Jewish Women in Pre-State Israel

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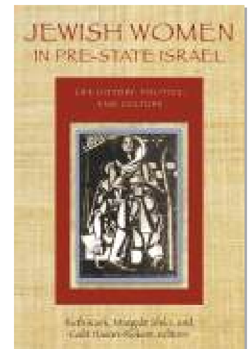

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The Legend of Sarah

*Gender, Memory, and National Identities (*Eretz Yisrael/*Israel, 1917–1990)*

Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for [the principle of] nationality. . . . [T]he essence of a nation is that all the individuals have many things in common, and also that they have forgotten many things.

—Ernst Renan[1]

Can there be a surfeit of memory? wonders the historian Charles Maier, referring not only to the collective preoccupation with preserving the past and commemorating certain fragments of it, but also to the burgeoning of the history of memory and commemoration during the last two decades. Students of history and culture, including historians, Maier points out wryly, act as though they were assigned the task of metaphorically dipping their madeleines in the memories of the past.[2] He means, of course, the famous cookies dipped by the narrator in the first volume of Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*; their taste, which re-

This article, which was first published in *Zion* 65, no. 3 (2000): 343–78, is dedicated to the memory of George L. Mosse, whose writings on memory, war, and masculinity have brought me to study the associations among gender, memory, and identity and Eretz Yisraeli culture. An English version appeared in the *Journal of Israeli History* 21, nos. 1/2 (Spring/Autumn 2002), special issue; and was reprinted in Hannah Naveh, ed., *Gender and Israeli Society: Women's Time* (London, 2003), part 1, pp. 55–92. I thank Shulamith Shachar and Shulamit Volkov, who read an earlier version of the article. I owe special thanks to Natalie Zemon Davis and Avner Ben-Amos for their contributions to my understanding of the complexity of collective memory. I extend thanks to Deborah Bernstein, Yaffah Berlovitz, Dalia Ofer, and Margalit Shilo for their comments. The staff of the Beit Aaronsohn Archives (BAA) in Zikhron Yaakov helped me find a variety of documents dealing with the commemoration of Sarah Aaronsohn in the 1930s and 1940s. I am also indebted to Devorah Omer, Zohar Shavit, Yael Dar, Rima Shichmenter, and Naama Sheik Eitan.

minds the narrator of the taste of the linden leaf tea that he drank in his childhood, was enough to carry the weight of "the immense edifice of memory."[3]

This excessive preoccupation with memory, bordering on the obsessive, both within and outside the academe, is also characteristic of Israeli culture.[4] Like the discourse elsewhere, so the Israeli discourse, both in the historiography of *Eretz Yisrael* before and after the establishment of the state and in the broader public debates, is marked by an intense interest in collective memory, in methods of commemoration, and in the preservation of certain narratives of the past and the forgetting of others. This interest is also a reexamination of national identity: of its boundaries and of what it includes and excludes. The "lieux de mémoire" (to use Pierre Nora's term) of Israel and *Eretz Yisrael* have been diligently mapped since the second half of the 1980s. These sites include commemorative sites such as cemeteries and monuments, rites, official and "spontaneous" memorial literature (Emmanuel Sivan's term), the Zionist calendar of Jewish history, as well as old revived or "invented" traditions of sacrifice for the nation such as the tradition of Tel Hai and the story of Masada.[5]

The ongoing fascinating discussion of memory and commemoration is thus, on the one hand, an examination of identity itself and, on the other hand, an elucidation of the question of which groups and which historians own memory and commemoration of the past. To paraphrase Natalie Zemon Davis, this discussion is about "who owns history?"[6] Nevertheless, the debate over memory between so-called "old" and "new" historians, and between them (or some of them) and sociologists of various schools, is somewhat flawed, or deficient. Its deficiency stems from the fact that the concern with the relationship between the memory and myths of "Eretz Yisraeliness" and Israeliness, and the formation of national identities is separated from the historical study of male and female gendered identities. With a few exceptions, the "general" discussion of memory has not yet taken into account the ways in which gendered identities formed the boundaries of the collective memory. This lapse can be seen in important studies of identity and commemoration, such as those of Yael Zerubavel, which are genderblind. The cult of Joseph Trumpeldor and the myth of Tel Hai, which have occupied historians and students of culture more than any other single cult in Israel, are examined without much attention to the fact that Trumpeldor was an exemplar of Zionist masculinity. Similarly, classic studies of *The Yizkor Book* of 1911, the prototype of the new, secular way of commemoration, ignore the fact that the first secular *Eretz Yisraeli* saints were also models of the new man in the nation-in-the-making. Nor does the assemblage of

important studies that examine the changes in myth and memory in terms of "the revolutions of Israeli consciousness" consider the possibility of studying the changes from the perspective of gender.[7]

This separation of the history of memory and the study of gender characterizes not only "general" historical study, but also the historiography of women and gender. This historiography has important and impressive accomplishments, but apparently has not yet been integrated into the discussion of collective national memory. As I have pointed out elsewhere, until recently feminist historiography of the period of the *Yishuv* (the pre-state period and pre-state Jewish community in Palestine) has focused on various aspects of women's material experience of the Zionist project. Only very recently has this historiography even begun to show interest in the relationship between the construction of femininity and masculinity, and the formation and representation of the *Eretz Yisraeli* ethoses and identities. The study of a gendered memory as the social dynamic and public action of individuals and collectives that "create, express, and consume" the memory of the past or its commemoration (which Jay Winter and Emanuel Sivan call "public remembrance" or "public recollection") is only just beginning.[8] The scarcity of such historical studies is not manifested simply in the absence of women from the history of memory. Thus, it may not be corrected by simply appending heroines of the past to histories and making a place for them in the national pantheon, although this is important in and of itself. While a more inclusive version, a kind of "herstory" of the history of memory, may serve as a "corrective" to the larger history, it will also perpetuate the distinction between the two areas of study: gender history and the history of memory.

The gendering of the history of collective memory is important because it may help us draw a less homogenous and monolithic map of this memory than the one we have today. Indeed, historians of national memory have been unanimous that this memory is never monolithic, that its very essence, like the essence of a nation, lies precisely in the lack of uniformity, that indeed every nation is characterized by a constant negotiation between its components. At the same time, as Alon Confino has pointed out, one failure of historians of memory is precisely their tendency to homogenize the collective that remembers.[9] These historians still tend to regard the act of remembering (or forgetting) in terms of politics and ideology, and merely as the reflection of the political hegemony of movements, ideologies, or establishments. National memory is still identified with omnipotent entities — the state, the party, the movement, the dominant elite — on whom these historians bestow all-encompassing power as chief agents of culture.

The bias toward the political and toward the apparatus of the state is sometimes accompanied by a reneging on the social and cultural. Such a bias, and with it the homogenization of diverse publics and their perception into a single entity—the "*Yishuv*"—is salient in the discussion of the *Eretz Yisraeli* culture of memory and commemoration. The claim that the collective memory in the period of the *Yishuv* and the first decades of the state was statist and created by "Labor" elites and circles, whose hegemony was fractured and broken only in the second half of the 1970s, still persists. Even historians who locate memory in cells within civil society (and not within the state and its bureaucracy) believe that this memory, at least until the 1950s, was not spontaneous and was governed by the state and officialdom.[10]

Paradoxically, even those who call for including different groups and identities in the Zionist and *Eretz Yisraeli* ethos do not adequately consider the potential that lies in the history of gender, not only in and of itself but also for history in general—namely, the potential to make that history more varied and pluralist.[11] Collective memory, as some of its early students, first and foremost among them Maurice Halbwachs, have taught us, is not formed by general and universal images and practices; rather, this memory is historical and particular. It is made out of the experiences, perceptions, and imaginings of groups. As John Gillis has pointed out, national memory in particular is formed in terms of specific identities, such as those of class, gender, and ethnicity.[12]

This type of memory developed in the *Yishuv* and even more so in Israel after 1948. It may be described in terms taken from from the world of vocal music, borrowing the concept of "polyphony," which Mikhail Bakhtin coined to describe the polyphonic character of "voices in their full value" that are sounded and heard together but maintain their uniqueness. Emanuel Sivan, too, made use of the image of polyphony in relation to memory in Israel. Describing memory as a "chorus," he suggested that alongside the so-called "official," "central," or "establishment" memory, other voices were also heard: of political groups, of social sectors united by specific cultural experiences, and of groups concentrated in a particular locus (for example, as I show later, the memory that crystallized in the urban "Civic Sector" (*hugim ezrahiyyim*)—as opposed to the socialist Labor sector—or in the *moshavot* (agricultural villages).[13] The polyphonic character of national memory was gendered. The one-armed hero of Tel Hai was perceived and represented not only as the new Zionist, but also as a new man. So were the fallen of the 1948 war. Similarly, women who died for the nation were perceived not only as national figures, but also as models of appropriate "national" female be-

havior. Put differently, the chronicles of deaths for country and state also can be examined in terms of the development of constructions of masculinity and femininity. Moreover, the gendering of the history of memory makes it possible not only to render a less homogenous account, but also to re-examine familiar questions, such as the question of the relationship between elites at the center and groups at the margins, between the culture of the establishment and sectorial and local culture, and between these and popular culture.

To focus the discussion and to elucidate the ways in which the polyphonic chorus of memory evolved in gender terms, I shall examine a single case: the forgetting (and the suppression) of the memory and commemoration of Sarah Aaronsohn (1890–1917), one of the leaders of the secret pro-British espionage network, known within British intelligence as the "A. Organization" and locally as "Nili," which operated under Turkish rule in Syria and Palestine from 1915 to 1917. I shall examine her image from the time of her death, in October 1917, through the growth of the "legend of Sarah," as Avigdor Hameiri termed it, in the 1930s and 1940s, up to its annexing, starting in the late 1960s, into the national pantheon, an annexation that brought on a crucial change in the image.[14] Since the focus of this study is on acts of public commemoration, I shall deal with the story of Aaronsohn's actual life and death only insofar as is necessary. As I have shown elsewhere, Aaronsohn regarded her suicide as a conscious and public act, and her death was the first example in the history of *Eretz Yisrael* of an active female death with secular and national overtones. I also argued that her death departed radically from existing models of female heroism, both from the classic Jewish model of female martyrdom that had developed after the waves of violence and persecution raging in Central Europe in 1096 and from the secular, national model of death which developed in *Eretz Yisrael* at the time of the First Aliyah and after.[15] Moreover, her death deviated even from the colonial model of female self-sacrifice for the nation, which evolved in anticolonial nationalist movements in the Middle East and South Asia, and which has been studied by Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, Gayatri Spivak, and Beth Baron.[16]

My focus on Sarah Aaronsohn has another motive as well. The changes in her status as a national hero can be compared to the transformations in the political and cultural status of the legend of Tel Hai and the myth of Trumpeldor. This comparison between a central and formative myth and a memory that was initially peripheral and sectorial, but which subsequently became an alternative myth, may serve as an example for the comparative study of memory. Such a study forces us to raise a number of questions. Was memory homogeneous? Was it controlled by practically omnipotent elites?

How did prevailing perceptions and representations of femininity (or masculinity) shape the narrative of the history of the Jews and of Zionism "written" by various groups? What were the features of a national heroine represented as an historical agent? And, finally, how did memory take form in various periods? Was it homogeneous until the 1970s and perhaps the 1980s, or had its fracturing or splitting (what some term its privatization) already begun in the early *Yishuv?*

To address these questions, I shall focus on two stretches of time that were major junctions in the evolution of "the legend of Sarah": from the beginning of her public commemoration in 1932 to the end of World War II, when the memory of Sarah Aaronsohn was nurtured by various right-wing groups within the Civic Sector (both urban and rural), as well as in popular culture; and after 1967, when local, sectorial, and popular memory was appropriated into the mainstream national memory, which changed and reshaped it, but was also altered by it.

To elucidate the possibilities in gendering memory, I have applied a two-pronged methodology, practicing a dual reading. First, I examine memory, ignoring gender, even though the object of commemoration was a woman. Thus, in the first part of this paper, I survey and attempt to reconstruct the political and social uses of Aaronsohn's memory. This survey is a "herstory": the "hero" of the story is female, but my rendition is deliberately blind to the ways in which different and dynamic perceptions of femininity (and masculinity) shaped the ethos of the national heroine. Only afterward do I pursue a "gender reading" of narratives about Sarah, a reading that is sensitive to the ways in which the various and often competing definitions and notions regarding the role of women in the nation-in-the-making, shaped the collective memory and commemoration.

1917 and 1932–1947: Forgetting and Remembering

In contrast to the battle for Tel Hai (1 March 1920), the death of Sarah Aaronsohn about two and a half years earlier had made no immediate impact on the collective, public memory or upon that of specific groups or sectors in the *Yishuv* such as the *moshavot.* Her violent taking of her own life for her people and country did not immediately become a model of national heroism, and its anniversary was not publicly commemorated. And her death did not stand out as a turning point or a formative event in the history of the *Yishuv.* In fact, in different milieux, both Labor and Civic, Nili's espionage

activities were regarded as irresponsible (and by some as mercenary), and not as manifestations of devotion to the national cause. True, Sarah's suicide, which was also interpreted as a conscious choice of self-sacrifice for the nation, sometimes rescued her from the pejorative image that stuck to her colleagues in the leadership of the Nili underground. At least during the first decade after her suicide, her image as a heroine was rather equivocal. There is reference to her heroism in writings of that time (notably in the writings of her contemporaries in the *moshavot,* the socio-economic group in which she grew and among whom, as I show later, her memory as a national heroine was molded), and in the Jewish press in Palestine and elsewhere, but it is scattered and hardly constitutes a tradition of memory.[17] The "invention" of such a tradition, to use Eric Hobsbawm's well-known term, was deferred.[18] In contradistinction to the construction of Trumpeldor as a national icon immediately upon his death, the ethos and myths of Sarah Aaronsohn present a delayed memory, evolving slowly and belatedly.

The appropriation of her heroism into a peripheral and distinctly sectorial remembrance began only fifteen years after her death with the first "*aliyah la-regel*" or pilgrimage to her grave on 10 October 1932. The thirty-five ceremonial pilgrimages that preceded the first official state ceremony in her memory and that of the other dead members of Nili, held in Zikhron Yaakov in 1967, were constructed as a "tradition," as their organizers emphasized from the very beginning. They saw themselves as the agents of a tradition that had the potential to preserve a segment of the national past, create its symbolic patterns, and commemorate it.

A close reading of the detailed descriptions of the pilgrimages allows us to examine not only the dynamics of the construction of public memory, but also to observe, in miniature, the remembering community and the social and political changes that occurred within it. Paraphrasing the anthropologists Clifford Geertz and James Clifford, we may describe the annual ceremony, held around the last day of the holiday of Sukkot in Zikhron Yaakov, as a "synecdoche," that is as a part representing the whole. This is a part, or perhaps a segment, of a culture, or of a cultural activity, that embodies the cultural, social (and political) whole of the observed community.[19] In the case at hand, the community is the Civic Sector of the *Yishuv* during the 1930s and 1940s.

Two thousand women and men of this community took part in the second pilgrimage to Sarah's grave on Tuesday, 10 October 1933, which served as a model for those that took place afterwards. Five hundred of the participants belonged to two leading organizations within the community: Bnei

Binyamin, the Young Farmers' Federation, the best-organized and most dynamic body within the private agricultural sector, and the Revisionist organization, Betar. The other fifteen hundred participants included residents of Zikhron Yaakov and guests from the large cities and other *moshavot*. The "day of the popular procession," as the organizers called it, was described as a mass pilgrimage. The fact that in some of the *moshavot* it was a half-day holiday helped make it successful.

At the head of the parade rode representatives of the First Aliyah and veterans of the *moshavot*, along with members of the "first" native-born "generation": Avram Shapira, his daughters, and the daughters of the Zviatitski family of Petah Tikvah, dressed in riding habits. After them came riders from Brit ha-Rokhvim (Riders' Club) and members of Bnei Binyamin from Zikhron Yaakov, Haderah, Shefeyah, Bat Shlomo, Binyaminah, and elsewhere. Leisurely following them on foot came members of the Bnei Binyamin executive, schoolchildren, members of Betar, and the "*kahal*" (general public).[20] In their procession, the pilgrims retraced parts of the last three journeys that Sarah Aaronsohn had made on the way to her death and burial: from the house of her father, Efrayim Fischel, to the improvised jail where she was interrogated and tortured; from the jail back to the home of her brother, Aharon, where she tried to commit suicide; and from her father's house, where she lay dying for three days, to the cemetery where she was buried. On reaching the important stations in their itinerary, the pilgrims stood to honor the memory of the dead Sarah.

The most prominent cohort of pilgrims, the first native-born generation from the cities, the established *moshavot*, and the new, private capitalist agricultural settlements, had an ambiguous collective status. This ambiguity dated back to the period before World War I and to the time of the war itself, when this generation was socially and economically marginal, yet at the same time occupied a central and even iconic place in the Hebrew *Eretz Yisraeli* discourse, in which they were elevated to a model of a new national experience — masculine and feminine.[21] During the 1930s and 1940s, this relationship between economic marginality and iconic place in the national discourse was reversed. After the economic crisis of the early 1920s, the *moshavot* saw a period of certain expansion, including the founding of new agricultural colonies and urban settlements. During this period, the organizational infrastructure of the agricultural and urban Civic Sector was constructed, and what came to be described as the "Civic culture" developed. Yet "*bnei ha-aretz*" (literally, "sons of the land," a term designating the first generation of native Hebrew speakers) lost their iconic place in the discourse

on the nation and were consigned to the periphery.[22] The members of Nili, who represented this generation, especially Sarah Aaronsohn, were seized upon by "the remembering group," that group that sought to commemorate its own cultural heroes, as the site of authentic *Eretz Yisraeli*-ness. In contrast to Trumpeldor, who was an outsider affiliated with the Labor movement, Aaronsohn's conduct and action could become role models, and she was reconstructed and represented by the Civic elites (and particularly by the native-born young elite) as both a sectorial and a national myth. The tension between sectorialism and nationalism is expressed in the first memorial pamphlet published by the Bnei Binyamin executive in 1932:

> Sarah Aaronsohn is a national heroine unrivaled in the annals of the Hebrew revival. . . . Aaronsohn is not only the greatest national heroine in this period of our revival, she is also our own heroine, the heroine of the class of the *Boazim*, people oriented to building the collective through building the individual and through individual responsibility, whose value [others] try to play down at every opportunity, denying them any idealistic tone and any desire and power for national sacrifice; Sarah is not a solitary heroine in our ranks; she was the bearer of a large movement, a wide-ranging organization of Civic farmers, who made sacrifices and invested physical and mental energy in their outstanding devotion to the liberation of the homeland and in extending frequent aid to the *Yishuv* in its most difficult moments.[23]

As the "heroine of the homeland" and a "heroic sacrifice," as "a saint in her life and death" and as a "symbol of national sacrifice and pride," Aaronsohn became a model of national activism.[24] Her tomb became a site "rousing audacity and sacrifice on the altar of liberation and the war to defend the *Yishuv* and the land."[25] The potential inherent in her commemoration was dual. She clearly represented a particular group or "class," and thus was not perceived as a unifying symbol by the peripheral young elite, her own milieu, and certainly not by the dominant "Labor" elite. The story of her heroism was not a part of what Hayden White called a "metanarrative," a metastory organizing the history of the community as a whole and representing homogeneity.[26] Aaronsohn's story was divisive. She was constructed as a heroine of the *Boazim*—an appellation given to the native-born farmers belonging to the land-owning sector within the *moshavot*, named after their prototype, the biblical Boaz—and as an icon of Civic culture, urban and agricultural alike, which saw itself as a "native" culture. The emphasis on "class" in the literature dedicated to Aaronsohn's memory competes with

and was an alternative to the Marxist concept of class and to the reality of a strong organized Labor sector and a hegemonic Labor movement. Bnei Binyamin were known for their blunt anti-Labor rhetoric and for their fierce opposition to socialism and collectivism.[27] However, the members of the commemorating group also wished to "speak for" and in the name of the nation as a whole. Thus, Aaronsohn was described as both a "Boazit" heroine and as a national figure embodying the entire *Yishuv*. Her discovery and the promotion of her memory as a "saint" of the Civic Sector reflected the need of groups within it to correct the dominant Labor narrative of the recent Zionist past, from which they felt they had been excluded. Thus the representative of Bnei Binyamin stated on the fourth commemoration of her death (October 1935) that:

> It has always been falsely said of the farmers and their sons, who in fact served as the foundation for the Balfour Declaration and as the first stones for building the Land, that they were concerned only with their own gain. The story of Sarah has removed this accusation. They [the farmers] knew how to sanctify the Hebrew name and Hebrew honor. On this anniversary, and on every day of the year, we teach our youth to remember that, apart from all else, there is national honor and that in case of need, one must withstand the trial and act like Sarah and her friends.[28]

In Sarah Aaronsohn, the commemorating group found their very own saint, who could also be represented as an icon of the nation as a whole. What is more, the organized commemoration transformed the activism of Nili, and especially the active death of Aaronsohn herself, into a model for the youth of the Civic Sector. The emphasis on sacrifice and exemplary death was particularly salient during World War II. In wartime memorial ceremonies, the comparison is repeatedly made between the willingness of the older generation of *Boazim* in World War I to sacrifice themselves for their nation and the hedonism and complacency of the Civic youth in the 1940s. In the ceremony of 1944, Arieh Samsonov of Zikhron Yaakov appealed to the young men of the towns and the *moshavot* and to the "youth of Israel" to volunteer to serve in the British Army in order to prove "that you deserve to be called people of Zikhron, the place where Sarah, the spirit of Nili, was born, raised, and educated!" From this year, the recruits were sworn in on Aaronsohn's grave in a ceremony before a local audience and representatives of the British Army.[29]

The representation of Aaronsohn as a model of *Eretz Yisraeli* nationalism

is not unique to the memorial ceremonies organized by the Bnei Binyamin Federation. It recurs in the eulogies for her in the daily Civic press (by writers who were not necessarily identified with Bnei Binyamin), in the children's press of the Civic Sector, such as *Ha-Boker le-Yeladim* (Morning for Children), as well as in stories, plays, and skits written in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s.[30] The discussion of her death and its symbolism makes a rich and dense fabric of texts characterized by what Raphael Samuel has called "a density of description and attention to the object of remembrance."[31] This density, along with the multiplicity of various texts, drawing on each other, representing writers of different political orientations, published on different platforms and directed toward different audiences, is what helped construct Sarah Aaronsohn as a cultural icon. The discussion of her life and death, both for those who had taken an active part in them and those who had not, was in fact a debate about the nature of *Eretz Yisraeli*-ness, who owned national history, and who had the right to interpret it.

It was precisely the absence of homogeneity in the collective memory of Sarah Aaronsohn that helped transform her into a "heroine for all," for different groups and at different times. For the older private agricultural sector, represented in the ceremonies by such veterans as Avram Shapira, Aaronsohn was an exemplar of "the farmer's way." For members of her own generation and for Bnei Binyamin youth, who from the beginning presented themselves as the true "natives of the Land," her "national espionage" accorded with the fulfillment of the Zionist project and "building the Land." As Oded Ben-Ami put it in 1932, she was "the one on whose grave we built the great building of the Land." Ben-Ami, like other activists in the Bnei Binyamin Federation, emphasized both Aaronsohn's local connections and her territoriality, the connection to the Land and people of Israel in general, acquired through her unmediated knowledge of nature, the terrain and its flora and fauna. As he presented her, she was a daughter of the Land and a true representative of the authentic native-born generation: "Nor did the *Yishuv* know how to appreciate the value of Sarah and her heroic friends, through malevolence, malice, and envy—because they were children of the Land."[32] Aaronsohn was a "territorial heroine," in accordance with the model that characterized the native Hebrew culture from the beginning, as Itamar Even-Zohar and others have shown.[33]

In contrast to the narrative of Aaronsohn's life and death molded by circles close to Bnei Binyamin, Revisionist as well as maximalist right-wing narratives emphasized blood sacrifice and revolt, which were promulgated as ideals in and of themselves and sometimes divorced from concepts of

territoriality and of settling on the land. From the beginning, the Young Maccabi movement, Betar, and Betar Youth took an active part in commemorating Sarah Aaronsohn. From the very first memorial ceremony, representatives of Betar attended the annual commemorations officially and in uniform; and their presence became especially conspicuous during World War II. Moreover, aside from the annual public ritual organized in Zikhron Yaakov, Nili and Sarah Aaronsohn in particular became models of activism and revolt among both Revisionists and right-wing maximalists. In the eyes of the Stern Group and of activists associated with Brit ha-Biryonim, her activities were not only a symbol of heroism and of "deeds" (presented as the opposite of the passivity and sterile verbosity of the intellectuals), but also part of a messianic myth. As Joseph Heller has convincingly shown, the zealot (*kanai*), rebelling against a sovereign ruler, had a central place in the Stern Group's eclectic messianic ideology. His/her historic role consisted of self-sacrifice that would bring on "the kingdom of Israel"—not by parliamentary means or through agreement (with colonial and international powers such as Britain), but by violent action. Thus, paradoxically, Nili, with its definitively pro-British orientation during World War I, became the ideological and operative model for the anti-British Lehi in World War II. The maximalist right appropriated Sarah Aaronsohn and the story of her death and set her (along with Tomáš Masaryk, Marshal Pilsudski, and Eamon de Valera) in an eclectic pantheon of national rebels. They even turned her death into an alternative national narrative of the history of Israel—the chronicles of the acts of the zealots.[34]

The children's and youth culture of the Civic *Yishuv*, on the other hand, had no place for the model of the zealot and the saga of apocalyptic violence invented by the extreme right, or even for the sectorialism and the version of class identity that characterized the narrative fostered by Bnei Binyamin. The literature published by the children's newspapers of the Civic Sector sought to present Sarah Aaronsohn as an exemplary national figure. Like Trumpeldor, so too Sarah was represented as a hero of the nation as a whole. Her death had added pedagogical value as an example of a "boundless love for our people and our homeland" and of "self-sacrifice and devotion, all in faith and confidence," as pointed out in *Ha-Boker le-Yeladim* of 25 September 1945.

Unlike Trumpeldor, Nili and Sarah Aaronsohn were not included in the curriculum—neither the curriculum of the general educational system nor that of schools affiliated with the Labor movement. Her slow appropriation by the state educational system began only after 1967 (see below). Until then,

and even in the 1950s, Aaronsohn and Nili were absent from school curricula and from the Hebrew school calendar, while the anniversary of Trumpeldor's death, the 11th of Adar, was made a day of ceremonies and the first national secular holiday. Given this absence, Aaronsohn's emergence as a national heroine for youth in the peripheral juvenile culture that emerged in the 1940s is particularly significant.

First occasionally, then more frequently, Sarah Aaronsohn's name and the story of her death appeared in fiction and memorial sections of the Civic children's press. A typical story was published in *Ha-Boker le-Yeladim* on 9 October 1946 (the eve of the traditional pilgrimage in Zikhron Yaakov). In the didactic "frame" story, serving as a setting for the inner narrative, a grandmother explains to her grandchildren why masses of pilgrims throng to the grave of the saint from Zikhron Yaakov every year. As befitting the genre, the story focuses on Sarah Aaronsohn's patriotic childhood and death and, typically, no mention is made of her adolescence or adult years. As the following brief excerpt shows, her death is described in territorial terms and through images of mourning that focus on the landscape and nature ("the heavens wept" "the first hard rain of the year") commonly found in Hebrew children's literature. These clichéd tropes, however, are now inserted into a new narrative of heroism for youth:

> When Sarah was brought to burial in the cemetery of Zikhron Yaakov, the first drops of the first hard rain of the season started to fall. Not only the people cried, the sky too wept for the death of Sarah . . . saintly and pure, who sacrificed herself for the redemption of her people and country. Even the Turkish officers and governors who attended her funeral declared, "She was like a daughter of kings."[35]

The various narratives of Sarah Aaronsohn's life and death reflect the polyphony of collective memory. And this polyphonic quality was in tune with the different and often competing agendas and needs, mainly political but also cultural, of different groups. But despite their differences and plurality of voices, these groups belonged to the same community of memory and may be located in the Civic Sector and the national Civic culture that emerged during the 1930s and 1940s. However, this functional explanation of the polyphony of the remembering community is insufficient. First, there was not always a direct connection between the political affiliation of those who fostered the memory and commemorated the past, and the actual practice of memory. For example, unorganized, popular forms of commemora-

tion, which were not partisan or connected to organizations sprang up (see below). Moreover, an explanation that reduces memory to a simple relationship between needs (mainly political) and organized social activities (such as public mourning and commemoration ceremonies) errs in ignoring the complexities of the object of the memory, its images, and the reconstruction of this object by individuals and groups. This kind of functional explanation also ignores the relationships among gender, memory, and identity.

How, then, was the discourse on Sarah Aaronsohn made into a gendered memory? Was she invented as a national *hero* of Eretz Yisrael who *happened to be a woman*, or, put differently, was her "femaleness" relevant to the myth of *Eretz Yisraeli*-ness that she represented? I shall argue that the memory of Sarah Aaronsohn cannot be understood outside of gender, since her construction as a model of *Eretz Yisraeli*-ness by the groups examined above, as well as by other groups, was related to the identification between nationalism and the active sacrifice and historical action of women. To examine the associations among gender, identity, and memory, I shall consider, from the perspective of gender, the same narratives that were examined above in a functional and neutral way. In addition, I shall discuss other sources: plays, high and popular literature, and the practices of memory in daily life, such as the custom of giving girls and boys "national" names associated with the history of Nili.

1917–1967: Memory and Gender

The most salient feature of the formation of the memory of Sarah Aaronsohn's life and death is the identification of nationalism with activism and femininity. This identification is manifest, first and foremost, in Sarah's very centrality in the many varied narratives of the history of Nili, its rise, deeds, and fall. The typical plot of the 1930s and 1940s did feature the central male figures in the anti-Ottoman underground: her older brother, Aaron Aaronsohn, and Avshalom Feinberg, presenting both of them as models of *Eretz Yisraeli* masculinity (Feinberg was described as "the first Sabra").[36] But Sarah Aaronsohn, the only woman in the Nili leadership (though not the only female member of the organization), who coordinated and from late 1916 practically ran the organization and the wider network that supported it, was the only activist to be elevated to a paragon of sacrifice and a model of national conduct. The relative marginality of the underground men within the memory undoubtedly had technical reasons, to do with the local-

territorial aspect of every presence of the past in private and collective memory. Sarah Aaronsohn had a *site* of memory and even "sacred" relics, which the pilgrims to her grave visited in their ritual processions. Aaron Aaronsohn and Avshalom Feinberg had no place of burial or relics. Their death was not final because their bodies disappeared and this disappearance was shrouded in uncertainty: The plane in which Aaronsohn flew to the Versailles Conference vanished over the English Channel, and Feinberg disappeared on his unfortunate journey to Egypt in 1917, and the remains of his body were recovered by chance only in 1967.

As historians of memory such as Pierre Nora, Raphael Samuel, and Frances Yates have noted, the act of remembering the past, whether to preserve an individual past or to reconstruct a public myth, is related to the practices and techniques of recall as a spatial art — remembering, preserving, and memorizing places or individuals in a space. The technique of recall is based on memorizing the exact location and arrangement of the disparate items that the rememberers "saw" at a particular site. This also characterizes the building of sites of commemoration. Without place, Frances Yates has pointed out, there is no practice of memory.[37]

Sarah Aaronsohn has had a definite place of memory: the site of her death and her burial place. The presence of her remains in the local space of Zikhron Yaakov aided in the "arrangement" and formation of the narrative of her activities and its incorporation into the history of the heroism of the nation, both by those who perpetuated her memory and by the groups who made pilgrimages to Zikhron Yaakov on the anniversary of her death. Her memory was preserved in the series of sacred places and relics: the room where she was tortured, the place where she committed suicide (the bathroom of Aaron Aaronsohn's house in the Aaronsohn family's back yard), the "instrument" of death (the gun), the blood-stained suicide letter, the white dress in which she committed suicide, and her grave. Every year from the 1940s, a *sukkah* was erected in the Aaronsohn yard, which the local schoolchildren and the general public were encouraged to visit throughout the festival of Sukkot and on Shmini Atzeret, the eighth and last day, when Jews in Israel no longer sit in the *sukkah*. At the center of the *sukkah*, on a table decorated with branches and flowers, stood Sarah Aaronsohn's photograph. In this iconic presentation of the dead "saint" in a public *sukkah*, the local ritual of the pilgrimage to Sarah's grave was combined with the tradition of the three pilgrimages to the Temple in Jerusalem at Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot.

Aaronsohn's centrality in the narrative of Nili, and of *Eretz Yisraeli* hero-

ism as a whole, however, is rooted in her complex gender identity. Sarah Aaronsohn's femininity was defined and interpreted in various ways, according to available models of gender—particularly the model of the "new" *Eretz Yisraeli* woman—that already had emerged before World War I and were refined during the interwar years. Both the definition and the memory contained an unresolved (and insoluble) tension between two perceptions of femininity and between two practices of *Eretz Yisraeli* female public behavior, which cohabited in the national discourse and in particular in the culture of the Civic Sector.

One perception may be termed "maternalist." This was based on the assumption that women were mothers of the nation, in two senses of the word: Literally, by virtue of their reproductive capacity, they were responsible for reproducing the nation, and in the sense that they were the conduit for the transmission of the national culture through teaching their children the Hebrew language. This twofold contribution to the nation was seen not merely as a "natural" (biological) role but also as a social and cultural activity.[38] The other perception, which cohabited with the maternalist definition, blurred gender differences and detached national female identity from motherhood. This perception was conspicuous, as I have demonstrated elsewhere, among women of the first native Hebrew-speaking generation and especially among Nili members and their female supporters. Sarah Aaronsohn's own conduct was an eloquent manifestation of this perception.[39] I shall now discuss each of these components in the gendered memory.

National-Maternalist Perception and Memory

As is well known, Zionist gender ideology in the first decades of the twentieth century was no different from Western nationalist ideology in general. Like nationalism in the West, so too Zionism "invited" women into the budding community of the nation and bestowed upon them historical agency by virtue of their essence as mothers. The vast body of studies on maternalism, most notably the writings of Gisela Bock, Patricia Thane, Sonia Michel, and Seth Koven on Western Europe and of Beth Baron and Fatma Müge Göçek on the Ottoman Empire, clearly shows how maternalism enabled the recruitment of women to nationalist movements. Yet, this selfsame image of femininity, which served to include women in the nation, at the same time led to their exclusion from what was perceived as the apotheosis of national liberation: blood-sacrifice for the nation and participation as combatants on

the battlefield.[40] "Translated" into *Eretz Yisraeli* terms, the maternalist model prevented women from acquiring (and in Hebrew *kniyah*, literally "buying") the land with their blood. Until Sarah Aaronsohn's death, this possibility was restricted to men, for example, the martyrs of Ha-Shomer. Although women also died in the battle for Tel Hai, blood sacrifice "for the Land" was identified with a new Hebrew hero, Trumpeldor, and with masculine characteristics.[41] Of course, the maternalist perception of the *Eretz Yisraeli* woman, as the embodiment of motherhood and of the family of the nation, did leave a certain space for women to act as agents of the national revival. Indeed, this space is one of the components of the memory of Sarah Aaronsohn. Various versions of the story of her heroism emphasized characteristics that were considered feminine, among them her devotion to her family, her willingness to sacrifice herself, and, lastly, her capacity for emotional identification with human suffering, as clearly manifest in her attitude toward the genocide of the Armenians (this last, considered as a major factor in her joining a political movement). These feminine traits turned her story into a part of a repertoire of alternative, feminine versions of the story of Jewish heroism.

In one such version, Aaronsohn's act of nationalism was described as a part of a domestic, family drama. This displacement of heroism from the public realm to the home and its presentation as part of a feminine biography is quite conspicuous in the hagiographies of Aaronsohn that were written under the aegis of the Aaronsohn family, especially of her brother Alexander. A typical example may be found in the volume dedicated to Sarah in Yaari-Polskin's work on Nili, which relates in detail the story of the growth and *bildung* of an *Eretz Yisraeli* heroine. This story of pioneering, represented as a source of heroism and sacrifice, is distinctly gendered:

> The pioneers had to create and develop everything. Isolated among their Arab neighbors, whose language and customs they did not know, they were forced to learn the work . . . to adapt to everything. And how difficult the life of these women pioneers was! They had to do everything with their own hands. They took care of their children by themselves, because there was no "daycare" yet. And every mother cooked, baked, washed, and sewed for her household; for in those days the pioneers had not yet come to believe that they could give up their personal lives and families. . . . Sarah grew up in a life of work, heroism, and sacrifice. From childhood, she worked, like all the daughters of the pioneers. Hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder with her mother, she washed floors, scrubbed tables and chairs . . .

After specifying the various household chores, he continues:

> And Sarah also inhaled spiritual heroism daily in her life with her mother. . . . From her she learned to suffer in silence, to dry her tears quickly, and to present a laughing face . . . to do her daily chores despite the ache in her body, in her heart. From her mother she learned that there was no obstacle, no hindrance, no power on earth that could keep the soul from rising and exalting above all and soaring, soaring to the heavens![42]

From her father, Yaari-Polskin points out, Sarah Aaronsohn learned a more earthly and territorial love: love for the land, a land identified with the space outside the home and the female sphere.

The relationship between memory and group or class, emphasized in the first part of this study and given social and political interpretations, is a gendered relationship. The "class" of farmers is endowed with qualities or a history that, in the view of Yaari-Polskin and other members of his group, had been expropriated from them: namely, a history of pioneering. Just like the people of the Labor movement, so too the Aaronsohns and the farmers of Zikhron Yaakov are "pioneers," insists Yaari-Polskin. And, most relevant here, this pioneering is gendered. Women's pioneering is domestic and spiritual. This spirituality is embodied in the Aaronsohns' mother, Malkah, and in her daughter Sarah, and does not characterize the men of the family, who represent the material connection to the land.

In another version of the maternalist narrative, Sarah Aaronsohn's life is detached from the domestic and familial framework and integrated, as an epic and a public story, into a clearly feminine narrative of the history of heroism. In this version, Sarah is described as a link in the chain of mothers of the nation, which includes the biblical Sarah, Deborah, and Yael, and sometimes even mothers from the Jewish apocrypha. In the necrologue, "Sarah Aaronsohn" by Avigdor Hameiri, which was first published in the newspaper *Doar ha-Yom* (Today's Mail) in 1923, Sarah is presented as a "Judith," a "great and gigantic" mythical heroine. Her mythological status and power are conveyed through images of femininity, seduction, and sexuality, which remain only symbolic: "And Judith bestows Greek compliments on Holophernes . . . and her eyes [Sarah's] were light, her face always smiling, and her lips full and somewhat obdurate."[43] Judith the tyrant-slayer is a founding mother of the nation. The fact that Sarah Aaronsohn, like Judith, was never a mother and, strictly speaking, did not fulfill wifely duties, since she abandoned her husband and home, has little or no significance. For ma-

ternalism identified all women as mothers, regardless of their biological or family status.

The Blurred Boundaries of Gender

Alongside this genealogy of national mothers and daughters, there evolved another memory of Aaronsohn's heroism and death, in which her role as an agent, in Jewish history and that of the *Yishuv*, was severed from the maternalist notion of action. This memory, in which the boundaries of femininity are blurred, took shape between the early 1920s and the end of the 1950s. Yet, at the same time, this non-maternalist (sometimes even anti-maternalist) image draws on the images of femininity and on social behaviors of the women of the native-born elite before and during World War I.

The blurring of gender boundaries and a pointed criticism of the identification of national femininity with motherhood were salient features of Aaronsohn's own writings and public conduct. Aaronsohn occasionally wore men's clothing and used the masculine form when writing about herself. She also criticized the way in which her male colleagues in the underground perceived femininity and represented women as mothers, saints, or asexual creatures. And she herself was a very sensual woman. Her challenge to notions of femininity and its boundaries culminated in the way in which she designed her death, in the last letter, and in her behavior until the moment of suicide.[44]

After her death, and especially after the early 1930s, right-wing movements and youth organizations within the private agricultural sector adopted the non-maternalist and open-ended definition of *Eretz Yisraeli* femininity formulated by Aaronsohn herself and other women of her generation. This model was not entirely political, however, for it also penetrated into popular culture, especially into popular women's culture. In this alternative narrative, memory operated as a sieve that sifted features identified as feminine and domestic out of Sarah Aaronsohn's biography, retaining details that were not perceived as purely feminine or that could be deemed "masculine." For example, a great many descriptions emphasized her physical prowess, her freedom of movement outside her home, her horsemanship, her mastery of various weapons, as well as qualities such as her unperturbability, unemotionality, contempt for pathos, and the desire to "do" rather than talk. Some of the traditional maternalist biographies also included these characteristics. Yaari-Polskin, for example, gives Sarah's love of riding a central place:

> [She loved] horse riding and life in nature. . . . She bore a sword and galloped in the mountains. . . . How beautiful she was . . . as she rode her noble and gleaming horse, rejoicing in gatherings and competitions with our Arab neighbors. Sarah was perhaps one of the first Hebrew women in the land [to participate] in heroism and horse racing and even in raids on a caravan of camels in the dark of the night.[45]

This portrayal of Aaronsohn as a horseman, a *man* of nature and the land, is very similar to descriptions of her by the historian Joseph Klausner. The portrayal is intriguing precisely because of the analogy between the Sabra woman and the Bedouin man, involving a broad notion of gender and elements of orientalism, an approach that idealizes the oriental man while blurring his gender.[46] Such comparison of the first Sabra women to Bedouin men and heroes was most common from the turn of the twentieth century, as was the custom of *Eretz Yisraeli* women to dress up as Arab men. Moreover, the compound of masculine traits, activities, and appearance attributed to the female "hero" would be applied to the Sabra male. It was precisely at this time that the masculinist ethos of the native-born male, a man of deeds, lacking pathos, was promulgated.[47]

The authenticity of Aaronsohn as a daughter of the Land, her love of nature, her contempt for verbiage and her admiration for action were contrasted to the behavior of the men around her. Thus, this narrative of her heroism was based not only on the blurring of gender (as in the analogy to the Bedouin man), but also on the reversal of gender behaviors. Aaronsohn's behavior is presented as diametrically opposed to the feminine conduct of the men in Nili. Such a reversal is salient in the writings of Moshe Smilansky, who deserves attention as an exception among the activists in the farmers' and nationalist bloc. Although Smilansky served as the president of the Hebrew Farmers' Association and as editor of its newspaper, *Bustana'i* (Orchardist) till the early 1920s, he detached himself from the ideology of the organization and from Bnei Binyamin. And it was at the time that the memory and the commemoration of Nili and of Sarah Aaronsohn were being shaped that he began to formulate his own special views about Hebrew labor and about the relationship between Jews and Arabs.

What is unique about Smilansky is that his rendition of the myth of Sarah Aaronsohn was neither political nor strictly partisan. In the play *Rohele*, which he wrote in 1933, underground leader Rohele—Sarah Aaronsohn—prefers an active political life to family and the love of a man, while her male colleagues (who are portrayed as feminine) long for home, family, and the

love of a woman. The heroine reproaches them: "Go without asking, without enquiring, with eyes shut, through fire and water, in blood and in death, always forward. Death with honor in an instant is better than a life of shame of the vanquished."[48] For "life of shame" read a comfortable domestic life. Rohele/Sarah's death is depicted as an especially "active" death. In the last scene of the play, Smilansky describes a duel between equals — between the heroine and Hassan Beck (the Ottoman interrogator). Rohele stabs Hassan Beck, and only then kills herself and dies on the spot.[49] Such reversal of gender roles and the relegation of the men in the underground to the margins of the narrative reach their peak in the article on Sarah that Smilansky wrote in 1935. The article ends with the sentence: "If there is truth in the statement that there is a next world, and that in the next world there are two parts, one for Paradise and one for Hell, and her male friends chance to go to Paradise, may her place be in Hell, and may she not meet them there."[50]

The blurring of the boundaries of femininity and the reversal of gender images characterize not only the statements of a "rebel" like Smilansky, but also the memory and acts of commemoration of Bnei Binyamin and the Revisionist and maximalist organizations of the right. Indeed, Aaronsohn's biography was integrated not only into the genealogy of the rebels and zealots discussed above, but also into an alternative history of Western female heroism.

From the early 1930s, Aaronsohn was commonly compared to non-Jewish female warriors or heroines whose myths were marked by gender ambiguity. These myths commemorated "masculine" traits such as courage on the battlefield and soldiering, on the one hand, and idealized female qualities such as sexual purity and sometimes even virginity, on the other hand. The two most common analogies in the memorial literature dedicated to Aaronsohn in the interwar years were to Joan of Arc, the Maid of Orleans, born in 1412, captured by the Burgundians and burnt by the English in 1431, and canonized in 1920, and to Edith Cavell, the British nurse who was executed in Belgium for anti-German espionage during World War I. Cavell, executed in 1915, promptly became a national saint in Britain and a propaganda asset for the Allied forces.[51] Her blood sacrifice was associated with the sacrifice of occupied Belgium, which was routinely feminized and described as a woman in the propaganda. It is noteworthy that no comparison was made between Sarah and the best-known spy of World War I, Mata Hari. The reasons are clear. Hari spied, apparently, for personal gain and not for any nation. Moreover, by the first decade of the twentieth century she was already a sex symbol and an orientalist icon of sensuality and exotic Eastern feminin-

ity. Saint Joan and the nurse Cavell, in contrast, were symbols of a national femininity, distinctly nonsexual, and asexual. The military nurse and the virgin-warrior crossed the gender lines without endangering the prototype and ideal of the female saint. A similar tendency to desexualize the heroine and distance her from an ascribed gender role also characterizes the memory of Sarah Aaronsohn and bears little relation to her "real" life.

The comparisons to Christian myths and images of womanhood are especially important because they manifest not only the tension, enhanced by the blurring of the borderlines of gender, between definitions of femininity and nationalism, but also the syncretism of the national symbols of the center and right-wing circles in Eretz Israel. Some of the images of femininity taken on by these circles were not Jewish but Catholic or Protestant Evangelical. The use of the myth of Joan of Arc in relation to Sarah Aaronsohn is an examplar of such syncretism. Joan was a virgin, and her virginity endowed her with exceptional power in contrast to other women, though her special power also derived from her assumption of the role of a soldier and cross-dressing as a man. As a man-woman who transgressed the boundaries of gender, Joan became a symbol of national movements as well as of many political and social movements: Catholic and Protestant, right-wing royalist movements, and radical movements on the right and left in France, anti-feminist movements and militant feminists such as the WSPU (Women's Social and Political Union, the British suffragette organization).[52]

The analogy between Sarah Aaronsohn, the woman farmer and native of the land, and Joan of Arc, the French peasant of Lorraine, was quite prevalent in the political rhetoric of Bnei Binyamin and various right-wing circles. The heroism of Aaronsohn, who "invited" the British to her land, was compared to Joan of Arc's anti-Burgundian and anti-English patriotism. Moreover, both women were depicted as soldiers and at times referred to in the masculine gender. Already in the second pilgrimage to Aaronsohn's grave, in 1933, Bnei Binyamin activist Ze'ev Neiderman, also a native of Zikhron Yaakov, compared Aaronsohn's acts to the "nobility and heroism of this daughter of Orleans, 'Joanna of Arc'": In the pilgrimage "to the holy grave of Sarah of Zikhron, we today went up to this holy place to stand at attention before the same exalted soul and to remind future generations of this heroine of Zikhron Yaakov, like the heroine of Orleans."[53] In the pilgrimage of 1941, Aaronsohn was called a heroine "greater than Joan of Arc," and, speaking at her grave in October 1946, Betar member Baruch Weinstein called her "the Hebrew Joan of Arc . . . Commander of Nili."[54] But here the resemblance ends:

> between Joan of Arc, the Frenchwoman, and Sarah, the Hebrew. They made their appearance in different national frameworks, in different periods, and under different conditions. Joan of Arc—among her own people, sitting on their own land, healthy in body and soul . . . who saw her, the heroine, as their emissary—their leader—of their own flesh. Joan of Arc made her appearance in an atmosphere of sympathy and admiration. The French people understood the value of her mission, gave her their assistance and backing for her actions. And our Sarah? She [appeared] under conditions of a cruel foreign government [and in a society] that had not reached a stage of complete national development. . . . Under these conditions, Sarah the Commander appeared.

Weinstein's typical speech is marked by his alternating use of the masculine and feminine gender, especially in his description of Joan-Sarah as a military commander. Joan of Arc, as noted, donned a uniform, and was depicted in uniform in the religious and secular iconography of both the right and left in the early twentieth century, as well as in feminist iconography. However, another source of her power was her virginity. Virginity was perceived as a source of female power and, more important, of authority, in Western Christian culture.[55] Beginning in the early 1930s, Aaronsohn was described as a (female) commander or as a (male) soldier and officer. The militarizing of her image and concomitant blurring of her sexuality (and femininity) culminate during World War II. Already in 1935, a Betar boat and naval unit were named after her, and from 1941, representatives of the British Army attended her memorial.[56] From 1942, her graveside eulogies became army recruitment speeches, and a number of recruits swore allegiance to Sarah Aaronsohn and committed themselves to avenging her sacrifice by freeing Eretz Yisrael and world Jewry from the National-Socialist threat. These recruits included not only members of Betar, but also members of *moshavot* whose political affiliation may not be determined with certainty.[57]

With the end of World War II, there was no longer a need to militarize Sarah Aaronsohn or to imagine her as a soldier. However, her blurred sexuality and sexual identity remained a part of her image as the alternative national saint of the Revisionist right. Thus, in 1958, the historian Joseph Klausner found it necessary to point out:

> Another people would have bestowed a laurel wreath on her. I do not know what the world view of the French was, but the French people as a whole fall on their knees before Joan of Arc, who, in actuality, did not bring about victory

> and permitted the desecration of her body. And how do we treat Sarah? And this after the State has already been established. . . . How many books have been written about Sarah? To what extent are her history and heroic act taught in schools?[58]

Klausner in fact urged women to constitute an alternative memory of the "heroine": "Women should have established something special in her memory." Women and girls indeed took an active part in the pilgrimages to the grave, both as members of the organizations involved in the commemoration, such as Young Maccabi and Betar, and as members of women's organizations, such as the Federation of National Women affiliated with the New Zionist Federation. Women's participation, however, like the blurring of gender in the political memory of Sarah Aaronsohn, may not be taken as proof of an egalitarian outlook on gender relations within the Civic Sector or in its dominant political movements. As several historians of gender have shown, integral nationalist movements identified with the right, whether the radical or the traditional right, tended (more than liberal or left-wing movements), to foster non-maternalist images of femininity. In some of the former, women succeeded in carving out major roles for themselves.[59] However, the process by which access to the nation and the right to act on its behalf were extended to women did not involve an egalitarian politics, nor a liberal universalist notion of rights. Thus, in the *Yishuv*'s right-wing circles and in the various farmers' organizations, the radical view of femininity that characterized the myth of Aaronsohn did not manifest itself in practice. Bnei Binyamin, for example, did not accept women as members. Moreover, its rhetoric (except for Aaronsohn's memorial rituals) celebrated male brotherhood, as one of the organization's publications noted.[60] Thus, Bnei Binyamin carried on the pre–World War I tradition of the "Gidonim" (after the biblical Gideon, the semi-military, all-male organization of the native-born from which Nili eventually emerged) and, unlike other youth movements, excluded women. Mixed organizations as well as nationalist women's organizations that criticized the militarism and militaristic rituals of the exclusively male organizations were established before, during, and after the war. Nili itself was a mixed organization, in which the borderlines of the definition of femininity and nation were stretched in an unprecedented manner, especially in Sarah Aaronsohn's activities.[61] However, as Mary Louise Roberts and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan have shown, a gender model that blurs the difference between what is considered "feminine" and what is accepted as "masculine" may develop, and is actually to be more likely to de-

velop, within hierarchical communities with a patriarchal tradition lacking gender equality. It is precisely in such communities that images of exceptional and extraordinary women, embodying ideal qualities that are not necessarily "essentially" feminine, can develop.[62] What needs stressing in the anti-maternalist narrative reviewed here is not the disparity between this narrative and the actual position of women in the Civic Sector in the *Yishuv*, but women's conspicuous presence in the nationalist discourse and the ways in which this presence shaped the collective memory.

This narrative should not be seen as a political "invention" manufactured by bodies with clear programs and political affiliations. Obviously, the narrative was political. However, it seeped into popular memory and created that fabric of representations and practices that Raphael termed "the density of memory." These practices testify to the extent to which Sarah Aaronsohn—as a symbol of active female heroism that challenged the definitions of femininity—was identified with Nili. A clear case of this permeation of the myth into collective memory was the practice of naming girls "Nili." Choosing a name is a way of bestowing identity, both on those who choose it and on the person for whom it is chosen. Nili was a national and native name, an acronym that stood for the biblical phrase "*Netzah Yisrael lo yeshaker*" (the Glory of Israel does not deceive [1 Sam. 15:29]).

Prior to the second half of the 1930s, the name Nili was chosen rarely and sporadically. Yet, as the data on Hebrew names gathered by Sasha Weitman shows, it appeared on the population register regularly from 1936 onwards. Between 1936 and 1979, 2,889 girls were named Nili. In contrast, only 1,300 boys were given the name Avshalom, which was both biblical and native, and was not exclusively identified with the underground figure Avshalom Feinberg. The name Nili was most popular in the early 1940s: It was given to 75 girls in 1940, to 106 in 1942, to 150 in 1943, and to 141 in 1944. In the early 1950s, its popularity declined, rising again at the end of the decade, with an increase from 46 in 1955 to 59 in 1958. A further increase occurred in 1967, when 71 baby girls were named Nili.[63] The value of these figures is rather limited since there is no way of breaking them down and analyzing them by ethnic origin, economic and social status, or political affiliation of the families that named their daughters Nili. The clear national character of this name, however, and the fact that it was most popular during periods of national emergency (like World War II and the Six-Day War) and security crises (during the 1950s) point to the feminization of the memory of heroism. Oral testimonies indicate that the choice of the name Nili was not limited to right-wing circles.[64]

The domestication of memory and its appropriation to the daily life of women and girls are also manifest in Sarah Aaronsohn's legitimization in the women's press, where her biography began to appear in the second half of the 1940s. In one commemorative article published on the thirtieth anniversary of her death (1947) in the weekly magazine *La-Ishah* (literally, For the Woman)—which would become a prototype for writing about her in this press—Sarah's story served as a way of inverting a conventional gender fairy tale: the story of the rescued princess. This biographical article, entitled "Captain without Stars," completely reverses the customary image of the princess. Sarah is not rescued or saved by any of the men around her, but rather frees herself of them. She chooses to liberate herself from an unsatisfying marriage and the burden of home and family and becomes the "captain of her fate" as well as the captain of the underground.

As captain, she rejects the suggestion of her older brother, Aaron Aaronsohn, to escape in the British warship *Managem*, which had been sent to retrieve the activists in the espionage network. And as "captain" of her ship, she commits suicide.[65] It is precisely on a platform like the weekly women's magazine, which perpetuated cults of femininity and domesticity, that Aaronsohn's military behavior is portrayed not as a contradiction of feminine ideals but rather as a possibility for a correct gendered nationalist behavior. This kind of diffusion (and internalization) of the story of Nili raises doubts about the assumption, still widely accepted in the debate on memory, that centers and elites mold the national ethos by means of cultural hegemony and have an omnipotent power over collective memory. Memory became part of the everyday, here the everyday of women and girls. It developed in the arena outside the core of hegemony—outside the ceremonial and the distinctly political space of official rites of commemoration and in "sites" outside unifying systems with repressive powers. This very process serves as proof of the tenacity and durability of a gendered memory that is both marginal and peripheral.

1967: Into "the National Pantheon"?

In the debate on memory and identity in Israeli society, the year 1967 has the special status of an *annus mirabilis* (or, depending on the interlocutor's politics and ideology, an *annus horribilis*). It is generally described as heralding a profound change and as the beginning of an ongoing process of the disintegration of collective ethoses and of a uniform, hegemonic, and cohesive

culture of memory. Above all, the period beginning in 1967 is associated with the process of the "privatization of memory" and its expropriation from the nation and from national needs to groups and individuals within the nation.[66] However, an examination of the evolution of the memory of Sarah Aaronsohn as a gendered process may change our perspective on the broader changes in Israeli culture and society as well as on the relationship between periphery and "center" within the national community.

The year 1967 indeed represents a surfeit of memory and commemoration; but, in contrast to the practices of the 1930s and 1940s, the commemorations of the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Sarah Aaronsohn were marked by her appropriation into the mainstream ethos and consensus and her consolidation as a popular figure. Along with these developments, there also occurred a perceptible change in her status as a heroine. These changes were related, of course, to the political and cultural changes of the times. The Six-Day War, with the arrogance that followed in its wake, happened to occur in the fiftieth anniversary year of the eradication of Nili. It was in this year that Sarah Aaronsohn first received official state recognition by the representatives of the hegemonic and ruling Labor movement culture. In 1967, the men and women members of the Nili underground who had been killed were recognized as soldiers in uniform who had died in action, and those who had survived were decorated with the "Nili Medal." That same year, the bones of Avshalom Feinberg were discovered by chance and brought to burial in a full military ceremony. In tandem with these events, the first official state ceremony was held at the grave of Sarah Aaronsohn in Zikhron Yaakov.

In the memorial ceremonies conducted between 1967 and the death in 1981 of Rivkah Aaronsohn, Sarah's younger sister and the force behind her local commemoration, the local Zikhron Yaakov tradition and the state tradition intermingled in the annual pilgrimage to Sarah's grave. The revised syncretic ceremony had a clear feminine element: Members of the Bnot Brit Organization of Zikhron Yaakov gathered together with women from the adjacent *moshavot*, many of whom had been active in the Bnot Binyamin Federation, the women's equivalent of Bnei Binyamin.[67] They gathered in the Aaronsohn family home before the public ceremony and marched to Sarah's grave, led by Rivkah Aaronsohn.

Such signs that the peripheral memory was penetrating the central and official tradition were not restricted to the ceremonies. The peripheral memory was legitimized in the gender discourse within the Labor movement itself. Already in November 1967, after the jubilee ceremony, Rachel Katzenelson, editor of *Dvar ha-Po'elet* (Word of the Woman Worker), the

flagship magazine of women's activity in the movement, published a lead article on Sarah Aaronsohn in which she described Aaronsohn as the first *Tzabarit* (female Sabra) and a national heroine. More important, she also settled accounts with the leadership of the *Yishuv* during World War I and with the pre-state and Israeli Labor leadership on the suppression of the story of the Nili heroine. Katzenelson even called for reburying Aaronsohn—metaphorically, of course—in the state pantheon:

> From now own, she shall belong not only to the national pantheon of the renewed Eretz Israel[!]. She shall also be incorporated into the innermost soul of the nation. . . . So, now, after some fifty years of silencing, they win the recognized title of admired heroes of the nation, a model for coming generations. Indeed, Sarah's home in Zikhron Yaakov still remains something of a "private national museum," a family heirloom, administered as a national asset and serving as a sanctified site for mass pilgrimages, by the young and old of all kinds.[68]

Katznelson's sermon undoubtedly was inspired by political motives. As one of the founders of the Livneh group, the first adherents of the idea of Greater Israel in the Labor movement, Katznelson may have been attracted to the territorialism and political activism of the heroes of the "native" culture in general and of Sarah Aaronsohn in particular. But a narrow biographical-political explanation does not suffice here, as Aaronsohn and Nili were rehabilitated within the Labor movement as a whole, and not only in its Greater Israel circles. Even before Katznelson's article, *Davar,* the Labor daily and the most authoritative platform of official discourse, had devoted some columns to the debate on Sarah Aaronsohn and her actions. In October through December 1967, the newspaper published a series of articles, by writers of both the Revisionist right and the Labor movement, on the Nili affair, the attitude toward the underground, and the association between this attitude and the formation of the collective memory. Yehuda Slutsky claimed that the "Nili group" was "from a social and historical perspective . . . the first sign of independent political activity on the part of the 'Sabra'." He saw Nili as a reflection of the native-born hero Yoash, "the new Jew of Eretz Yisrael" in the story by this name by Joseph Luidor (1912). Slutsky, who evidently was not a member of the Labor movement, portrayed Aaronsohn as a moral authority and as "the first link in the chain of the fallen for the establishment of the State of Israel."[69] However, the fact that his voice was heard from a platform such as *Davar* is evidence of the change in Labor's attitude toward this chapter in the history of the *Yishuv.* Nonetheless, one of the re-

sponses to the article leveled criticism at the attempt—attributed to the right, but also to voices identified with the Labor movement—to "falsify our history" and to include in it persons, like Nili members, who harmed the security of the *Yishuv*.[70]

The debate on the death and memory of Aaronsohn thus became, at one and the same time, a negotiation over her inclusion in the official national ideology and a discourse on the development of the nationalist memory of Labor itself—her exclusion in the past from this discourse, on the one hand, and the integration of different kinds of heroic ethos into the discourse, on the other. Katzenelson, for example, found it necessary to compare Sarah Aaronsohn to "the female workers" and female socialist settlers of the Second Aliyah, Manya Shochat and Dvorah Dayan. Dayan, who was perceived as one of the female saints of pioneer Labor settlement, was the mother of a national Sabra icon, Moshe Dayan.[71]

The rehabilitation of the memory of Sarah Aaronsohn, and the efforts to bring her memory to bear on the history and ethos of Hebrew labor and settlement did not impair her appeal as a popular, and not necessarily political, heroine. In contrast to the memory of Trumpeldor and the myth of Tel Hai, the memory of Aaronsohn and Nili survived outside clearly political and official sites of memory. In fact, the single most important feature of the narratives of her heroism fashioned after 1967 was the depoliticization of her national activity. Depoliticization was accompanied by another crucial change: Aaronsohn's feminization—an emphasis on the feminine and domestic essence of her activities, on the one hand, and the sexualization of these activities, or her representation as a product of the relations between the sexes and sometimes as a product of female identity and sexuality, on the other hand. Whereas before 1967, and especially before 1948, there had been a concerted effort to blur Aaronsohn's sexuality and the gender boundaries of her activities, after 1967, she was pushed to the margins of the story of Nili, while efforts were made to include her in the national pantheon. Her involvement in national affairs was interpreted as the outcome of her position in her family and in the extended "family" of the Nili underground.

These two changes, occurring simultaneously, are especially striking in the shaping of Aaronsohn's image as a "historical" and didactic heroine for juveniles. Nili gradually made its way into the curriculum of the mainstream state school system as well as into the special curricula of the kibbutz movement. From the second half of the 1960s, the moralizing position regarding Nili's activities was almost totally abandoned, and discussion of Nili was no longer political. At the same time, Sarah Aaronsohn's role in the under-

ground was rarely mentioned, while the deeds of the men were discussed in great detail. She was rendered mostly in terms of her familial and gender affiliations: as the younger sister of Aaron, "father" of the underground, and as a loyal daughter. This feminization of her image is striking, for example, in the second edition of *The History of the People of Israel in Our Generation* by Shimshon Leib Kirshenbaum (1965), in the nine editions of his book *The History of Israel in Recent Generations* published between 1968 and 1973 as well as in *A Brief History of Israel in Recent Times*, by Shlomo Horowitz, which was used by teachers and pupils of the Reali High School in Haifa (1973).[72]

Sarah's marginality is also manifest in the guidelines for teachers put out by the Curricula Division of Ha-Kibbutz ha-Artzi, the kibbutz movement of the left-wing Ha-Shomer ha-Tza'ir. These guidelines stipulated that the Nili affair was to be taught in the movement's schools by means of reenactment games with the triple aim of first, "encouraging the consideration of and thinking about Nili as a social-historical group"; second, rousing debate "on the moral image of Ha-Shomer" and of the Labor movement in general, given the history of Nili and their treatment of this organization; and third, "expressing feelings and opinions about concepts such as 'the politically persecuted'." In the detailed quiz that accompanied the program, Sarah was mentioned only marginally and characterized by the gendered trait of "nobility" (described as a feminine quality), rather than by her actions or ideas.[73]

It is difficult to assess the influence of these schoolbooks on different juvenile readerships. It is easier to appraise the distribution and impact of texts such as *Sarah giborat Nili* (Sarah, Heroine of Nili) by Devorah Omer, which contributed more than any other book to spreading the memory and myth of Aaronsohn as a heroine for young people and as a model of *Eretz Yisraeli*-ness. Between 1967, when it was published, and 1990, the book went through twenty-five printings, and between 1970 and 2000 it sold 88,009 copies. It was a "steady seller," its sales never falling beneath 1,500 copies or rising above 3,300 copies a year.[74] In the wake of its success, Omer wrote a play with the same title, which ran for fifteen consecutive years at the Theater for Children and Youth. The book deserves special note since it was the first monograph written for children on Sarah Aaronsohn and Nili, a subject that until then, as already noted, had been treated only in the children's and juvenile press of the periphery. Moreover, the book is a clear example of the penetration of spontaneous and apolitical popular memory into the hegemonic mythology of *Eretz Yisraeli* heroism, and also of the complex relationship between dominant, official myths and those evolving in the periphery. A test case of this set of relationships between the center and periphery in Israeli

culture, the success of *Sarah giborat Nili* raises questions about the power of establishments or of so-called "central agents of culture." Moreover, the book also encapsulates the changes, noted above, in the relationship between gender and identity: that is, the feminization of the female national "hero," on the one hand, and the integration of this "hero" into an epic national narrative, on the other hand.

The book, like *Ha-No'azim* (The Audacious) series of which it was a part, was the brain-child of the educator, editor, and writer Uriel Ofek, who suggested it to Omer as an "educational story."[75] The very view of Sarah Aaronsohn as a model "educational figure" was totally new, since, until then, the activities of Nili and Aaronsohn had not been deemed "educating" or even as properly nationalist, outside Civic circles.

For Omer, who had been raised in a kibbutz and was identified, like Ofek, with the Labor movement and with the mainstream culture, Sarah Aaronsohn was a political and sexual adventuress. Omer and Ofek felt a need to provide young people with literature that would rescue "stories of *Eretz Yisraeli* heroism" from oblivion.[76] Thus the *Ha-Noazim* series, which included canonical figures such as Hannah Senesh and Manya Shochat, also made room for peripheral figures like Sarah Aaronsohn, the pugilist and spiritualist Raphael Halperin, and Etzel terrorist/freedom fighter Dov Gruner. Not only was the book not published on the initiative of the establishment; it was not supported by it either. It was brought out by the small, politically unaffiliated Sherberk publishing house.[77] Yet it received no funding from the "local" commemorative apparatus based in Zikhron Yaakov, under the direction of Rivkah Aaronsohn, who helped finance a number of hagiographies of Sarah Aaronsohn and other Nili figures that were published from the 1930s. Rivkah Aaronsohn cooperated with Omer only after the book had proven a success, and even tried (with little success) to interfere in how her sister's image would be shaped, attempting to remove details that undermined Sarah's asexual image, such as the descriptions of her in the company of Turkish and German officers.[78]

The book's indisputable success led to its adoption both by the educational establishment and by the local memorial center. From the early 1970s onward, the Ministry of Education ordered numerous copies of the book through projects such as "A Book for Every Home" and "The Literature Fund for the Children of Israel." From 1970, about ten thousand copies of *Sarah giborat Nili* (5,009 of them in 1970 alone) were produced for the Ministry of Education.[79] At the same time, the book's success also transformed the Beit Aaronsohn Museum into a flourishing center, especially for schoolchildren. As early as 1970,

it was visited by pupils from the very sectors that in the past had excluded Sarah Aaronsohn and Nili from the collective memory and youth culture: namely, the kibbutzim and the Labor-affiliated agricultural settlements.[80]

It may seem that the Sarah Aaronsohn in the 1967 version is the focus of Omer's novel and of the newly defined memory of Nili's heroic deeds. She bestows her name on the novel; indeed, the novel itself is the first *Bildungsroman* about a young *Eretz Yisraeli* girl. Without doubt, Omer had intended to tell the historical story from a female perspective. She preferred to narrate the epic of Sabra-ness through the figure of Sarah Aaronsohn and not through that of Avshalom Feinberg precisely "because she was a woman, and I could identify with her better" and because women were absent from [Israel's] history and youth culture.[81]

In addition, Omer's version of Sarah's life is in no way domestic. It is a story of adventures and heroism, a "thriller," in the words of the boy listening to the narrator in the "outer" story that frames the inner plot of World War I heroism. Sarah is apparently a "hero." She possesses the traits of the non-essentialist woman, who is not a mother: physical prowess and the skills of a scout and warrior and horsemanship.[82] She and her younger sister Rivkah are even included in the quasi-military activities of the Gidonim (in fact, the Gidonim had excluded women and girls).[83]

However, this narrative of national political activity is undermined and even canceled out by a separate, albeit parallel, narrative. This is the story of one woman's personal drama, in which the personal engenders the political act in an almost deterministic way over which Sarah has no control. Sarah is driven to her activities for Eretz Yisrael through and by the men around her. "Girls don't fight, but you must know how to defend yourselves," her brother Alexander tells her. "It's good I was born a girl," Sarah declares. "I'm terrified of blood and afraid of every pain, even the tiniest."[84] And, elsewhere: "Only if she becomes a heroine will he [Avshalom] value her."[85] Sarah's death scene at the end of the book merges the feminine, essentialist narrative with memory itself: "I'm coming, Avshalom . . . Remember me, don't forget. . . ."[86]

From the Periphery to the National Pantheon

That the "legend of Sarah" took such a circuitous road from the periphery to the national pantheon of heroism clearly has a political reason and explanation. This chapter discussed the suppression of Sarah's death, and of the Nili affair itself, as well as the delayed evolution and peripheral nature of her

memory. All these were undoubtedly outcomes of her political, social, and cultural affiliation with a group that was excluded from the hegemonic memory, and not the result of her gender. However, as the first part of the chapter argues, this political explanation is inadequate. For when the memory did evolve, it was distinctively gendered. It was shaped by different, and sometimes competing, perceptions of the national female-social identity. The survey offered here of these perceptions, of their dynamics, and of their representation in the dense fabric of memory may teach us some lessons that could prove useful for students of the history of memory, for those who map Israeli identity, and for historians of women and gender.

The first lesson concerns the dynamic and frequently changing presence of group — or collective — memory in culture and society. The memory of a voluntary death for the nation was shaped by the Labor movement establishment, as historians of the legend of Tel Hai and the story of Trumpeldor have shown. However, this memory was not homogenous, and not even hegemonic. Alongside this central and unifying myth, other memories also emerged in "cells" or sectors of civil society, in what is generally viewed as the cultural and political periphery. Moreover, these memories had begun to crystallize before the disintegration of the Labor hegemony and a long time before the processes that are conventionally described as the segmentation and disintegration of the Israeli national ethos. The alternative memory of Sarah Aaronsohn, which started off as a marginal and sectorial compound of rites and practices of remembrance memory and evolved into a popular memory, was crystallized precisely during that same period that is seen as the zenith of Labor hegemony and cultural domination. However, the Labor establishment did not have unchallenged control over the narrative of the past or the contents of memory; these were subjects of a continuous negotiation, in which individuals and groups outside the center (whether or not they were identified with specific political groups) took part. It is thus quite clear that "center" and "margins" or periphery are relative and complementary, rather than binary entities.

The second lesson, which is closely related to the first, concerns not only the periodization of the history of the particular memory studied here — or of Israeli memory more broadly — but also the periodization of *Eretz Yisraeli* and Israeli culture as a uniform and cohesive entity. In the historiography and study of Israeli culture in general, the collapse of cohesiveness is still associated with the emergence of the critique of the Zionist project voiced in the 1980s and 1990s as well as with the profound changes in Israel's social fabric after the 1960s. However, the example of Aaronsohn indicates that the

sharp distinction between an "official" and central monolithic memory during the *Yishuv* era and the early years of the State, and the splitting and pluralization afterward, has little or no validity. Pluralism and the "polyphonic" chorus of memory characterized the discourse on Sarah Aaronsohn from the very beginning.

The third and most important lesson concerns the use of gender in the study of memory. This is considerably more than the mere "addition" of a forgotten historical female subject to a historical pantheon. It is an indispensable tool for analyzing nationalism and nationalist myths. It is also a valuable methodology, which provides us with additional—and perhaps new—understanding of the manner in which images and constructs of female identities formed the ways in which the past was remembered, represented, and commemorated.

Precisely the fact that Aaronsohn was commemorated as a figure embodying competing, and sometimes conflicting, images of femininity, whose interrelationships changed over time, reinforces her enduring image as a national heroine. Aaronsohn embodied the maternalist ideal of female patriotism but at the same time crossed the boundaries of femininity. She represented essentialized female features and secular Zionist ideals of femininity, but also Western Christian perceptions that had undergone processes of secularization and syncretization. Once again, the lack of compatibilities in gendered memory are apparent, the very contradictions within the national images of femininity and women, which cannot and need not be resolved. These "insoluble paradoxes" (Joan Wallach Scott's term) are saliencies of constructs of gender and of the definition of femininity in the modern nationalist age.[87] The paradoxes do not detract from the power of the myth, but strengthen it, as illustrated above. Significantly, the paradox of the maternal woman and the sexless soldier, which cohabit in the discourse on Sarah Aaronsohn, was especially pronounced in times of crises and transitions, for example in the 1930s and 1940s. Moreover, at such times, the female image also served as a metaphor, a tool, and as the locus of a discussion of the broader issues concerning individuals' and groups' relationship to Eretz Yisrael and *Eretz Yisraeli* identity.

Yet Aaronsohn's survival as a female icon of the nation well into the so-called post-Zionist era, also involved her transformation into a more conventional figure. From the late 1960s, with the rehabilitation of her memory, Aaronsohn's image became wholly essentialist. Paradoxically, the narrative of her heroism and death seeped into the narrative of sacrifice for the nation at the very same time as the story of her heroism was detached from the po-

litical and public sphere. As my analysis of the novel *Sarah giborat Nili* shows, the hierarchy between the political and the personal that characterized the 1930s and 1940s was reversed in the depiction of the character of the *Eretz Yisraeli* heroine. The story is made by the personal drama of the *Eretz Yisraeli* woman; and the public and political are explained in terms of the personal and intimate.

This reversal is even more striking in the 1993 television drama *Sarah*, whose creators enjoyed liberties that Omer, as the writer of a book for children and adolescents, never had. The depoliticization of the myth and the sexualization of Sarah are reinforced in various ways: the script of the teledrama, the contents of the introduction to the story, which is spoken in a male voice, visual images, props, dress and body language, and sentimental-romantic music. The new hierarchy is established in the polarities within the opening statement: "Sarah came to politics from love, and to love from politics." It is consistently reinforced through Sarah's appearances on screen, where camera shots of her face create a claustrophobic, domestic ambiance: in her tiny bedroom; in the kitchen, where she performs female chores like cooking and sewing; and on the balcony of the experimental agriculture station at Atlit, where she hangs out colored washing (to signal the British ship *Managem*), a shot that relays political and domestic meanings at one and the same time. Only for 2.39 minutes out of over 50 minutes of film is Aaronsohn seen in outdoor shots, in which she plays a secondary or passive role. In the opening and final scenes, which frame the story, the camera travels from her scarred and bloody legs to her unkempt hair, as she walks along the main street of Zikhron Yaakov. The historical Aaronsohn took care to tie up her hair, and various sources describe her walk from the interrogation room to her brother's house as proud and dignified. In the teledrama, neighbors regale her with shouts of "whore, whore. . . ."[88] There may be no sharper contrast than that between this comparison of Aaronsohn to a prostitute in the early 1990s and the analogies to the Maid of Orléans in the 1940s.

We must be wary, however, of a simplistic and linear view of the gendered memory studied here that would describe it as a move from the periphery to the center, or from the right to the center, hence to the left. We must also be careful not to idealize the peripheral memory, for this will lead us to chart a decline in or a deviation from an original powerful image to one representing powerlessness, thus delineating a process in which a memory that features an activity that crosses the boundaries of gender turns into an essentialist and sexual memory. Such a reduction to a movement from Joan of Arc to the sexual Sarah ignores the complexity of the images during the two peri-

ods studied here, the "insoluble paradoxes" that characterize them. It may of course be argued that endowing Sarah Aaronsohn with masculine qualities and the rituals commemorating her as a "soldier" and as "Sarah, the [male] commander" actually reinforced inequality. For these images were shaped by political and military organizations that were highly patriarchal and excluded women from their activities. Yet it would be mistaken to reduce the blurring of gender boundaries to a manifestation of total repression or the silencing of women's voices. The emphasis on the absence of female sexuality, the erasure of the image of the "mother of the nation," and the blurring of gender — all these characterized native *Eretz Yisraeli* women's discourse until 1920. As I have shown in great detail elsewhere, the crossing of the borderlines of gender was particularly salient in the activities of Nili and those close to this group, and characterized the activities, writings and self-image of Sarah Aaronsohn herself.[89] In other words, the martial images that were so central to the commemorative rituals prior to the 1950s were not created by a "male elite." They were drawn from a reservoir of images and representations that were available to the men and women of the time, and especially to the men and women of the remembering group.

The appropriation of Aaronsohn's memory and her commemoration in the national pantheon, from the end of the 1960s, are closely related to an essentialist perception of women and femininity within the state. Nonetheless, this essentialism is not peculiar to the hegemonic culture or the so-called formal "agents" of this culture, but rather is conspicuous in feminist and postmodern interpretations of the female Zionist story, for example in Ben-Dor's and Landau's teledrama. The three lessons related here may tell us that gender and memory are closely intertwined and are quite inseparable — whether as subjects for research or as possibilities for analyzing national culture. If we acknowledge this, we shall perhaps be able to write a history that will allow a different and more complex interpretation of Israeliness, of national memory and of national amnesia than is available to us at the present.