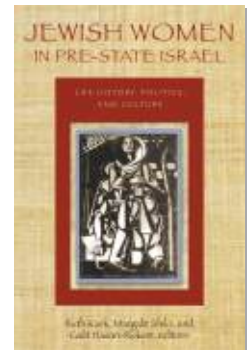
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Have Gender Studies Changed Our Attitude toward the Historiography of the *Aliyah* and Settlement Process?

Background

The aim of this article is to examine to what extent gender studies in Israel have thus far changed our attitude toward the history of the periods of the First and Second Aliyah, and in general, the history of the *aliyah* and Jewish settlement processes in Eretz Israel at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries and to propose directions for research that are likely to make gender a central, different elucidator of known phenomena of these processes.

In general historiography of the First and Second Aliyah periods, significant changes have taken place in the past two decades thanks to joint research projects or individual studies.¹ They certainly have shed new light on the periods themselves, and they have presented new perspectives on each period or for understanding the settlement developments that occurred during them. For instance, the place of the moshavah in settlement history now appears totally different than it did in the previous classic studies.²

The roles of the Baron Edmond de Rothschild's administration and of the Jewish Colonization Association (JCA) already are perceived completely differently than the way they frequently had been distorted in historical memory.³ A more balanced, fact-based picture has been drawn toward understanding the proportional role of private versus public capital in the processes of modernization, settlement, and land acquisition.⁴

All the foregoing are examples showing that in settlement historiography, a new stage has been created that completely changes our appreciation of pivotal phenomena: land purchases, settlement in its various forms, organization of settlements, factors in settlement, and so on. From this, we deduce

that one may achieve fresh insight into central phenomena by using alternative research paradigms for the writing of classic history, such as the historical-geographic approach, or the economic-historical approach, or understanding the place of institutions and organizations in historical processes.

It should be stressed that the place of research into women and gender perception have not been left out of this renewed scrutiny of the early periods of *aliyah*; moreover, in recent years, many studies have focused on the feminine “voice” and the feminine view of processes and phenomena related to these *aliyot*. These studies have successfully met two important criteria in their own right from the aspect of the gender paradigm: first, an addition to existing knowledge, in the sense of new materials that emphasize feminine participation in the formation of the *Yishuv* with all its various characteristics; second, complementing the first, amplifying feminine or gender exclusion from study of the period. In this way, pioneering studies, such as those by M. Shilo, D. Bernstein, and D. Izraeli, became the foundation stones for a fresh look at well-ensconced “truths,” such as the equality attributed to women of the Second Aliyah and of the labor movement.⁵

Central Issues in the Study of the Period

The central issues related to the history of settlement to which we will refer in the context of gender in this article are the following:

- Immigration (*aliyot*) as a historical and social process: circumstances, characteristics, trends, dimensions, and results;
- Settlement in its extended meaning: land acquisition, settlement distribution, forms of settlement, structure of the economy;
- Formation of the social fabric: ethnicity, ages, genders, internal relations;
- Education: institutions, methods, organizations;
- Culture and creativity: language, writing, creativity, and the shaping of identity;
- Political and organizational structure: movements, trends, parties, membership, and organizations.

All of these phenomena and processes have been studied, of course, by a wide range of researchers dealing with the study of the history of settlement;

and our goal here is to examine to what extent we would write a book on the history of settlement differently if we scrutinized all these through the prism of gender. Would we just gain additional knowledge, a contribution in the uncovering of new facts about women's "participation" or exclusion, or would we, perhaps, forge new insight into the settlement endeavor in one, a part, or all of the issues listed?

First we will examine in what way existing gender studies have changed our understanding of some of the phenomena mentioned. Then we will offer a list of questions, hypotheses, and topics for research from a gender viewpoint to complete the claim that it is, indeed, possible to write a different book on the history of settlement.

An Examination of Women's and Gender Studies and Their Contribution to the Historiography of the Settlement Process Thus Far

Interestingly, the pioneering gender approach to understanding this important chapter in the formation of settlement society was adopted inadvertently, that is, even before the formation of the gender approach. I am referring to studies dealing with the Hebrew language and the effort to turn it into a spoken, living language. Bar-Adon's work on this topic was a kind of swallow as harbinger of the historiographic spring in this important sector of "building the nation" — the revival of Hebrew.⁶

The emphasis on the role of the "mothers," the women of daily life, in adapting the Hebrew language to the native-born generation and their descendants, created a new, different attitude toward understanding the phenomenon that riveted global attention. It was no longer E. Ben-Yehuda alone, and not even the innovators and others involved in the mechanism for reviving the language, who were spotlighted by history, but simply the mother, she who speaks to her children, who was more influential than any other linguistic factor in this central historical process.

Similarly, the works of Shilo, Bernstein, and Izraeli changed the prevailing historical image of women during the periods of the Second and Third Aliyah.⁷ Even if they bound themselves to historical validity, they knew how to present the ongoing longitudinal processes of the attitude to women and their being distanced from the foci of power and influence as powerful explanations for the status of the woman in modern Jewish settlements. Women's struggle to attain positions of influence, to achieve true rather than

rhetorical equality, and scholars unbiased illumination of the inequality as opposed to the idealization of “those [wonderful] girls” in historical memory, contributed greatly to becoming familiar with historical reality. This contribution created a more fitting balance between image and reality, between historical discussion and generalization; it drew scholarly attention to the need for a re-examination of conventional truths. Yet, and mainly because of the precedent-setting status of these studies, they made no attempt to present the new settlement narrative differently. That is, if, indeed, the women of the Second and Third Aliyah did not enjoy the equality and cooperation they deserved based upon their class affiliation and their political awareness, how did this affect the settlement process? Did this lead to maneuvering their comrades and spouses in new directions — for example, to the creation of a change in the general aspiration from hired labor to independent settlers?

The breaking into the gender space of the periods of the Second and Third Aliyah that resulted from these studies has been characterized thus far by the expansion of knowledge, in recompense, in supplementation, and in amplifying the exclusion. R. Aaronsohn and Y. Ben-Artzi exploited the breach that was created for a fresh presentation of women’s place in putting settlement on a firm footing in the moshavot and for contrasting of woman’s images and standing in the moshavah, both the one in memory and in the historical image as well as that of the women in the Second Aliyah and in the cooperative settlements.⁸ Their articles are rich in new details, in a fresh illumination of “the missing half” in the scraps of information, and in the attempt to present women’s great contribution to the survival of the moshavot under the conditions of those times. Yet, even these works by settlement researchers with a settlement-geographic point of view do not create a new narrative of the history of the moshavot, as these two scholars actually have done in other contexts for this settlement type. A similar place is held by M. Shilo’s study about women in the First Aliyah.⁹ Shilo attempts in her article to present as a historical dilemma the question of the role of the woman as a full partner (“member”) or as a “laborer” in the settlement process, but like her predecessors, she turns out to be a contributor to the learning of many new facts about the place of the woman in “the revival project,” in her words, but this revival project receives no different or new historiographical illumination even in this pioneering study. A bit different is the outstanding work by Y. Berlovitz that delves deeper into understanding the place of women in creating the national-Hebrew identity in Eretz Israel during the First Aliyah.¹⁰ Viewed from the discipline of literary (and in effect, cultural) research, Berlovitz demonstrated effectively not only the

contribution of women measured in the sense of this or that act, but also specifically: in creating a cultural infrastructure for the invention of the nation. She, thereby, takes a step and a half beyond compensation and explanation of participation, but she also calls for another understanding of a rather ignored aspect in the history of settlement—the aspect of written artistic culture and creativity.

In this regard, R. Elboim-Dror provides a material foundation in a tangential field—education and its history.¹¹ This foundation is not used for a new reading of settlement activity and leaves the schools, teacher training, and curricula as an almost separate text from the broad context of settlement and its characteristics.

An economic methodological view for the aspect of equal employment opportunity is used by Katz and Neuman, but their contribution, too, is at the level of factual analysis of the long-time conventional premise that equality was a ritual never put into effect.¹² In a certain way, they also take a small step forward toward a new explanation of the settlement trends in the 1930s in light of the conclusions that women drew from the inequality they faced, namely, the creation of independent female workers' farms.

So we find that the 1990s were replete with studies and works from a feminine or gender viewpoint that were definitely refreshing and innovative—mainly in the basic meanings of the paradigm: addition to knowledge and information, a different interpretation of an existing text, balance and compensation, illumination of the participation and amplification of the exclusion of women. All of them combine into a new picture of the gender situation in research into *aliyah* and settlement, but all of them together did not coalesce to create a new or different book of settlement history in general, or its main issues in particular.

Suggestions for a Re-Examination

Immigration (Aliyah) and the Motivation for It

The motives for the First and Second Aliyah to Eretz Israel have been examined to date mainly from the ideological, economic, and political points of view, and there is no reason to repeat them here. Anita Shapira already has indicated the possibility inherent in the gender aspect of the motive for national revival, by comparing the situation of the nation to that of the woman.

The humiliation of the Jewish people through persecutions and pogroms and the presentation of its physical helplessness were like the disgrace of the woman sullied in those events.¹³ Despite the validity of this argument, it does not contribute to the possibility for understanding immigration from a gender-social viewpoint. The aspiration for *aliyah* cannot be explained by uni-sex Zionist ideology, as if women were dragged against their will to the Zionist idea by their spouses infused with the spirit of national revival.

Until now, the place of the Jewish woman's aspiration in the two Aliyot is missing in most of the studies of immigration and the formation of the Hovevei Zion associations and other Zionist organizations. Should this aspiration be investigated, it may turn out to have two facets: Zionism for its own sake, as with the men, derived as a rational conclusion about the validity of the Zionist idea as a unique escape hatch from the travails of the Jewish people, or—and herein will lie the main innovation—the desire and hope to change her own status. The striving for extrication from her basically inferior status in Jewish society, even in the more modern and certainly in the traditional, is a motivating force that has yet to be examined thoroughly toward understanding the participation of women in the immigration processes in general and in that of Zionism in particular.

The desire to become free of society's ills, of difficulties of subsistence, of the danger of persecutions and pogroms, and the hope to find a new life and better chances in new worlds is common to all the male and female Jewish immigrants to Western Europe and the New World. In that, they are no different than other peoples who emigrated by the thousands to the same destinations. But the latent promise in the Zionist "new world" was also bound with a new social world in which women would find a more fitting, more equal, and free place for effecting her personality and independence. It was this promise, more than anything else, that perhaps captivated the Zionist woman. There, in the new Jewish society, in the land of the forefathers, where the "new Jew" would come into being "ex nihilo," the new "Jewish woman" would be created too. These motives apparently were stronger among families that had begun to go through processes of modernization, (relative) secularization, and education, since in that case the women were more strongly exposed to the shame of their status in Jewish society with its traditional approach. Research into the motives for emigration, *aliyah* to Eretz Israel must, therefore, find new input from this attitudinal perspective. If that does happen, we will be able to construct not only a balanced picture of women's participation in this pivotal historical process, but perhaps also a new understanding of it; and this, of course, is in addition to the accepted historical in-

sights, since it will not be a single, exclusive explanation for this entire phenomenon that will be under discussion.

Settlement and Aspects of It

Studies of the First Aliyah and settlement within its framework have focused mainly on the activities of the organizations, companies, and institutions involved in land acquisition as well as on planning and implementation of settlement. Thus Hovevei Zion, Bilu, Baron Edmond de Rothschild, the Jewish Colonization Association, and many moshavot were the focus of the examination of settlement processes. Only recently have treatments begun to appear of additional aspects, at whose focal point are people as individuals who were the “makers and shakers” of the processes. Land acquisition in Eretz Israel, one of the most widely studied processes in the history of the settlement, in most cases, has been studied from the institutional aspect and with regard to practical measures: locating available land, carrying out the purchase, payments, quantities, contracts, and so on. Also put on center stage by the shift to scrutinization through the personal prism were people like Hankin and Ruppin. M. Smilansky had already specifically pointed out Olga Hankin as the motivating force behind her husband Yehoshua; this was expanded upon in the romantic sense — but based on proven historical evidence — by Kark and Amit.¹⁴ May we now consider Olga the key woman in the large land acquisitions in Rehovot, Hadera, and later the Jezreel Valley and elsewhere? And if so, what was happening in other places, in other organizations? And why should Olga want to try to support her husband — was it because of her Zionism, or as part of her deep understanding of the importance of land ownership as a solid foundation for the hoped-for change in society (and then also in the status of women)? In a similar fashion, close examination of the struggle for survival (mainly) by the early moshavot may reveal new information about women’s roles.

Aaronsohn and Ben-Artzi have pointed out women’s role in the First Aliyah’s version of *tzumud* and we will not repeat here the many examples and details they cited in their articles.¹⁵ But they, too, asked — Why? What connection was there between these women, who came from towns and cities that already had absorbed a bit of the niceties of modern life in Europe, and the sand dunes of Rishon le-Zion, the rocky ground of Zamarin, and the Huleh swamps? What led the Aaronsohns’ mother to determine, “even if we eat rocks — we are staying here.” Even if she is not the one who made this statement, why is this type of saying attributed specifically to a woman? What

stops the mother of the Gluzgial family in Hadera when her husband and infant die? Was it really only the spirit of Pinsker and Ahad Ha-Am pulsating in them? Or, perhaps, the explanation is linked to the same factor cited previously: Only here, in the new society, as part of the rebirth of the nation, society, and culture, may women attain what they longed for: independence, equal status, self-realization. Is there a better explanation for their clinging to the idea, their determination, and their superhuman strength to remain?

From a different angle, the place of the women in settlement planning has physical and economic considerations. Here, too, detailed, innovative studies have increased of late, but they lack examination of the gender aspect. Regarding planning of the moshavot, for instance, the role of women is not used as an explanation for the design of the family farming unit and the suitability of its design to women's needs.¹⁶ An allusion to the possibility for gender observation of this aspect is found in Joseph Klausner, who explains the uniqueness of the moshavah Sejera. There, as we know, the *hakura*, a plot of land next to the home, was in the front yard of the farming unit and not behind it, as was customary. When Klausner visited there in 1914, he noticed this distinctive feature of Sejera and explained it as follows:

If Sejera is not the most beautiful of the moshavot, it is the most original in its appearance.

A very wide street, unparalleled in its breadth, on the mountain slope. On both sides of the street—very tall, dense trees. Behind the trees—large gardens with all kinds of vegetables and behind the gardens were built the small, simple houses of the moshavah.

So the vegetable gardens were not behind the houses, as usual, but in front of them. This was instituted by the agronomist who founded the moshavah, first, so that the unseen gardens would not be destroyed by Arabs, on the one hand, and the birds on the other. Secondly, so that the women farmers would always keep an eye on them, water them, and nurture them.

... No [other] moshavah looks like a village to the extent Sejera does.¹⁷

Even though this superficial explanation is embedded in a typical, chauvinistic view, it is among the few that lead to a new direction, a gender one, in understanding the planning of the farm and the farmyard of the moshavah.

These three aspects of settlement activity: land, survival, and planning are only allusions to the possibility for a fresh examination of women's part in this activity, and not in the sense of "participation," but rather in that of the motivating, explanatory force.

Relations between the Sexes: Cooperation, Violence, Competition

Many have written about keeping women far away from the sources of power and the main activities of the First Aliyah. In the moshavot, women were not given the status they deserved for their contribution to survival and daily existence, and even independent women among them were not allowed to be elected to committees or key positions. In the organizations of the Second Aliyah, a rare few earned a central position, but precisely because of their tiny representation, one can see proof of the discrimination against the bulk of them: in field work and guard duty — the heart's desire of every male and female belonging to this Aliyah. In the following section, we will address the issue of the consequences and influence of this inequality and nonparticipation in the Second Aliyah, but here we would only like to add another as yet unstudied aspect: violence toward women as a concealed social facet. The only type of violence studied to date for these aliyot has focused on provocations such as robbery and murder against Jewish settlements within the context of relations between neighbors or between nations. Violence as a social aspect has not been studied — or has been ignored within the framework of the various types of historiography. The image of the inhabitants in the settlements of the First and Second Aliyah appears, therefore, as idealistic, free of all social ills. An exception is the issue of the attitude toward immigrants from Yemen — as has been addressed by Nitza Druyan and Yehuda Nini.¹⁸ But violence in moshavah society was not at all an unusual phenomenon; below we offer two examples of its gender aspect.

There is no instance of a historical source mentioning rape or sexual violence against women. “Smirking” hints were heard about Eliyahu Scheid and others among the Baron's clerks who had an eye for the girls in the moshavot. The trouble is that as early as the first weeks of the existence of Rehovot, always cited as the model example of an independent, free, pure Hovevei Zion moshavah, one of the founders raped a colleague's wife. The rape was mentioned in the records of the moshavah and had other repercussions, but even now the incident stands uninvestigated, neither in its own right nor as part of a broader context of violence against women.¹⁹

Murder and internal violence were not investigated thoroughly enough, if at all, meaning that the issue of women suffering from this type of violence never surfaces. An illustrative example is the application by a woman from among the founders of Yavne'el to the leaders of the settlement who she tried to convene after a meeting in Zikhron Ya'akov in 1903. In her letter, she reveals in full the terrible affair of her husband's murder by a co-resident of

their hut in Yavne'el over a trifling. Her desperate cry is that something should be done not only in memory of her husband but especially to help her maintain herself in the moshavah and to not force her to leave it owing to the lack of means to provide a livelihood.²⁰ This incident, too, attests not only to the uninvestigated facet of internal violence in the moshavot but also to women's aspiration to remain attached to the moshavah and the new way of life they had chosen, even those who had become widowed.

The issue of widowhood has been discussed by Ben-Artzi, but only in the sense of exposure and not in the context of the question: why did they remain?²¹ Why did they cling so firmly to the settlements in which they lived? The answer, perhaps, leads us back to the new interpretation of settlement seen in the mirror of gender, bound up with the issue of the women's motivation and influence on the formation of the movement for immigration and settlement in Eretz Israel.

Competition over women, a subject not without use in understanding historical processes, was passed over in most studies of the period. Can one understand, for example, the entire chapter of the relations among the moshavot members and the hired laborers solely against the ideological background as historiography presents it? Were all the farmers opposed to Jewish labor, to the socialist ideas and secularity of the new workers, or perhaps fears and anxieties fanned the flames and exacerbated the inherent distinctions between the Aliyot? Might it not be the fear of their daughters becoming captivated by the itinerant "ragamuffins" or perhaps of their sons becoming ensnared by the "new women" who lacked any obligation to existing traditions and frameworks that led to the creation of clear antagonism? This antagonism is presented by historians as strictly ideological — but might it not be that such an aspect was not at all a motive behind or the focal point for this issue? Might it not be that the competition over the hearts of the moshavot girls is what stood behind the confrontation and rivalry between "Hashomer" and the "Gideonim"?

The Second Aliyah and Its Settlement Process

Two basic issues in the history of the Second Aliyah have not as yet been investigated from the gender aspect: the shift to permanent settlement ("conquest of the soil") and the model of the "mixed farm" that took shape in this settlement period (although actually only after World War I).

The shift to settlement by the members of the Second Aliyah became an essential milestone in its history and in the history of settlement in general.

Four types of settlements developed because of this shift: *moshav ha-po'alim* (laborers settlement; and from the lesson learned from it, the consolidation of the concept of the *moshav ovedim*, workers settlement), the *kevutzah* (commune of pioneers in a small agricultural settlement), the *ko'operatziyyah*, and the different types of farms. The passage to permanent settlement was actually revolutionary for the classical workers' ideas: conquest of labor, conquest of security, creation of a workers' class according to the socialist model they steadfastly adhered to. Researchers of the Second Aliyah have provided many and varied reasons for the permanent settlement of Israel by the laborers in its various forms:²² Vitkin's call "for conquest of the soil" found a willing audience among the laborers of Petah Tikvah; the enhanced status of permanent laborers who began to earn well and to set aside savings; the aspiration for independence and self-administration; constant competition to sway the employers; the historical connection between the laborers, on one side, and Ruppin and the leaders of the Zionist Organization on the other; the Jewish National Fund rules for land management that called for leasing only, indicating that they were appropriate for people without capital — all of these plus other reasons not listed here were certainly factors accelerating the shift from "conquest of labor" to "conquest of the soil." Two aspects, however, are missing from this historical observation: the woman and the family. The women of the Second Aliyah have been the object of research in more than a few instances, and in every case — as is seen in their memoirs — a rather clear picture emerges of feelings of discrimination, inequity, being held off, and of being kept away from realizing aspirations similar to those of their fellow male immigrants. These feelings apparently intensified, since externally their colleagues espoused cooperation, equality, and the provision of similar opportunities to both sexes. The common lack of confidence on the part of both the laborers and the farmers in the women's physical ability to cope with the various farming tasks understood from Sarah Malkhin's memoirs parallels the women's frustration at not having been accepted as equal members of the *kevutzah*, or at not having been assigned to guard duty.²³ Being shunted off to the kitchen in Kinneret or Deganyah was the same as remaining with the children in Tel Adashim or Mesha when the guards left for their patrols. Added to these affronts were salary discrimination and nonparticipation and nongranteeing of rights at meetings and gatherings; some of the results of all the foregoing ultimately found expression in the various types of women's organizations.²⁴

I suggest that the frustration, discrimination, and nonrealization of the aspirations and wishes of the women who belonged to the workers' movement

are what led them to the conclusion that the only chance for attaining equality, participation, and full utilization of their responsibility would be through permanent settlements in which they would play a full and active role, both as partners and as spouses. If we adopt this as a research hypothesis, and we find contemporary evidence and proof or in sources from that time, we will reach a completely new conclusion that will explain the formation of the *kevutzah*, the moshav, and what derived from them. The passage to permanent settlement instead of the wandering and instability of a work group or as individual men and women was likely to solve their problems of livelihood but in particular to address the feelings of frustration, disappointment, and despair that washed over the women of the Second Aliyah as individuals, spouses, and unequal members of work groups. If we have accepted as fact the results of studies affirming these feelings, and we have turned them into a premise, the next stage is the research hypothesis formulated above. The women were the ones, apparently, who pressed their husbands to change over from paid laborers to permanent settlers. At first it was small, young families in Petah Tikvah who did this, turning themselves into a laborers' moshav, and once the trail was blazed, the system was adapted both for people who favored the idea of the family as "a production unit" and for those espousing economic "collectivity." For both groups, the common denominator was the participation of women, and this time in a different way: as spouses or individual women — but full partners as *haverot* (members) in the *kevutzah* or the cooperative or as possessors of farming units in the laborers' moshav, and afterwards in *moshavei ovedim*.

In both settlement types, women could do away with their previous dependence, their physical inferiority, and their exclusion from participation in activities and prevention from realizing their aspirations, and they could release their pent-up frustration. We must look for and clarify what measures they took, how they applied their influence on their spouses or their colleagues and the laborers' groups; we must examine the validity of the hypothesis proffered here. Should it be found valid, we will be able to write a different history of the shift to settlement during the Second Aliyah. The circumstances of that move as currently known will turn into an ideological shell surrounding a hard gender kernel that is the major explanatory motif. Of course, even then other circumstances contributing to the about-face of the Second Aliyah members remain valid, such as the policy of the Palestine Office, Ruppin's personality and his being enraptured by the workers' spirit, the accumulation of Jewish national land that somehow had to be worked and maintained, but all of these only complement the true motive: the women's

desire to change their situation fundamentally. The place of the woman and the family as a principal factor in the Second Aliyah laborers' move to permanent settlement therefore must be re-examined, and an essential chapter in the history of the settlement must be illuminated in a gender light.

Similarly, and as a direct continuation, one must re-investigate the coming into being of the "mixed farm" in what is called "working" settlements, that is, consisting of Second and Third Aliyah laborers and not the type in the moshavot (where they also obviously "worked"). At the end of the Ottoman Period, the farm in the JCA settlements was just as varied and did not depend on growing a single crop as has been commonly thought.²⁵ In the German villages, too, the farm economy was essentially varied by a combination of orchards and dairy farming and all that involved.²⁶ The latter model is the one that influenced Yitzhak Wilkansky, who as the director of the *haksharah* at Ben-Shemen had studied closely the German farms at nearby Wilhelma and developed the idea of the "mixed farm" on the basis of them. He expressed his ideas as early as 1913 when he formulated the regulations for the *moshav ovedim* as it developed a few years later.²⁷ At the center of the "mixed farm" as it took shape, mainly during the 1920s in the *moshav ovedim* — and to a different extent than in the kibbutz — stood dairy farming, and around it field crops related to it. The dairy farm was, indeed, intended to create a stable, long-term economic base, but it was selected as particularly *fitting* for a family farm, that is, a farm in which the wife works as a full partner. Allusions as to the place of the woman in the family farm were voiced by Ruppin in 1913, and quite a few researchers have quoted him for different purposes in their studies.²⁸ According to Ruppin, a German farmer at Sarona claimed that the Jews would never truly become farmers and live a full village life as long as their wives did not get up for the early milking. Milking, therefore, became a kind of touchstone for the participation of the woman in the burden of farm work. Hence the dairy would be the linchpin on which the farm would revolve if they wanted to effectuate the idea of the new Jew: the worker of the land who lives by the sweat of his — or her — own brow. From here to placing the dairy as the focus of the desired farm model was but a short distance.²⁹ So it was that Ruppin became an enthusiastic supporter of the "mixed farm" as formulated by Wilkansky, and as time went on, both of them were responsible for putting it at the center of settlement activity in the first *moshavei ovedim*. The participation of women becomes, according to this proposal, not only an important motive for the shift to permanent settlement, but also for understanding the farm adapted to this settlement style.

But How to Carry Out the Research?

The main difficulty facing a person trying to investigate issues in a gender light is methodological, namely, which texts and documents can be located and used for the purpose of proving research hypotheses such as those previously mentioned. B. Melman correctly noted the internal contradiction faced by male and female scholars of gender in the history of Eretz Israel, who tend to invalidate from the outset “individual” or “personal” sources that are not within the purview of classical archival documents. Melman did use for her study “personal” material, such as diaries, letter, testimonies, and memoirs, allowing her to develop a new position regarding the crystallization of the Eretz Israel identity of “the native-born.”³⁰

To be sure, if we have recourse only to “positivist,” classic historical materials, such as the notes from meetings of settlement bodies, reports, contemporary articles, and so on, we will not be able to go far in changing the concept of the role of gender as a motif explaining the history of settlement. At most, we would be able to reach the place where current research stands, that is, a “different” reading of existing text and the inclusion of the woman as a participant in the historical narrative in the sense of “compensation” for her absence from the historiography of the settlement process.

The other way to use existing materials and to read them differently is the use of new materials (and, of course, it is necessary to discover them), such as personal letters, memoirs, diaries, and “dry” material such as account books, analysis of living expenses, and so on. Only with these we will be able to find and expose the feelings of the people who took part in the historical processes, their thoughts, and especially the methods they adopted to influence change in the direction wanted.

In the official reports, no conversations between a woman and her spouse have been found, and we have no way of knowing what methods she used to make clear to him the desperately vital need to change direction, for example. Between the lines of late testimonies and of memoirs, we can read the women’s cries, but how the changes actually occurred and how, for example, they switched from life in a itinerant work group to a family in one or another settlement, we can only learn from “personal” material. These items have long been known in archives as “private collections,” but most of them are still packed in dilapidated suitcases standing in the dark corners of cellars or stuck up in an attic somewhere. Uncovering this material, analyzing it, and generalizing from it must become an accepted research method, particularly in gender studies.

Beyond that, one must read between the lines in better-known material. A proper combination of the two methods, and particularly enhancing the importance of the “personal” material as reflecting public and general concern, are likely to support research hypotheses of the type proposed in this article.

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to see to what extent the study of women and gender has changed our understanding of the processes and central phenomena in the history of Jewish settlement in Eretz Israel, especially during the periods of the First and Second Aliyah. Currently, we see that gender has changed practically nothing in the understanding of the phenomena and processes but has been able to add much information to it, in the sense of “compensation” and “completion” of accepted history by illuminating the role and contribution of women to sustaining settlement and to the development of the Eretz Israel social structure and cultural texture.

We feel that a real change in the understanding of certain phenomena in the history of settlement can occur if we establish gender as a leading research paradigm, and if we pose new questions, or offer new, alternative hypotheses on the formation of phenomena, such as the motives for emigration and *aliyah* to Eretz Israel, settlement methods (in terms of land acquisition, survivability, and planning), internal relations (violence, rape, competition over women), essential changes in the type of settlement, such as the passage of laborers of the Second Aliyah to permanent settlement, and crystallization of settlement development.

In this article, we have suggested these hypotheses as attainable goals for new research, based on the premise (supported by previous studies) that the inferiority of women in these periods, their frustration, and their despair were their internal goals prompting them to seek changes and to find new ways through which they would be able to realize their aspirations. Equipped with these ways, such as the shift from a struggle for the “conquest of work” to “the conquest of the soil,” the women pushed for the historical change that usually is explained in historiography by idealistic, historicist circumstances. This view, which sees the “feminine condition” as the true catalyst for historic changes, is that which will lead — if, indeed, it is proven as correct — to a change in the *understanding* of the history of settlement and to a different way of writing about it. Compensation and filling in the blanks, as has been done until now, will not suffice.