

Sappho
in the Holy Land

LESBIAN EXISTENCE AND DILEMMAS
IN CONTEMPORARY ISRAEL

Edited by CHAVA FRANKFORT-NACHMIAS
AND ERELLA SHADMI

SAPPHO
IN THE
HOLY LAND

SUNY SERIES IN ISRAELI STUDIES

RUSSELL STONE, EDITOR

SAPPHO
IN THE
HOLY LAND

*Lesbian Existence and Dilemmas
in Contemporary Israel*

Edited by
CHAVA FRANKFORT-NACHMIAS
and
ERELLA SHADMI

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK PRESS

Published by
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK PRESS
ALBANY

© 2005 State University of New York

All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America

No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission. No part of this book may be stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means including electronic, electrostatic, magnetic tape, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without the prior permission in writing of the publisher.

For information, address the State University of New York Press,
90 State Street, Suite 700, Albany, NY 12207

Production, Laurie Searl
Marketing, Anne M. Valentine

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Sappho in the Holy Land : lesbian existence and dilemmas in contemporary Israel / edited
by Chava Frankfort-Nachmias & Erella Shadmi.

p. cm. — (SUNY series in Israeli studies)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-7914-6317-6 (alk. paper) — ISBN 0-7914-6318-4 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Jewish lesbians—Israel. 2. Jewish lesbians—Israel—Political activity. 3. Jewish
lesbians—Israel—Identity. I. Frankfort-Nachmias, Chava. II. Shadmi, Erella. III. Series.

HQ75.16.I75S27 2005

306.76'63'08992405694—dc22

2004042991

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	vii
1 Knowing Lesbians, Lesbian Knowing: Introduction <i>Chava Frankfort-Nachmias and Erella Shadmi</i>	1
Part I Experience	
2 Lesbians in Israel: A Legal Perspective <i>Ira Hadar</i>	15
3 The Story of ClaF: The Community of Lesbian Feminists <i>Haya Shalom</i>	39
4 To Re-Construct the Community: Lesbians on a Kibbutz <i>Nurit Barkai</i>	65
5 Emigration: The Case of the Israeli Lesbian <i>Chava Frankfort-Nachmias</i>	73
6 Orthodox Lesbians: Not a Contradiction in Terms <i>Devorah Esther</i>	87
Part II Culture and Identity	
7 Toward a History of Gay Bars in Israel: A Memoir <i>Amalia Ziv</i>	105

8	The Presentation of Self of Young Israeli Lesbians: A Discourse on Split Identity <i>Diana Luzzatto</i>	117
9	Crafting Multilayered Identities in Israel <i>Prina Motzafi-Haller</i>	135
10	From “Sexless in Russia” to “Proud Israeli Lesbian”: Immigration Stories of Coming Out <i>Adi Kuntsman</i>	153
Part III Politics		
11	Lesbians in the Women’s Peace Movement <i>Su Schachter</i>	175
12	Alliance and Denial: Lesbian Protest in Women in Black <i>Hannah Safran</i>	191
13	A Rainbow Kufiyya <i>Mickey M</i>	211
Part IV Social Construction		
14	Israeli Lesbians, National Identity, and Motherhood <i>Ruti Kadish</i>	223
15	The Construction of Lesbianism as Nonissue in Israel <i>Erella Shadmi</i>	251
	Glossary	269
	List of Contributors	273
	Index	277

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to numerous women who helped us in planning and compiling this volume. First and foremost we extend special thanks to our dedicated and enthusiastic contributors who patiently waited for a long time to see this book finally published. Our special thanks go to Tal Haran, Marsha, Gila Svirsky, Barbara Baker, Dina Walk and Nicole Berner for their admirable work in translating three of the essays from Hebrew to English.

Berenice Malka Fisher and Nitza Berkovitch contributed generously of their time and provided invaluable feedback. We are also grateful to copy editor Alan V. Hewat and to Laurie Searl at SUNY Press for guiding this manuscript through the production process.

This page intentionally left blank.

ONE

Knowing Lesbians, Lesbian Knowing: Introduction

Chava Frankfort-Nachmias and Erella Shadmi

Despite the rapid, recent development of a new body of scholarship on lesbians, most scholars in the United States have neglected the lives of lesbians in other countries. Interestingly, there is no body of scholarship regarding lesbians and lesbianism in Israel. Most of the studies published so far on homosexuality in Israel, focus mainly on gay men. Lesbians in the main prefer to publish reflections on their experience in lesbian-only publications or in the Israeli-only feminist journal *Noga*.

This edited volume, the first to be published on lesbians and lesbianism in Israel, is designed to provide a broad perspective on the experience of lesbians in contemporary Israeli society and insights into some of the institutions that have helped shape this experience. The articles in this collection analyze how culturally specific political, ideological, and social systems construct lesbian identities, experiences, and dilemmas. They also examine how a specific society is seen, understood, and interpreted from a lesbian perspective.

Israel sets up a paradoxical framework for such an analysis because it combines two worlds: on the one hand, it is a liberal society, characterized by democratic institutions, principles of equality, justice, and freedom, and a relatively free flow of communication (although recent economic and militaristic developments have inhibited liberalism and democracy in Israel); on the other hand, it is characterized by tribal inclinations, a high level of familism, nationalistic and messianic ideologies, the strong influence of religion and tradition, and military involvement in government and civil society. Moreover, since Israel is still engaged in a nation-building process and is still facing security threats and challenges to its existence, collectivist ideologies that give a premium to state interests and national identity over individual needs and sectoral subcultures have usually dominated the national dialogue (Ezrahi 1997;

Yishai 1997). Pluralism often has been compromised for the sake of national unity, and the “other” and the “different” often have been marginalized, oppressed, and become outcast. In such a society, lesbians are caught between their wish to be part of the collective and their desire to be heard and allowed to develop their own identity and culture. Lesbianism thus defines the boundaries between the liberal, progressive tendency and the traditional, oppressive orientation of the larger society.

This book focuses on three main issues. First, what are the dilemmas faced by Israeli lesbians; in particular, what are the intersections between nationalism, Zionism, militarism, familialism, and heterosexism, and how do these forces influence the perception of lesbianism in Israel? Second, what are the individual identities developed by Israeli lesbians to survive as lesbians, to preserve their lesbian identity, and, at the same time, to adjust to such demanding and collectivist-oriented culture? Third, what are the political strategies developed by the lesbian community, whose commitment and involvement in activity for women has always been impressive? These issues stand at the core of this collection. In foreshadowing and exploring lesbian identities, strategies, and dilemmas, this collection offers an analysis of major dimensions of Israeli lesbianism as well as of Israeli culture and politics.

Adopting a lesbian standpoint as a paradigm guiding this work will allow (hopefully) the reader to see Israeli lesbianism as enacted in a heterosexual society. For example, Luzzatto's research shows how encounters between lesbian and heterosexual women provide a possibility for young lesbians to experience identity elements, which are granted low legitimization within the lesbian community. Furthermore, the insight gained from this collection is not limited exclusively to Israeli lesbians. Starting from the daily activities of Israeli lesbians enables us to see things that might otherwise have been invisible to us (Harding 1991, 249)—not just about those lives but about the inherent cultural contradictions between lesbian identity and Jewish and Zionist identity, conformity and deviance or Palestinian and Mizrahi identity. Barkai's article on being a lesbian on a kibbutz; Mickey M's piece “A Rainbow Kufyya,” Devorah Esther's profound account of life as an orthodox lesbian and Motzafi-Haller's exploration of lesbians of Mizrahi origin all illustrate these inherent contradictions.

A lesbian standpoint as illustrated in Schachter's and Safran's articles on lesbians in the peace movement and “Women in Black,” also permits us to see and to imagine communities that do not need or want men. “From the perspective of lesbian lives, communities of women designed, organized and directed by women become imaginable” (Harding 256).

Finally, Israeli lesbian lives have been devalued and neglected as frameworks for a critical examination of Israeli society. The view from the perspective of lesbian lives is the view from the “other side.” The struggles that Israeli lesbians must engage in for survival can reveal regularities of social life and their underlying causal tendencies that are invisible from the perspective of

heterosexual lives. This collection illustrates how lesbian exclusion can become the source of new understandings of central issues in Israeli society.

The volume is divided into four sections, each focusing on a specific issue central to Israeli lesbian identity. The first section, "Experience," delineates the unique and diverse aspects of lesbian life in contemporary Israeli society. It consists of articles on the history of lesbian organizing (Haya Shalom), the legal status of gay men and women (Ira Hadar), lesbian experience in what has been considered the most unique aspect of Israeli society: the Kibbutz (Nurit Barkai), lesbians who chose to leave Israel (Chava Frankfort-Nachmias), and the experience of being a lesbian in an orthodox community in Jerusalem (Devora Esther).

The articles in Part II provide various readings of Israeli lesbian identity and culture. A growing body of work in the past two decades has altered the shape of our understanding of homosexuality from a subjective state of individual desire for persons of the same sex to a significant category of identity involving social and political practices and social institutions that are above and beyond individual actors. The authors offer a fresh look at the development of a thriving lesbian culture in Israel. This section includes an autobiographical narrative of gay bars (Amalia Ziv), young lesbians' ways of defining themselves (Diana Luzzatto), Mizrahi's lesbians' (of Arab-Jewish origin) manners of articulating their internally contradictory social identities at the crosslines of gender, sexual preference, ethnicity, and class positions (Pnina Motzafi-Haller), and the identity construction experience of young lesbians from the former Soviet Union (Adi Kuntsman).

The third section of this book explores the political dimension of lesbian identity in Israel. It includes two analyses of the experience of lesbians in the peace movement (Hannah Safran and Su Schachter) and one analysis of the conflict of identities of Arab-Jew (Mizrahi) and Israeli-Palestinian lesbians (Mickey M).

The articles in the fourth section explore the intersections and discontinuities between Israeli national identity and identities produced in and by Israeli lesbian communities. Kadish analyzes the uneasy relations between Zionism and lesbianism and Shadmi shows the ways n  minant social ideologies made lesbianism a nonissue in Israel.

SOME REFLECTIONS OF THE EDITORS

For more than ten years we have been trying to put together a collection of articles about Israeli lesbians. Because we are lesbians living at the crossroads of theory and practice, academia and activism, we feel, in finishing this collection, a sense of both joy and frustration. Nevertheless, the difficulties we faced in collecting and editing this volume and the voices absent from it make us feel uncomfortable.

In this introductory chapter we wish to describe and reflect on the editing process and the collection as a whole and suggest that both process and

product reflect the state of mind of Israeli lesbians as a collective. They reflect what Israeli lesbians are willing to know about themselves, what they are willing to publicly acknowledge, name, discuss, and debate. The contradictions, pains, and dilemmas they are reluctant to face are absent from this volume and are reflected in the editing process and its problematic nature.

EDITING WITHOUT EDITING

When we began working on this collection, we embarked on a path previously taken by hardly anyone: Israeli lesbians have rarely been studied or examined by either scholars or lesbians themselves (Shadmi 2000). If they were at all, it has often been as part of the gay (men and women) community and identity, rarely by themselves.

Only recently, that is in the last five to six years, are lesbians better tolerated by Israeli society, and their experience is slowly beginning to be examined by lesbians, gay men, and others, still to a very limited extent.

This dismal state of affairs puts us, as the editors of the first and so far the only collection of articles about Israeli lesbians ever published, in a position of responsibility: lesbians and society as a whole might view such a collection as presenting and representing the lesbian community and lesbians in general. Consequently, lesbians might have high expectations as to its impact on public debate regarding lesbianism. Issues raised by the writers of this collection might stir conflicts among lesbians themselves and with other social change groups; they might influence public debate regarding, for example, ways of political struggle and the possibilities of alliance among social change activists. As such, we are aware of the potentially political meaning such a collection might hold for lesbian and other social change struggles in Israel.

As a first collection, the editing was also uneasy and challenging: uneasy—because it posits us as gatekeepers, who have the power to exclude and include, to marginalize and demarginalize, to give or to deny voice, to use and abuse power. Challenging—because it raises many issues and dilemmas, such as:

- Who is our audience—Israeli lesbians, Israeli feminist academics, Israeli society, non-Israeli lesbians, non-Israeli scholars, and social change activists? To whom are we accountable?
- What is our goal: empowerment of women, theory construction, social critique, documentation, and empirical analysis?
- Can this collection fully represent the diversity among Israeli lesbians (along axes of race, nationality, class, ethnicity, sexuality, age, ideology, and so forth)? If not (which is usually the case), which groups must be represented? On the basis of what criterion?
- What perspective should we adopt—the one emphasizing the structurally marginalized position of lesbians in Israel or the one linking

lesbianism to larger issues of power, identity, community, and her/his history? Are both the same in terms of social change and lesbian identity in Israel?

- Can we, as Ashkenazi/white, leftist, radical feminist, and peace activists, be trusted by all lesbians so they might be willing to contribute to this collection?
- Can we, as such, be open to all perspectives and points of view, let alone antifeminist or right wing? Can we reach out to all diverse Israeli lesbians?
- What about the writers? Should this collection be open to activists and scholars, lesbians and heterosexuals, feminists and nonfeminists, women and men? What about women whose voice is important but who are incapable of writing?

In short, issues of representation and positionality, power and authority, community, identity and boundaries, theory and practice, formal and informal knowledge, sites of theory production, external and internal foci of reference, process and product (Swilder and Ardit 1994)—all these and much more are raised by the editing of such a collection.

As we, the editors, come from different theoretical and political positions, our reaction to this challenge was different:

Chava Frankfort-Nachmias:

As a quantitative sociologist and a lesbian feminist I have struggled to balance my positivist “bias” with a commitment to feminist epistemology. I was trained as a positivist and a quantitative sociologist. Following radical changes in my personal life from a “married heterosexual” to a “lesbian feminist” I began to see the assumptions of “value free” science and objectivity as essentially flawed conceptions, which have excluded from inquiry those who are marginalized.

In my work on Israeli lesbians I found that dominant paradigms employed in analyzing Israeli society have produced research and knowledge that rendered Israeli lesbians’ lives, concerns, and interests as invisible. Furthermore, the knowledge, if produced at all, has not been useful for Israeli lesbians, and has reinforced gender and other social hierarchies (Harding 1991).

As a co-editor of this collection I have been guided by, Harding’s, (1991) and Mies’s work (1983) on feminist standpoint epistemology. They advocate “the value free research of neutrality toward the research object be replaced by “conscious partiality” toward the oppressed, engagement in their struggles for change, and the creation of a form of research that fosters conscientization of both the researcher and the research.” (Mies 1983, 122-26; quoted in Gorelick 1991, 461).

Thus, the central framework I have employed in editing this volume is that of a “situated knower” and “situated knowledge” (Harding), where knowledge about Israeli lesbians reflects the perspective of Israeli lesbians. Furthermore, I felt

committed to supply an account of that world which is accessible not only to the authors in this collection or an academic audience but also to the Israeli lesbian community in general.

Erella Shadmi:

The internal contradictions of editing this volume filled me, on the one hand, with paralyzing fear of hurting our sister-activists and the lesbian-feminist struggles; on the other, they challenged my integrity and social responsibility. In particular, editing this collection gave me an opportunity to better integrate my two selves—the political and the academic—long separated by feminist activists' refusal to listen and appreciate feminist academic efforts as well as by feminist scholars' reluctance to be involved in feminist politics and closely study women's experience (see also Shadmi 2000). In the same vein, this collection perhaps suggests ways to integrate scholarship and politics, so painfully divided in Israel.

Taking the responsibility of editing after all, it was clear to me that most of the issues such a collection raises are irresolvable; that this collection is more of a political act than a theoretical or scholarly endeavor; that being a lesbian-feminist, Ashkenazi/white, middle-class activist, my editorial decisions will be closely scrutinized by many of my sister lesbian and feminist activists and scholars. In short, in editing this collection I have to be aware of these issues. I cannot avoid them.

In such a dilemma-ridden situation, various editorial strategies could be employed. Among them: limiting the scope of the collection to one issue (e.g., the relations between lesbianism and feminism), one perspective (e.g., that of activists) or one theory (e.g., queer theory). We felt uncomfortable with any of these strategies, especially for a first collection of its kind. We decided to use another strategy, which we may call "uncritical polyvocalization," made of two elements: first, we opened the possibility to contribute to this collection to whoever wished to participate, be s/he lesbian, heterosexual, woman, or man; although top priority was given to lesbians and special efforts were made to reach out to them. In this way we were aiming at multiple representation of lesbianism. Writers had to meet only two conditions: being lesbian or lesbian-friendly and having writing skills. We were aware of the problematic inherent in the second condition since more than a few lesbians, especially activists, either have no writing experience, are so politically involved they hardly have spare time, or find it hard to make a living let alone write. We therefore made a special attempt to wrestle with it. For one, we first approached lesbians who regularly write for the community's journal and/or participate in the community's debates, assuming they were experienced in making a clear argument and expressing their views. Second, we asked skilled scholars to accompany less skilled writers in the writing process. Third, we invited feminist anthropologists, whose politics and academic interest seemed to us valuable, to write a chapter based on an in-depth interview with lesbians whose voice

seemed important but who might lack writing skills, especially working-class Mizrahi (Arab-Jewish) lesbians. We also proposed to publish articles anonymously, if necessary.

Knowledge of the English language was not required since English-speaking lesbians volunteered to translate and, if needed, edit chapters written in Hebrew.

The second element making up the “uncritical polyvocalization” of the editing process was opening the collection to every topic, perspective (political or theoretical), and writing style (scholarly, documentary, experiential, autobiographical, and so forth) chosen by the writer—as long as she was making a point. The only instructions the writers were given in advance were: “We are looking for something more than a journalistic article which may but need not attain the level of an academic paper. In particular, we are looking for the ways lesbians interpret, make sense and conceptualize their experience.”

Also, if necessary, writers, in particular nonacademic writers, were assisted in advance in defining the boundaries of their subject so chapters would not overlap and the foci of their arguments would be clear.

From this point of the editing process, we, the co-editors, differ in our views:

Erella Shadmi:

After the submission of the articles, no comments and criticism were offered and no additions and corrections were requested so as to ensure diversity and authenticity of views and ways of seeing and expressing.

My way of editing, including both the uncritical polyvocalization strategy and the “no comments” strategy, was kind of “editing without editing,” that is, I consciously limited my responsibility to reaching out efforts and coordinating among articles. I made no attempt to control or influence either the selection of the writers or their writing process, yet did my duty as an editor in providing some initial instructions and counseling regarding writing style and subject matter and kept the project moving despite obstacles.

The editing strategy I used was not without problems. First and foremost, I could not avoid the gatekeeping position due to my social positionality. No matter how many reaching out efforts I made, they depended, to a large extent, on the social circles in which I mingle and were limited by my social position.

Second, despite my uncritical openness to multiple voices, I retained some control in my hands. I decided not to make the editing process a cooperative one in which either the lesbian community or a group of writers work collectively. I decided against it since my experience in collective feminist decision making was always problematic, rarely efficient and never truly democratic and participatory (see, for example, Shadmi 2000a on Women in Black).

Third, openness and pluralism, with little criticism and control, meant that I could scarcely have controlled the social and political attitudes of the writers. I could have been faced with racist, antifeminist, or “orientalist” (in

Said's term) writers and articles. I was fortunate enough not to have found this among the writers. I am not sure I would have known how to handle them.

By adopting such an editing strategy I hoped that the process of collecting and editing would be easy and the end product—in terms of the subjects covered and the identity and positioning represented by the writers—would be diverse.

Chava Frankfort-Nachmias:

My editing approach was greatly influenced by my research orientation and training. My experience was limited to academic writing, which adheres to a fairly formal structure and style of writing. I found it easier to evaluate the articles submitted by academics like me.

Living and working in the United States I was not socially or politically part of the lesbian community in Israel. This made me less uncomfortable with my gatekeeping role as an editor. Ultimately however, my editing focused on issues of writing style and, conceptual clarity, which led to dropping two of the articles in the collection. In one case the author was given the opportunity to revise but she declined. Most articles required only minor editing. In a few cases where I requested more substantial revisions my comments and recommendations were welcome.

EDITING IN PRACTICE: ENTHUSIASM AND RELUCTANCE

In practice, the process lasted more than ten years. Throughout the years we approached well over one hundred potential writers—mainly lesbians (both scholars and activists), but also gay men and heterosexual feminist scholars. All reacted with enthusiasm and interest to our request, but most of them turned down our overture claiming that they were too busy. Some agreed to contribute to the book, but only a small number (fourteen, editors included) finally submitted an article. Only one, a young Mizrahi MA student, turned down our proposition because, as she put it (to our best recollection), the editors' politics seemed wrong to her. Two writers, leading Mizrahi lesbian activists, never finished their writing because, so they said, they were too politically busy and felt unskillful in writing. Many of the potential writers, although agreeing that such a collection is both theoretically and politically important, made life difficult for us: Some let us chase after them for months only to learn that they had decided not to write an article. Others never bothered to call back after we left dozens of messages on their answering machines. Still others, promised to write an article, but never kept their promise, giving all kinds of excuses.

In a way, every editor goes through such hardship, yet we found the process we went through different: editors usually encounter difficulties in getting the writers to submit their articles on time. They encounter fewer problems in the initial stage of making the writers undertake the commitment

for writing. We, on the other hand, turned, as we said, to a very large number of potential writers. Only a small minority (less than 15 percent) agreed to take on the obligation. This distinction apparently reflects what seemed to us to be an ambivalent attitude toward this collection by lesbians (as well as gay men and heterosexual women; yet this is another issue): on one level, enthusiasm and endorsement, on another level, reluctance and reservations. We were puzzled by this attitude.

POLITICS-ORIENTED: OUTWARD LOOKING

As the end product shows, these attempts were only partially successful: two Mizrahi (Arab-Jewish) lesbian activists and one lesbian anthropologist who interviewed several working-class Mizrahi lesbians did not submit their papers. A gay man and a lesbian therapist did not keep their promise to write articles for this book.

The end product consists of fourteen articles covering a wide range of lesbian experience in Israel. Fourteen writers wrote these articles. As a group, the writers are all Jewish; all but two Ashkenazi/white; all are middle class (as far as we know); all but two are lesbians; some activists, other scholars, the majority of whom are involved in feminist or lesbian politics in Israel. We knew no Palestinian-Israeli lesbian at the time of editing and we failed to locate any through our personal contacts. Though, the voice of one Palestinian-Israeli lesbian is partially heard through Mickey M's article.

Only four articles address as their main focus issues of difference and diversity among lesbians: one discusses class and ethnicity (Motzafi-Haller), the second (Mickey M)—race, class, and ethnicity, the third religious faith (Devorah Esther), and the fourth femininity and, to some extent, sexuality (Luzzatto). Thus, difference and diversity along axes of political ideology, ethnicity, race, class, nationality, and (to a large extent) sexuality are not sufficiently represented by this collection. Consequently, the absence of certain voices (varieties of lesbian sexualities, right-wing, Palestinian, Mizrahi, working-class, upper-class, nonpolitical and unaffiliated), on one hand, and the positionality of the majority of the writers (middle-class, Ashkenazi, mainly organized, and politically oriented), on the other, seem to characterize this volume.

On the whole, it seems as if this collection focuses on political issues and dilemmas and on the larger society and its oppressive mechanisms, leaving out significant personal and collective experiences, which also construct the lesbian identity and reality in Israel. In particular, issues related to lesbian social positioning, economic conditions, diversity and identity, and to the lesbian community itself, which point to tensions and contradictions embedded in lesbian experience, were avoided. This group of articles is, thus, mainly outward rather than inward oriented: it looks beyond the lesbian community itself, concentrating particularly on oppressive mechanisms in society as a whole.

LESBIAN KNOWING AND SILENCING

On the surface, the distinguishing features of both the writers and the editing process should not come as a surprise: as a collection written and published in English, edited by two Ashkenazi, middle-class, educated women and edited in a nonparticipatory manner, it might provoke opposition among some potential contributors. Also, many Israeli lesbians, particularly those who are activists and social change oriented, are too busy making a living and being active in politics. They may see the significance of such a collection, may even wish to contribute to it, but are too involved in other activities, which seemed to them more politically urgent than devoting time to writing.

The clear preference they accord to practice over theory further makes them ambivalent toward what they see as a research-, and not politics-oriented endeavor. Their reluctance to participate in such a work may further represent a way of protesting against Israeli feminist and nonfeminist academia, including lesbians in academia, who showed little interest in lesbian experience and rarely did research about lesbians' lives and perspectives.

All these factors—the editors' positioning, the editing style, Israeli feminist academia, lesbians' economic concerns and their preference for politics over theory—although not without merit, point mainly to external circumstances, factors beyond the control of lesbians.

The thematic nature of this volume, namely, its orientation toward politics and society rather than toward identity and community, points, however, to another interpretation: this collection seems to us the result of a deliberate choice made by the potential writers who declined to contribute to this collection. It reflects the issues and dilemmas the Israeli lesbian community is willing to confront and with which it is ready to deal. And these issues are mainly political and relate to the society at large and its oppressive mechanism.

We are suggesting then that this collection and its features are products of choices made by lesbians themselves. They reflect the unwillingness of the Israeli lesbian community to reflexively contemplate its identity, experience, and struggle. It is lesbians' reluctance to examine the meaning of their identity and the way it is constructed which lies behind this collection. Such a reflexive elaboration goes beyond the binary opposition between society and "us," between the oppressor and the oppressed, and requires contextualization and problematization.¹ It requires explanation of the political and personal path lesbians have chosen (for example, favoring collaboration with gay men rather than feminist women). It requires facing issues of lesbians (such as working-class lesbians) oppressed by lesbians, of silencing mechanisms by which unwanted ideologies (such as feminist-lesbian politics) or identities (such as upper-middle-class lesbians) are disregarded, and, consequently, of boundary construction by which certain lesbians are excluded and some issues and positions are left out of discourse. Such a process of reflexivity not only requires courage, maturity,

and sincerity; it in particular requires lesbians to connect themselves to the pains, dilemmas, and problematic, not only to the joy and pride, associated with lesbian identity and experience in contemporary Israel. A few strong and self-confident lesbians could be found in a long process of searching for and reaching out, and their thoughts are presented here. They represent nobody but themselves.

A close reading of their writing offers three explanations for this refusal to reflexively articulate lesbian identity in Israel. Two are external, stemming from the social and discursive surrounding of the lesbian community, and one is internal, springing from the community itself. First is the overwhelming presence and policing power of liberal Zionist ideology and its pressure to be heterosexual, endorse mainstream norms, and emphasize sameness rather than difference (vividly shown by Barkai in the microcosms of a kibbutz), consequently pushing lesbians to the margins (insightfully explicated by Ziv) and silencing them (see Kadish's and Shadmi's articles). The second is the absence of feminist articulation of an alternative woman's identity, which might provide an ideological and discursive framework within which lesbians' identity formation might take place. Finally, as a consequence of the contradictions in which Israeli lesbians live—between Zionism and lesbianism, between social acceptance and rejection—as well as the splits permeating Israeli society in general (along axes of nationality, religion, ethnicity, and class), the Israeli lesbian community fails to construct a safe space for self-reflexivity and to contemplate the interconnection between lesbianism, feminism, and the oppression of the Palestinians and Mizrahi Jews (see the articles by Su Schachter, Shalom, Mozafi-Haller, and Shadmi). This failure is further facilitated by the inability of the lesbian community to simultaneously serve as a source for solidarity necessary for the struggle against oppression and a site for debating identities and negotiating splits and contradictions. This problematic nature of the lesbian community perhaps explains why the only writers who directly and openly discuss issues of lesbian identities are the two heterosexual writers in this collection (Motzafi-Haller and Luzzatto) and two writers whose academic or personal roots are not Israeli (Mickey M and Kuntsman).

Such interpretations throw light on the fears associated with lesbian experience and self-reflection in Israel. Living in fear and silence—as the experience of abused children and women teaches us—is a way of preserving oppression. But, this volume indicates ways out, toward Israeli lesbians' reflexivity regarding their identity and position vis-à-vis the liberal Zionist paradigm: the articulation of difference rather than sameness and of the interconnection between the oppression and liberation of lesbians and of the “other” women, whether feminist, religious, elderly and/or other, Palestinians, Mizrahi Jews, working-class people (see the articles by Shalom, Schachter, Shadmi, Kadish, and Devorah Esther). In fact, Israeli lesbians are just beginning to do so (Kadish's article), and we hope this collection will facilitate and contribute to the debates beginning to take place in the Israeli lesbian community.

NOTES

1. In a somewhat similar way Amalia Ziv interprets the fact that lesbian poetry more than lesbian fiction is published in Israel. See Ziv 1995.

REFERENCES

- Ezrahi, Yaron. *Rubber Bullets; Power and Conscience in Modern Israel*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1997.
- Gorelick, Sherry. "Contradictions of Feminist Methodology." *Gender & Society* 5 (1991): 459–77.
- Harding, Sandra. *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.
- Mies, Maria. "Towards a Methodology for Feminist Research." *Theories of Women's Studies*. Ed. Gloria Bowels and Renate Duelli Klein. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983.
- Moore, Tracy, ed. *Lesbiot: Israeli Lesbians Talk About Sexuality, Feminism, and Their Lives*. London: Casseli, 1995.
- Shadmi, Erella. "Lesbian Absence: Silencing the Personal and the Feminine in the Feminist-Sociological Discourse." Paper presented at the annual conference of the Israeli Association for Feminist Studies and Gender Research, Beit Berl, February 16, 2000.
- Swilder, Ann, and Jorge Ardit. "The New Sociology of Knowledge." *Annual Review of Sociology* 20(1994): 305–29.
- Yishai, Yael. *Between the Flag and the Banner. Women in Israeli Politics*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997.
- Ziv, Amalya, "The Literature that Has not Been Written Yet, but Is Waiting to Be Written." *Tat Tarbut* 1(1995): 19–20.

Part I

Experience

This page intentionally left blank.

TWO

Lesbians in Israel: A Legal Perspective

Ira Hadar

INTRODUCTION

Recent years have witnessed a sea change in the legal status and standing of lesbians and gay men in Israel. The gay and lesbian community has become increasingly visible and vocal in all areas of Israeli society. One such area is the law, including both legislation by the Israeli parliament (the Knesset) and decisions by the various judicial bodies.

Although lesbians and gay men in Israel still suffer from different forms of discrimination, such as denial of the right to marry and to adopt children, today the gay and lesbian community in Israel benefits from a series of laws and legal precedents that recognize its rights on a number of levels. These laws include: laws prohibiting employment discrimination; recognition of lesbian nonbiological mothers as legal guardians of the children born to their life-partners; the right of lesbians to equal access to fertility treatments; prohibition of defamation; and more. These laws and precedents serve as a foundation for the continuation of the struggle for public and legal recognition of the lesbians and gay men, and provide hope for a future in which lesbians and gay men will be guaranteed complete equality under the law—as individuals, as couples, as parents, and as a community.

A survey of the legal issues that have been raised in Israel reveals that lesbians and gay men have enjoyed favorable rulings when they have turned to the courts to protect their rights. Courts often responded to the challenges brought before them by applying liberal and progressive attitudes, and invoking Israel's obligation as a "democratic" and "enlightened" state to defend the rights of lesbians and gay men. Fortunately, this perspective has typically prevailed over Judaism's traditional and conservative perspective that perceives

homosexuality as an abomination and categorically denounces anything that could be perceived as legitimizing homosexuality. The conflict between the conservative, religious Jewish position and values of equality and tolerance that are deeply engrained in the Israel judiciary has been the topic of many interesting legal cases that will be discussed in this article.

Lesbians' struggle for equal rights and for official recognition of lesbianism as a legitimate lifestyle has, by its nature, been intertwined with both the feminist movement and gay men's struggle for equality. Because they suffer both gender and sexual orientation discrimination, lesbians have had to work simultaneously on both fronts to ensure themselves equal rights. It has become clear, however, that the issues that most motivate lesbians to fight for their rights are those in the traditional female realms of motherhood and parenting. Almost all of the cases that lesbians have brought before the courts in Israel grew out of the struggle for the right to become pregnant and give birth, or for recognition of the status of nonbiological mothers as equal parents of the children born to their life partners. In contrast, gay men in Israel have spearheaded the legal battles for the recognition of gay couples, especially by demanding the financial benefits that go with this recognition.

This chapter will survey the legal status of lesbians and gay men in Israel at the beginning of the twenty-first century. It will describe the veritable revolution that has taken place over the past decade in the relationship between the legislature, the courts, and the administrative agencies toward the lesbian and gay community in the areas of employment, couples' rights, parenting, and military service. This chapter will discuss some of the areas wherein desirable goals have yet to be achieved and will point to the obstacles that have been placed in the paths of lesbians and gay men toward equal rights, first and foremost being the efforts of the religious and conservative sectors to stymie this movement. This chapter will attempt to emphasize the status and rights of lesbians in Israel, and examine their unique involvement and contribution in the struggles of the gay and lesbian community, both the involvement of lesbians as individuals and lesbian organizations acting on behalf of the entire community.

INITIAL STEPS AND THE BREAKTHROUGH IN THE AREA OF EMPLOYMENT

Until 1988, male homosexual sex, even if consensual, was criminalized in Israel. While this law was never enforced, and no one was ever prosecuted for violating this law, its very existence was not only humiliating for gay men, but also acted as a barrier to open public organizing by the gay and lesbian community against the discrimination gays and lesbians faced in other aspects of their lives. Although the prohibition on homosexual sex applied only to men, and the law did not cover lesbian sex, lesbians too feared the impact of the law; and the sodomy law also prevented lesbians from organizing to improve their status and gain equal rights.

To the dismay of the religious sectors in Israel, in 1988 the Knesset repealed the same-sex sodomy law. With its repeal, a new era began in the struggle for equal rights for lesbians and gay men in Israel. What followed was a period of many legal maneuvers, in which the gay and lesbian community made significant strides and Israel assumed an honored place among enlightened nations in the area of recognition of gay and lesbian rights.

In 1990, an Israeli court for the first time expressed an opinion on the issue of lesbians and gay men. In this case, landlords brought an action in Tel Aviv magistrate court seeking to void a rental agreement after they discovered that the property was rented for the purpose of serving as a meeting place for gay men and lesbians. The court strongly disapproved of the discrimination against the gays and lesbians, and held that:

The sexual orientation of an individual is a private matter, so long as he does not violate any laws. Just as it would be inconceivable to inquire as to the culinary tastes of an individual, it should be inconceivable to inquire as to one's sexual preference, because this is unrelated to the issue before us. When irrelevant factors are considered, as they were in this case, it is not far from the consideration of other factors that remind of darker periods of history when factors such as one's religion, the color of one's skin, one's world-view, and all of those same considerations that would make all who wish to uphold the humanistic values that it is incumbent upon us to uphold shudder in horror.¹

Even before this time, in 1989, the first case was filed in Israel against discrimination against gays in the workplace and for granting equal rights to same-sex couples. The case was brought by Yonatan Danilovitz, a flight attendant on El Al, Israel's national airline, who asked to receive free airline tickets for his life partner just as heterosexual flight attendants received for their spouses and life partners. After El Al refused to grant his request, Danilovitz filed a complaint against the airline in which he argued that this was unlawful discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

During the time when the Danilovitz case was being argued, toward the end of 1991, the Knesset passed the first law in Israel protecting the rights of lesbians and gay men. This law explicitly prohibited employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and marital status. The law also contained a provision permitting plaintiffs seeking to enforce their rights under the law to request that the case be heard behind closed doors. This way, individuals would not be forced to come out publicly about their sexual orientation unless they wished to do so.

The passage of this law led to an impressive victory by Danilovitz against El Al. Three different panels of Israeli courts held that withholding benefits from an employee's same-sex partner is tantamount to discrimination on the

basis of sexual orientation, which is impermissible under the law prohibiting such discrimination. El Al insisted on appealing the decisions of the lower courts, and in 1994 the case reached the Israel Supreme Court. Thus, the president of the Israel Supreme Court, the Honorable Aharon Barak, was given an opportunity to opine on the subject of recognition of same-sex partners for purposes of employment benefits granted to an employee's life partner. The Supreme Court president held that:

It is clear to me that denying a benefit to a same sex partner is discrimination and a blow to equality. Indeed, the only reason for such a denial of a benefit to a same-sex life partner is sexual orientation. . . . A subject we have held to be arbitrary and unfair: Is a separation from a same sex partner easier than a separation from an opposite sex partner? Is living sharing ones life with a same sex partner different, in terms of support, companionship, and running a household, from sharing ones life with an opposite sex partner?²

The Honorable Justice Dalia Dorner joined Barak's opinion and expanded upon it. She held that, in her view, even if the legislature had not passed the law explicitly prohibiting discrimination in the workplace on the basis of sexual orientation, Danilovitz would have prevailed because of the centrality of the principle of equality, which is a very important value in the Israeli legal system. At the same time the Court declined to address the issue of whether same-sex couples may be defined as "common-law marriage" and thus deserving of the various rights granted to opposite-sex couples. The opinion narrowly addressed only the rights of same-sex couples in the area of employment.

Despite the relatively narrow holding of the *Danilovitz* decision, the case became a most important cornerstone in the struggle of lesbians and gay men in Israel for equal rights, and opened the door to a broader recognition of the rights of same-sex couples both in the area of employment and in other areas as well. Equally important, the decision was a very significant boost to lesbians and gay men to fight for their position and rights, and paved the way for other legal cases alleging discrimination, both in the workplace and in other areas of life.

Thus, in 1995, following the *Danilovitz* decision, the University of Tel Aviv capitulated to the demands of Professor Uzi Even, chair of the Chemistry Department and a leading activist in Israel's lesbian and gay community, and agreed to grant Even's life partner all of the benefits granted to the common-law spouse of a faculty member, including pension benefits, a tuition waiver, sabbatical benefits, and more.³

In connection with the area of labor and employment law, it is interesting to note that no employee in Israel has ever filed a legal action claiming that he or she was terminated because of his or her sexual orientation. The only cases that have reached the courts concerned employees seeking benefits for their same-sex partners, and to have their partners be treated the same as

the spouses of their married heterosexual co-workers. It is unlikely, however, that there were no instances in which an individual was terminated because of his or her sexual orientation. It is much more likely that lesbians and gay men that were fired from their jobs on account of sexual orientation were afraid to sue their employers, and refrained from taking advantage of the progressive legislation and the precedent that was created by the *Danilovitz* decision, which prohibits discrimination in the workplace on the basis of sexual orientation. Perhaps potential litigants do not feel that the law's requirement that hearings in cases of alleged sexual orientation discrimination be held behind closed doors provides adequate protection, and they chose instead to accept the humiliation of being fired because of their sexual orientation rather than go through protracted and contentious litigation.

Given the dearth of legal actions that have been brought on this basis, it is unclear that the law will actually be interpreted in such a way that will protect gay men and lesbians. For example, the courts have yet to address a list of important legal questions such as: the right of a same-sex partner of an employee to receive severance pay of his deceased partner; the right to receive vacation days to mourn the death of a same-sex partner; the right of a lesbian mother to take maternity leave in place of her partner after the partner gives birth to their child (just as a husband is permitted to do after his wife gives birth); etc. No cases have been brought to the court on these important issues; thus, the courts should flesh out the meaning of the antidiscrimination legislation and, hopefully, continue to expand upon the legal reasoning of the *Danilovitz* decision.

ACTIVITIES IN THE KNESSET: THE ISRAELI PARLIAMENT

Concurrent with progress in the courts, particularly in the area of employment law, groundbreaking achievements took place also in the political and legislative realms. In 1993, a Knesset subcommittee was created for the prevention of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Knesset member Yael Dayan, a member of the Labor Party, established this subcommittee. Dayan has spearheaded the issue of equality for gay men and lesbians, and she has courageously led the struggle on this issue in the Knesset, contributing greatly to the advancement of gay rights both politically and legislatively.

At Dayan's initiative, on Feb. 2, 1993, the first gathering of lesbians and gay men took place at the Knesset, despite the extreme opposition of several Orthodox Knesset members. At this gathering, scores of lesbians and gay men participated and raised several problems faced by them in their daily lives, such as the hostile attitudes toward gays and lesbians in the education system and in the military. The gathering raised public consciousness and awareness of these difficulties. Following the gathering, the Knesset addressed the issue of service of lesbians and gay men in the Israeli army, and new regulations were established prohibiting discrimination against gay men and lesbians in the IDF (the Israel Defense Forces).

The Subcommittee for the Prevention of Discrimination on the Basis of Sexual Orientation continues to advance gay and lesbian rights in different realms, and brought about the enactment of two additional laws that protect lesbians and gay men. In 1997, the defamation law was amended to include defamation on the basis of sexual orientation. In 1998, legislation was passed prohibiting sexual harassment; in that law, the definition of sexual harassment includes, among other things, humiliating or degrading behavior toward another on account of sexual orientation.

In 2000, the criminal law was amended to lower the age of consent for homosexual sexual activity from eighteen to sixteen years. Accordingly, whereas in the past even consensual sexual relations with a youth who had not yet reached the age of eighteen was criminalized, today consensual homosexual sex with an individual over the age of sixteen is legal (unless committed within a coercive relationship).

Although it accomplished these numerous achievements, the Knesset Subcommittee for the Prevention of Discrimination on the Basis of Sexual Orientation—headed by MK Dayan—failed to push through a law that would have equalized the legal status of same-sex partners for purposes of pension rights received by the spouses of state civil servants. Legislation proposed on this issue failed in 1995, and religious Knesset members strongly opposed the legislation and threatened to bring down the government if the legislation were brought to a vote on the floor. This threat brought the then prime minister Shimon Peres to order MK Dayan to cancel the vote. Since that time, there has yet to be an opportunity to bring the law to a vote once again.

In light of the composition of the Knesset, in which the representation of religious and conservative parties has increased, there is little chance to pass progressive legislation that would afford expansive rights to same-sex partners, similar to domestic partnership laws now existing in many countries in the world such as Holland, Denmark, Sweden, Iceland, Norway, Canada, and some of the United States (in particular Vermont). Thus, for example, the Knesset is highly unlikely to enact an amendment to the Israeli adoption law that would permit adoption by same-sex partners.

Under these circumstances, the primary prospect for the advancement of the status of lesbians and gay men in Israel lies in continued supportive and progressive rulings in the courts.

PARTIAL LEGAL RECOGNITION OF SAME-SEX COUPLES

Because Israeli law does not permit civil marriage, but rather only religious Orthodox marriage, and because Orthodox Judaism strongly opposes homosexuality and views it as an abomination, at this stage same-sex couples are unable to fight for their right to marry legally. Although several years ago the Movement of Reform Judaism in the United States did recognize same-sex

marriage, the State of Israel didn't recognize this marriage, so the decision of the Reform Movement has no real impact on the status of same-sex couples in Israel.

From time to time proposals have been raised that would remove marriage from the exclusive hold of the Rabbinate and establish civil marriage or some other alternative registration of couples. Nevertheless, even these proposals have never included same-sex couples. Despite meetings that the lesbian and gay community held with the minister of justice with the goal of convincing him that lesbians and gay men should not be excluded from any arrangement for civil marriage, the minister maintained that the inclusions of gay men and lesbians would spark a strong opposition that would jeopardize any possibility for removing marriage from the jurisdiction of the Rabbinate.

In light of the denial of the right of same-sex couples to marry, lesbians and gay men in Israel have focused their struggle for equal rights on attempts to gain the benefits that flow from the institution of marriage. The lack of specific legislation regarding same-sex couples has led to these issues being adjudicated in various forums, which has in turn led to some lack of clarity with regard to the rights of same-sex couples. On the one hand, several terrific court decisions have granted full rights to same-sex partners. On the other hand, some rulings have denied all such rights.

As far back as 1988, the Haifa Small Claims Court held that the separation of a gay couple with shared property should be adjudicated in the same manner as a separation of an unmarried heterosexual couple. The court did not view the fact that the two partners were of the same sex as an obstacle, and unhesitatingly applied the same laws to this couple that it would have applied to a heterosexual couple. In the words of the court:

We are speaking about a truly shared life, the management of a shared household, just like any married couple. These two men shared a deep emotional, spiritual, sexual and economic day-to-day relationship. . . . Throughout the world, and in particular in the Western world of which Israel is a part, the public, the government and the courts increasingly must acknowledge relationships between lesbians and between gay men as legitimate, permissible, and natural relationships deserving of recognition and tolerance, and with attendant legal rights.⁴

Another instance in which a court was asked to adjudicate the rights of a same-sex couple was the case of Adir Shteiner, the former partner of a high-ranking officer in the IDF, the late Colonel Doron Meisel who passed away while serving in the military. After Meisel passed away, Shteiner demanded that he be recognized as the widower of Colonel Meisel, and that he be afforded the same rights as would a woman under similar circumstances. First, Shteiner

insisted that he play a central role in every ceremony and event the IDF arranged to commemorate his partner, just like other family members of soldiers who die during their military service. Initially the minister of defense denied Shteiner's request. However, after Shteiner appealed to the Supreme Court the minister changed his position and agreed to grant Shteiner's requests.⁵

In addition, Shteiner requested retirement and other benefits, just as a female partner of a deceased IDF officer would receive. After lengthy discussions, and after two conflicting court rulings on the matter, the parties reached a settlement according to which the army agreed to pay Shteiner pension benefits without officially recognizing his status as the partner of the late Colonel Meisel.⁶

Because these payments were made pursuant to a settlement, no binding legal precedent was set by this case. Undoubtedly, however, the fact of the army's willingness to agree to pay Shteiner pension benefits after the death of his partner created an extremely important real-world precedent on the path to full recognition of gay and lesbian relationships and points to a deep recognition on the part of the authorities and the army of the fact that it is impossible to deny same-sex couples their rights.

This trend toward recognition of same-sex relationships is evident also in a 1997 decision of the Haifa Family Court dealing with a request by a lesbian to keep her partner away from their apartment because the partner had become violent and was a threat to the woman and her children. The family court held that the term *partner* in the law against violence in the family included same-sex partners, emphasizing that the Supreme Court decision in the *Danilovitz* case compelled this legal interpretation.⁷

Another important precedent was created in July 2001 when the Tel Aviv Labor Court came down with a ruling that not only granted rights to a same-sex couple, but also formally declared them to be partners and common-law spouses. This precedent-setting recognition was made in the context of a demand by Patrick Levy to receive the survivors' pension of his deceased partner, Ricardo Shneider, who died of AIDS. The Honorable Sara Meiri of the Tel Aviv Labor Court did not hesitate to grant the requested declaratory relief after she became convinced that Levi and Shneider had been a couple and had lived together for almost eight years before Shneider's death. Meiri accepted the petition and issued a ruling declaring the two were a couple and common-law spouses, and accordingly Levi was entitled to receive the survivors' pension of his deceased partner.⁸

Despite the general trend of the courts toward recognizing the rights of same-sex couples, in 1998 the Tel Aviv Family Court entered a conservative and discriminatory order ruling that same-sex partners are not included within the legal definition of the term *partner*. This was decided in a case between two gay male partners who had separated. One of the men filed a complaint in the family court against his former partner seeking part of the property and assets acquired during their relationship. His ex-partner sought to dismiss the suit

and challenged the jurisdiction of the family court to hear the case, arguing that same-sex partners are not included within the legal definitions of the terms *partner* and *family*. The family court adopted the defendant's argument and dismissed the case, transferring it to the civil court. The family court opined that its ruling would do no damage to principles of equality nor was it discriminatory against gay people since the plaintiff had another forum available to him in which to bring his claims.⁹

With all due respect to the court, it seems to me that this decision to remove a dispute between same-sex couples over joint property from the jurisdiction of the family court is discriminatory and ridicules same-sex couples and families. To treat a conflict between same-sex partners as if it was a run-of-the-mill financial or business dispute, unrelated to an intimate relationship and devoid of the attributes of family, misrepresented the facts, distorts reality, and diminishes the chances of lesbians and gay men to receive due process in the courts. I note that in the aforementioned case the couple reached a settlement between them without the involvement of the civil court.

I think it is not incidental that the only instance of a discriminatory or conservative ruling regarding the rights of gays and lesbians in Israel resulted from a dispute between former partners when one of the partners utilized conservative or homophobic arguments in an attempt to destroy his former partner. Moreover, this created much animosity in the gay and lesbian community toward those individuals in the community who, in times of crisis, deny relationships that they themselves build over the course of years, and who suddenly—to avoid giving money to an ex-partner after a long-term relationship ends—employ arguments that even the most homophobic would not be ashamed to employ. It appears that when members of the community use such arguments in court, it becomes easier for the courts to adopt otherwise untenable positions and issue discriminatory and conservative rulings. At the same time, there can be no doubt that the overriding tone of the Israeli courts with respect to lesbian and gay relationships has been positive.

The majority of judges in Israel has shown an acceptance of homosexuality and do not condone discrimination against the gay and lesbian community. Hopefully, this trend will continue to prevail in the future, and couples will not hesitate to stand up for their rights and bring their disputes before the courts.

Fortunately, gays and lesbians have not been forced in every instance to turn to a court to receive the benefits they deserve. At times, the authorities have granted these benefits without a protracted legal battle.

One area in which the authorities have created relatively positive policies toward lesbians and gay men is in connection with immigration to Israel by non-Jewish same-sex partners of Jewish Israelis. I note that Israel has strict immigration laws that were intended to protect the Jewish character of the country and to prevent immigration of non-Jews to Israel. Accordingly, non-Jews are only permitted to enter Israel for short periods of time, as tourists, and they are not permitted to take residence in Israel. There is an exception,

however, in the case of a non-Jew who wishes to come to Israel to be with his or her Jewish (opposite-sex) partner. In these cases, the non-Jewish partner receives special permission to immigrate to Israel and may even take Israeli citizenship. If a non-Jewish same-sex partner wishes to immigrate to Israel to be with his Jewish partner, their relationship must be officially recognized in order for them to benefit from this exception.

In the beginning of 2000 the Israeli Ministry of Interior established a new policy recognizing the rights of non-Jewish gay and lesbian partners of Israeli citizens to reside in Israel. According to this policy, non-Jewish gay and lesbian partners of Israeli citizens will be permitted to live and work in Israel for an unlimited period of time, and after several years may be granted the status of permanent resident. A significant number of gays and lesbians have thus far benefited from this new policy. This new policy notwithstanding, the rights of gay and lesbian couples are not on par with those of heterosexual couples, for in contrast to legally married couples, non-Jewish gay and lesbian partners of Israelis will not be granted citizenship regardless of their extended residence in Israel.

It should be noted that as early as 1998 before the instigation of the aforementioned policy of the Ministry of Interior, a non-Jewish woman, a Greek citizen who had been living in Israel for many years with her Jewish Israeli lesbian partner and her partners' children, appealed to the Israeli Supreme Court after she was instructed by the authorities to leave Israel. In light of the unique circumstances of her situation, despite the prior policy, the state agreed to extend the petitioner's visa, allowing her to continue residing in Israel while avoiding a ruling on the nature of the women's relationship.

OTHER RIGHTS GRANTED TO GAY MEN AND LESBIANS WITHOUT LEGAL BATTLES

In 1998, the state recognized the right of a same-sex partner of a civil servant to receive survivors' benefits from the state. That same year, the solicitor general decided to equalize the status of same-sex partners with that of common-law spouses in all matters pertaining to the use of tax-free cars purchased by new immigrants.¹⁰ The solicitor general was concerned, however, that his decision would be interpreted as recognizing same-sex couples and accordingly determined that the permission to drive the new immigrant's car will be granted to all members of the household rather than solely to the new immigrant's partner.

Another area in which lesbian relationships have gained recognition is blood bank donations. The regulations governing blood banks in Israel give donors and their spouses the right to "blood bank insurance." Several years ago it was decided that a lesbian couple is entitled to the benefits of this insurance if one of them donates blood.

Despite all of these areas in which gay and lesbian couples have achieved equal rights, there remain many areas in which gays and lesbians continue to experience blatant discrimination. One such area is that of housing. For example, the Ministry of Housing discriminates against same-sex couples by not giving them access to the special mortgage rates given to first-time home buyers. Currently only legally married heterosexual couples enjoy this benefit. Same-sex couples are forced to take less affordable mortgages, thereby denying them the right to equal opportunity in housing.

Similarly, it is doubtful whether the same-sex partner of a resident in a rent-controlled apartment would continue to benefit from the rent-control status, as would be the case if the partner were of the opposite sex.

Another example of blatant discrimination against same-sex couples in the area of housing is in taxes that are levied on same-sex couples that transfer ownership or partial ownership of an apartment. While heterosexual couples can transfer ownership of an apartment without tax implications, gays and lesbians must pay the full tax assessed when transferring all or partial ownership to a same-sex partner, just as if the transaction were between strangers. Thus, when a lesbian (or gay man) wishes to transfer one-half ownership of her apartment to her same-sex partner as part of consolidating the assets of the couple, she is required to pay the state tens and sometimes hundreds of thousands of shekels. In these circumstances, such a transaction is fiscally unwise. Thus, same-sex couples are effectively prevented from combining their assets formally.

In this regard, in early 2001 Adir Shteiner filed a petition to the Tel Aviv District Court seeking to transfer ownership over one-half of his property to his same-sex partner. Shteiner requested that the Israeli tax authorities grant him the same exemption from transfer tax granted to heterosexual couples. His request was denied and Shteiner appealed to the court, arguing that the denial of the tax exemption is tantamount to unlawful discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. As of this writing, this appeal has yet to be heard. Hopefully, the court will not permit such blatant discrimination, and will find that same-sex couples are entitled to share their real estate without being forced to pay inordinate taxes to the state.¹¹

An additional area in which the rights of same-sex couples are denied is that of denial of various benefits provided under Israel's social security laws to heterosexual couples, such as workers' compensation, disability, survivor's benefits, etc. Gay men and lesbians are also discriminated against with regard to inheritance. Israel's probate law states that if a person dies without a will his or her spouse or common-law spouse will inherit the property of the deceased. To this day, however, it has not been determined that same-sex partners can be considered common-law spouses and entitled to their deceased partner's property. On this subject also a petition has been filed with the court, in which a gay man requested recognition as a same-sex partner of his deceased partner for the purpose of inheritance. This petition has also yet to be heard.

Lacking legislation that formally and clearly recognizes same-sex couples, and in light of the inconsistent attitudes toward same-sex couples, the Israeli gay and lesbian community has developed several alternative channels to formalize and solidify same-sex relationships. First, many lesbians and gay men have taken advantage of the Israeli law regarding changing names that allows anyone freely to change his or her last name, for the purpose of creating the outer-image of a family in which all of the members of the family share the same last name, which is also given to the couples' children. While this technical change does not carry with it any other benefits or rights, it does provide a strong feeling of family and unity.

Similarly, in recent years, Israeli lesbians and gay men have increasingly recognized the importance of solidifying their relationships through the use of legal documents that provide protection in the event the couple separates or one member of the couple dies. Many couples enter into living-together agreements, setting forth how they wish to divide their property in the event of a separation, and, if they have children, what will be the relationship between each of them and their nonbiological children. In addition, many lesbians and gay men draft wills in which they bequeath their property to their partner and/or to their nonbiological children. They also sign mutual powers of attorney wherein each partner gives the other the right to take certain actions in the name of the other.

THE STRUGGLE FOR RECOGNITION OF LESBIAN PARENTAL RIGHTS

Over the past decade, scores of lesbian families have been established in Israel; some couples had children through anonymous sperm donations, others by agreement with a man solely for the purpose of conception. As is often the case, reality dictates the rules and challenges the legal system to respond to issues that it never faced in the past. Indeed, over the past few years, Israeli courts have been presented with a number of issues related to lesbian parenting, and in this sphere considerable achievements have been made, of which three are particularly notable: elimination of all forms of discrimination against lesbians with regard to provision of fertility services and artificial insemination; granting legal guardianship to nonbiological lesbian mothers; and registration in Israel of a second-parent adoption that took place in the United States.

Progress in the area of recognition of lesbian parental rights must be viewed in light of the significant changes that began to take place in Israel over the past few years regarding different types of nontraditional family structures, which now receive social and legal recognition and support. For example, in 1992, the Single-Parent Family Law was enacted to provide single-parent families with economic assistance and other benefits. In 1996, a law was enacted that legalized surrogacy.

Moreover, Israel's policy regarding donor sperm and artificial insemination is exceedingly liberal. Any woman who wishes to conceive a child without the involvement of a man, regardless of her sexual orientation or marital status, is entitled to receive such services at public hospitals.

Until 1997, however, unmarried women and lesbians suffered discrimination in the provision of artificial insemination and other fertility services. While married women were provided these services without restriction or preconditions, unmarried women and lesbians were compelled to undergo a preliminary psychiatric test and an interview with a social worker in order to qualify. This unjust discrimination against single women and lesbians ended in 1997, following a petition brought to the Israel Supreme Court on behalf of a number of unmarried women. One of these women was a lesbian, Dr. Tal Yaros-Hakak, a prominent activist in the Israeli lesbian movement, who has done extensive work to promote the issue of lesbian parenthood and motherhood and in 1998 was awarded the Felipe de Souza prize in New York for her work in this area.

In the petition, Dr. Yaros-Hakak stated that she shares her life with her (female) partner, Dr. Avital Yaros-Hakak, and for several years they have been raising their two children within the family unit they established together. They now intend to have their third child (all of their children were born of anonymous sperm donations). Dr. Yaros-Hakak stated that an approach that casts doubt over her ability to function as a mother simply because of her marital status and sexual orientation is discriminatory and injures her privacy and dignity. The Supreme Court granted her request, and with the state's consent, abolished this form of discrimination against unmarried and lesbian women.¹²

This ruling, which, as stated, was granted with consent of the state, evidences the state's recognition of the lesbian family in Israel, of its right to exist, and of the state's commitment to support it. The fact that the authorities are committed to providing artificial insemination and donor sperm to lesbian women, so they may conceive and raise children with their female partners as two mothers, constitutes a further step in an increasing trend toward the definitive recognition of lesbians and gay men, and toward the rights of gay men and lesbians to live together openly, to establish family units as they wish, and to be parents—without state limitations or restrictions.

In 2001, another positive development occurred regarding the right to conceive a child from sperm donation, when the sperm bank started to offer the services of insemination and fertility not deriving exclusively from anonymous donors, but also in cases where a woman chooses to conceive a child from sperm donated by a man she knows and has chosen to be the child's father. The sperm bank then receives sperm from the man in question, tests it for diseases (such as AIDS), and provides both parties the services necessary for them to have a child together through artificial insemination. This new development enables a man and woman who wish to have a child together without physical intimacy to do so safely and comfortably.

THE STRUGGLE FOR ADOPTION RIGHTS IN THE LESBIAN FAMILY

In 1997, a lesbian couple filed a petition in the Tel Aviv Family Court seeking to adopt one another's biological children (second-parent adoption). The women were raising their three children together, two of whom were born to one mother, and one of whom was born to the other; all three children were conceived through anonymous sperm donation.

In their joint second-parent adoption petition, the women claimed that adoption would be in the best interest of their children, since it would actively affirm their feelings of stability and permanence in the family unit they were born to, and it would prevent any future threat of being cut off from either of the two women, both of whom they view as their mothers. The couple stated that official adoption would also strengthen the relationship between their children, who would then grow up as legal siblings. The petitioners further asserted that adoption would be of particular importance in the unfortunate event of one partner dying or being unable to take care of the children. In such circumstances, it would be in the children's best interest to continue living with the surviving partner and their other siblings. An adoption order would spare the children unnecessary trauma, and it would offer them maximum permanence and stability.

Both women emphasized that since all their children were born of anonymous sperm donations, none of them have a father who would be affected by the granting of such an order. They stated that many countries, including half of the states in United States of America, Canada, and Holland, allow adoption by a second parent in same-sex couples, and that Israel should also join the ranks of countries that protect the welfare of minors growing up in lesbian families, by legally recognizing the reality of these children's lives.

The state opposed the adoption petition, stating that the Israeli adoption law does not permit the recognition of parenthood by two women, and that legally a child cannot have two mothers. Thus far, two courts—the family court and the district court—have accepted the state's view and denied the request for second-parent adoption, despite the fact that in their rulings, the judges treated the two women and their children as a family in all respects. The court forbade the publication of the names of the women and their children, stating that such publication would be harmful to the children.¹³

It is important to note that the district court ruling also included a dissent by the Honorable Saviona Rothlevi, who sided with the request for adoption, sensitively and humanely relating to the lesbian family. Among other comments, Judge Rothlevi held that:

The children are in a warm and loving home, a secure and stable environment where they have lived from birth, and which is deserv-

ing of legal imprimatur through adoption . . . the need to provide the children and the family unit in which they are growing up with a legally sanctioned framework, is as important as the Court's obligation to establish social norms to oppose the lack of openness and tolerance demonstrated by certain segments of society, against that which differs from them.¹⁴

In 2001, an appeal was lodged with the Israel Supreme Court, against both the ruling on the request for second-parent adoption and the decision forbidding the publication of the mothers' names, thereby forcing them back into the closet. It is hoped that the justices of the Israel Supreme Court will demonstrate the necessary openness, will adopt the dissenting opinion of district court judge Rothlevi and will allow each of the women to adopt the children born to her partner.¹⁵

Parenthetically, I must state that I think the very need to ask for a process of adoption in order to establish the connection between a nonbiological mother and children born to her partner in the course of their life together is artificial. In cases where two women are full partners in the decision to bring a child into the world, and together they undergo the process of insemination, pregnancy, childbirth, and bringing up the child from birth, it is fitting that the nonbiological mother be treated from the start as an additional mother, just as an infertile father whose wife gives birth to a child through artificial insemination is recognized in Israel as the father of such children, although he has no biological connection to them.

Alternatively, a nonbiological mother's parenthood can also be recognized as in the process of recognition of the status of parents at surrogacy. Israeli law allows a legally married couple to employ a surrogate mother, from whom they receive a child and almost automatically become its parents. This happens by means of a simple and technical legal procedure called a "parenthood order," which does not require that any parental fitness be demonstrated, as in the case of the adoption order. Such recognition is also suitable for lesbian partners who wish to have children together.

It is also interesting to note that the official position in Israel against one child having two mothers has already been eliminated in an unexpected manner: since Israel grants individuals the right to change their sex, registering a person's new sex in all official documents, in cases where fathers changed their sex and became women (male-to-female transgender) their children then had two mothers.

GRANTING LEGAL GUARDIANSHIP TO THE NONBIOLOGICAL MOTHER

A most important achievement attained in the course of negotiations on the adoption issue was the precedent of January 1999, when upon consent from

the state, the family court granted the status of legal guardian to the nonbiological mother of children born of her partner.¹⁴ Legal guardianship ensures that if something happens to the biological mother, the children will not be taken from her partner, and they will remain with the partner until an adoption order is granted. Similarly, a guardianship order enables the nonbiological mother to do certain things on behalf of children born to her partner (including making medical decisions on their behalf, liaising with governmental institutions on their behalf, enrolling them in day care and schools, and so on).

Recognition of nonbiological mothers as legal guardians of children born to their partners is a significant milestone not only in practical terms, but also in terms of the public message it conveys. In effect, it conveys state and judicial recognition of the need to help women raising children together to function as a regular family in their day-to-day lives, and to protect (albeit partially) the relationship between nonbiological mothers and children born to their partners. Nevertheless, one must not forget that legal guardianship does not lead to full and complete recognition of the lesbian family. This can only be achieved by means of adoption and by recognition of a lesbian couple as two equal mothers in every realm.

The landmark ruling on legal guardianship now allows all lesbians couples raising children together to petition courts for legal guardianship for the nonbiological mother. Such applications are discussed in closed sessions and personal details are not publishable, in order to avoid exposure of both women and their children. Indeed, since this groundbreaking ruling on legal guardianship was made, many such applications have been made, and it appears that they will become routine, without particular interference from the authorities.

REGISTRATION IN ISRAEL OF LESBIAN ADOPTIONS GRANTED OVERSEAS

A short while after the precedent regarding legal guardianship, an application was made to the Supreme Court by a lesbian family to register an adoption that had been decreed overseas. Ruti and Nicole Berner-Kadish, a couple of Israeli women with American citizenship, lived in California for several years, where their eldest son was born. The nonbiological mother applied to adopt the child, and the California court issued an adoption order decreeing both women as the child's mothers.

In late 1998, Ruti and Nicole returned to Israel with their son and wished to register him with the population registry as their child, as per the California adoption order. The minister of the interior objected to their request, stating that such registration opposes the prevailing social concept of family structure, and that Israeli law does not allow for two women to be registered as mothers of the same child. The two women turned to the Supreme Court. In May 2000 their petition was granted, and the Court instructed the minister of the interior to register Ruti and Nicole as the child's two mothers.¹⁵

It is important to note that the Berner-Kadish ruling pertains only to situations where the couple has dual citizenship (e.g., Israeli and American) and has resided in a place that permits second-parent adoption, or adoption by same-sex couples. In this unique instance, all that was required of the court was to issue an order for the child's details to be entered in the population registry, since by law, registry clerks have no discretion to decide whether such details can be registered. This verdict does not help Israeli women and children, who are bound by Israeli adoption law alone. Nevertheless, the Berner-Kadish ruling is important for its psychological effect, since it began to erode the cliché, "there is only one mother," as well as the assertion that a child cannot have two mothers in Israel.

In any event, the Berner-Kadish case is not yet over. The minister of the interior requested a rehearing of the case before a broader panel. This request was granted in late April 2001, when the president of the Supreme Court, Aharon Barak, decided to rehear the case before seven justices of the Court.¹⁶

On the other hand, in early June 2001 President Barak denied a request of the minister of interior to delay the execution of the verdict, in anticipation of a further ruling. He reprimanded the minister for failing to allow the registration of the child on his nonbiological mother's identity card as her son. The decision to oblige the minister of the interior to promptly register the child as the couple's son raises hopes that the wider forum of judges will not oppose the results of the first ruling, but rather, strengthen it by adding supportive and advanced comments on the recognition of the lesbian family.

STRUGGLE BETWEEN FORMER PARTNERS OVER A CHILD BORN DURING THEIR RELATIONSHIP

In contrast to the above-mentioned cases, where female partners stand together fighting the authorities for recognition of the lesbian family, a case is currently being discussed in court where former partners are fighting each other over custody of a daughter born into their relationship.

In 1988 a request for guardianship and visitation rights was lodged with the family court regarding a girl born while the plaintiff was living with the defendant, the biological mother of the child, and the two had allegedly agreed to raise the child together. The defendant sought to dismiss the petition, claiming the plaintiff has no legal status and rights in respect of the child. She denied having agreed to raise the child together with her former partner, and stated that even if they had they entered into such an agreement, it was legally unenforceable. The biological mother went so far as to challenge the jurisdiction of the family court to adjudicate the matter, stating that a female single-sex couple can not be considered a couple or a family.

All three levels of courts (the family court, district court, and Supreme Court) rejected the nonbiological mother's claims against the lesbian family and against the possibility of two women agreeing to engage in joint parenthood. It

was established that indeed two women could agree to establish a family together, as two mothers. The court ruled that in a society that allows lesbians to receive anonymous sperm donations, a practice that is becoming more and more acknowledged and widespread, an agreement defining the nature of the relationship between the two parties and the child born of such donation couldn't be viewed as contravening public policy. The court established that if the plaintiff could prove she was, *de facto*, a mother to the child, she could then seek legal guardianship.¹⁷

After all three courts rejected the biological mother's request to drop charges, the case was brought back to the family court for an evidentiary hearing, to determine whether the two women had a joint parenthood agreement, the meaning of such agreement, and whether it would be in the child's best interest for the plaintiff's rights to be recognized currently, after the women's separation.

GAYS AND LESBIANS IN THE ISRAELI DEFENSE FORCE (IDF)

The army's fundamental position in Israeli life, and the positive developments that have recently taken place within this rigid establishment, justify a few words about army attitudes toward gays and lesbians. Over the past several years there has been a significant improvement in this attitude, which is completely different from the intolerant, discriminatory attitudes held by the American army.

Although gays and lesbians have always been subject to Israel's mandatory conscription law, prior to June 1993, army regulations stated that gay and lesbian soldiers could not serve in certain units, would be denied access to classified information, and would not be promoted beyond a certain rank. In all cases, they would be treated by a mental health officer and remain under his or her surveillance for the entire duration of their military service. If a soldier's gay or lesbian sexual orientation was discovered, that soldier was then moved to a minor, insignificant position, even when the position was inappropriate based on the soldier's skills.

A change in IDF policy regarding gays and lesbians came about after the exposure of Professor Uzi Even's story at the Gay and Lesbian Conference at the Knesset in February 1993. Professor Even served in the army for approximately fifteen years, holding research and security development positions, with access to vast amounts of classified material, with no negative consequences. However, once his officer discovered he was gay, he was removed from his position, on the grounds that his sexuality would affect his work and could endanger the IDF. Following Dr. Even's appearance at the Knesset and the wide public outcry that ensued, in June 1993 the military regulations regarding lesbians and gays were changed, limitations on the drafting of lesbians and gays were removed, and it was established that lesbians and gays would be drafted according to the same criteria used for the rest of the population.

More on the IDF's increasing openness toward lesbians and gays can be learned from the case of Adir Shteiner discussed above, where security forces ceded to his request, awarding Shteiner rights as partner of Reserve Colonel Doron Maizel, who died while on active military duty. Shteiner was granted both military pension and official status in all ceremonies and commemorative events the IDF held for his late partner.

Despite this, the picture is not all rosy at the IDF. In 2000, two female officers were dismissed from the army after they were discovered engaging in sexual activity on an army base. The army's official statement was that their dismissal was not because of they were lesbians, but rather, because they had sex against army orders. In a similar incident, a male officer was dismissed from the army after having sexual relations with a male soldier under his command. The officer then turned to the Supreme Court in appeal against his dismissal from the army, but he was forced to withdraw his appeal, since his dismissal was also defined as not because of his being gay, but rather, because he went against army orders not to have sex with a soldier under his command in the base.

ATTEMPTS BY THE ORTHODOX SECTOR TO PREVENT LEGITIMIZATION OF HOMOSEXUALITY

As discussed above, one of the main barriers preventing lesbians and gays in Israel from furthering their status and attaining full equal rights is the religious authorities' hostile attitude toward homosexuality. This group views homosexuality not only as "sexual deviance," but also as an absolute abomination, which according to Jewish law (Halacha) is punishable by death though stoning (literally!!!).

In this connection, it is interesting to note that the Orthodox sector has no clear position regarding lesbians, and Jewish law does not condemn lesbian relations as harshly as it does sexual relations between men. It is clear, however, that this approach does not derive from openness or a tolerance of women, but rather from a deep disregard for the possibility of there being sexual relations between women without the presence of a male. The act of love between women is not even perceived by the Jewish religion as sexual relations, but at most, as an "innocent and harmless" show of affection, which, unlike homosexual relations, does not threaten society or harm the way of the world.

One way or another, Israeli religious authorities are trying to exploit their extensive power in the local political arena, to block the continued developments in the status of lesbians and gays, and to make sure they remain a depressed minority group, trapped in the depths of the closet. Between 1996 and 1999, the Ministry of Education, governed by Orthodox ministers, fought legitimization of the gay-lesbian way of life. Rather than focus on educating youths on the openness and tolerance befitting a democratic nation, Orthodox ministers of education took upon themselves to depress this broad segment. In so doing, they neglected their obligation to act as Ministry of Education for

the entire population, ignoring research that points at a high incidence of teenage suicides in youths traumatized by the discovery of their lesbian and gay orientation.

It is important to note that in the years 1992–1996 and 1999–2000, when members of the secular left Meretz party headed the Ministry of Education, an appropriate policy of openness toward lesbians and gays was adopted. In 1995, a booklet dealing with same-sex sexual orientation was published as an aid for school counselors and educators, to help them cope with youths who discover that their sexual orientation differs from their friends.⁷ The booklet attempts to dispel myths and prejudices concerning lesbians and gay men, emphasizing that ignorance and lack of reliable information are the main reasons for homophobia.

This period of progress in the Ministry of Education came to a standstill between the years 1996 and 1999, with Binyamin Netanyahu's government. During these years, the Ministry of Education was in the hands of a religious political party (the Mafdal), whose position was menacing and discriminatory, forcing the Israeli gay-lesbian community to hold a number of extremely successful campaigns to protect their rights and to prevent their voice being silenced.

The first of those legal struggles was connected with the minister of education's refusal to air a television program on gay and lesbian youths on educational television. The program included interviews with three gay adolescents and a lesbian adolescent, who wished to share their experience of coping with their sexual orientation, the process of coming out of the closet to themselves, their families, their friends, and society as a whole. Just before the program was due to be aired, the minister of education suddenly ordered it not to be transmitted. Three organizations dealing with the rights of lesbians and gays in Israel (the Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Association (CLaF), the Lesbian Feminist Community, and the Association for Civil Rights in Israel) came together and appealed to the Supreme Court to compel the minister of education to issue an order that the program be aired. In September 1997, the Supreme Court granted the appeal and ordered the minister of education to have the program transmitted, on the grounds that the phenomena of lesbianism and homosexuality cannot be ignored in Israel, and that there is no justification for hiding it from public eyes. The ruling also held,

In a world moving into the twenty-first century, the phenomena of homosexuality and lesbianism—per se, no longer expresses a “deviance” that must be eradicated, disgraced and fought against, despite the lack of knowledge of its precise origins—it is treated with understanding and tolerance.¹⁸

The ruling received widespread media coverage in Israel, and when the program was finally aired, the viewing ratings were particularly high.

Only one year after the Supreme Court rejected the minister of education's position, the Ministry of Education once again expressed its threatening approach toward lesbians and gays, this time in a much more pronounced and offensive manner. It happened during the festival of Hanukah in December 1998, when the Ministry of Education held a fair with the promising title, "The Right to be Honored and the Obligation to Honor." A number of different organizations were invited to present teachers and educators with pedagogical material and workshops on the subject. CLaF—the Lesbian Feminist Community—was among the scores of organizations applying to participate in the fair, offering the public information on lesbianism. The Ministry of Education rejected CLaF's application, stating they did not wish to promote topics that are not connected to "reproductive families."

CLaF opposed this irrelevant and offensive criterion (which factually is inaccurate), and requested that the minister change his position, in light of the fact that his position was in stark contradiction to the title of the fair, which spoke of the right to be honored. The minister met with CLaF representatives a few days before the fair was due to open, and informed them that he had no intention to change his decision. CLaF (together with two other organizations) turned to the Supreme Court requesting to be allowed to participate in the fair. However, since the fair was due to open two days later, the Court refused to be involved, stating that CLaF had waited too long to bring its claim, and that the short time left before the fair would not suffice for the issue to be discussed in a satisfactory manner.¹⁹ The gates of the fair were therefore closed to the gay-lesbian community; its representatives were forced to set up a stand outside the fair hall and make do with holding a protest demonstration.

While on the surface, the Court's denial of CLaF's petition was on account of procedural reasons connected with untimeliness of the petition, it is hard to avoid feeling that the Supreme Court's refusal to address the issue and become involved derived from its desire to avoid further conflict with the Orthodox authorities on the sensitive topic of lesbians and gays.

The third event where gays and lesbians were forced to take action against the Ministry of Education was early 1999, when the Ministry of Education announced that Professor Abraham Steinberg, who had spoken out more than once against homosexuality, was one of the nominees for the Israel Prize (a prestigious prize granted each year on Israel's Independence Day to outstanding individuals in different fields). Steinberg had described homosexuality as a disease and sexual deviance that was tantamount to bestiality. He blamed gays for conveying and transmitting AIDS, and compared them to drug addicts and prostitutes, bringing serious ethical and health problems to the world.

The Association for Gay Men, Lesbians and Bisexuals sent a letter expressing the outrage of the members of the organization to the minister of education, asking him not to bestow the prize on Professor Steinberg, since a man who so blatantly opposes the right of an entire community to exist does

not deserve any prize. Professor Steinberg eventually chose to apologize for his statement, claiming he had not intended to offend gays, and that he was sorry he was not properly understood. Following this apology, a decision was made not to appeal to Supreme Court, but rather that exposure of this incident would suffice, together with the demand that the offensive statements against gays would not be included in Professor Steinberg's future publications.

Beyond the tremendous significance of opposing public and Orthodox authorities' disturbing positions and standing up for gay and lesbian rights, these three campaigns against the Ministry of Education can be seen to represent a new and powerful course taken by the gay-lesbian community. While all previous efforts to advance the position and the rights of lesbians and gays were made by individuals fighting for their own individual rights, these recent efforts saw several lesbian and gay rights organizations working together to promote the rights of the entire community. It appears that advent of the gay-lesbian community's coming together in joint campaigns symbolizes a new era in its development and empowerment.

An additional occasion where gay-lesbian rights organizations joined together to fight the authorities' conservative position took place in the year 2000, in a campaign directed against the Film Review Committee, which had barred the screening of the American film *Edge of Seventeen* to children below the age of eighteen. The film portrays the story of a high school pupil who discovers his gay sexual orientation. The Association for Gay Men, Lesbian and Bisexuals and CLaF appealed this decision to the Supreme Court. Following their appeal, the ban was lowered to children younger than sixteen years of age, so youths between the ages of sixteen and eighteen were permitted to view the film.²⁰

Another legal battle against the religious authorities and their threatening attitudes toward lesbian partnership and parenthood was waged over a restraining order that was served by the rabbinical court in 1999, forbidding a mother to introduce her daughters to her female partner, stating that her behavior was "immoral and would seriously harm the children's spirit and education." The order was issued upon their father's request (i.e., the woman's ex-husband), which claimed he feared for his daughters' education upon exposure to the lesbian relationship their mother began after their divorce.

In January 2000, the two women appealed the decision of the rabbinical court to the Supreme Court, stating, among other things, that the restraining order resulted from the rabbinical court's discriminatory and prejudicial approach, which contravenes the basic principles of the State of Israel and goes against legal precedents that have already been achieved in favor of the same-sex family.

The Supreme Court accepted their petition and nullified the order, but only because of procedural defects that were discovered in the course of issuing the order. Sadly, the Supreme Court steered clear of ethical aspects. It did not view the rabbinical court's threatening and offensive language with

appropriate severity, and expressed no concern about the rabbinical judges' discriminatory and prejudicial views. Similarly, the verdict, delivered in March 2001, came only with the ruling that in the circumstances surrounding this specific case the rabbinical court was not authorized to issue a restraining order (since the issue had nothing to do with the children). The Court did not consider it necessary to make even the briefest statement or comment about the rabbinical judges' threatening and prejudicial declarations.²¹

CONCLUSION

As can be seen, the legal status of lesbians and gays in Israel has undergone a most significant change over the past few years. From a country where in 1988 homosexual sex was strictly forbidden and considered a criminal offense and where the rights of lesbians and gay men were completely denied in all spheres, Israel of the early twenty-first century has turned into a country where lesbian and gay issues are widely discussed, where lawmakers, courts, and state authorities clearly acknowledge the existence of lesbians and gays and their rights in different areas.

Sadly, there is still a long way to go before lesbians and gays in Israel will attain equal rights in all spheres of life, before we will be permitted to marry in a legally binding ceremony, receive full social and legal recognition of our right to joint parenthood, enjoy the same economic benefits as legally married couples, expose the fact that we prefer people of our same sex without worrying that such declaration might affect our work or society's attitude toward us, and enjoy tolerant, open-minded education and complete recognition of the full range of existing lifestyles without discrimination.

Nevertheless, as we have seen, a social environment in which homosexuals and lesbians actively create families and fight for their rights compels the legal system to address issues that were never before raised. Past experience teaches us that in most cases where lesbians and gays fought for their rights they won, and, step by step, in Sisyphean manner, the gay-lesbian community is gradually acquiring status and rights in Israel. Our hope is that we may one day arrive at a point where every man and woman in Israel, and the world round, will enjoy the right to live as they wish and to establish families as they wish, as equal citizens, without having to engage in further struggles.

NOTES

1. *Project Gan Ha'ir v. Horowitz*, 23319/90, 139 (Tel Aviv, Shalom B).
2. *El Al Israel Airline v. Danilovitz*, 48(5) P.D. 749 (1994).
3. *Even v. University of Tel Aviv*, Tel Aviv Labor Court (1994) (unpublished).
4. *Doe v. Doe* (Haifa), 15/2591/87 (1987) (unpublished).
5. *Shtainer v. Minister of Security*, Supreme Court 5398/96 (1996) (unpublished).
6. *Shtainer v. Director of IDF Pension Benefits* (Tel Aviv), 369/94 (1994) (unpublished).

7. *Doe v. Doe* (Haifa), 32520/97 (1997) (unpublished).
8. *Patrick Levy v. Mivtahim* (Tel Aviv), 3816/01 (2001) (unpublished).
9. *Doe v. Doe*, Tel Aviv Family Court 14480/98 (unpublished).
10. Israeli law grants new immigrants the right to purchase a car tax-free. Only the new immigrant and his or her spouse are permitted to drive the vehicle, however.
11. *Shteiner v. Director of Property Tax Authority*, Tel Aviv 1228/01 (pending).
12. *Yaros-Hakak v. General Director, Ministry of Health*, Supreme Court 998/96 (1996) (unpublished).
13. *Doe v. Ministry of Labor and Welfare*, Tel Aviv Family Court 50/97 (unpublished).
14. *Doe v. Ministry of Labor and Welfare*, Tel Aviv District Court 10/99 (unpublished).
15. *Berner-Kadish v. Minister of Interior*, Supreme Court 54(2) P.D. 368 (1999).
16. *Berner-Kadish v. Minister of Interior*, Supreme Court 4252/00 (pending).
17. *Doe v. Doe*, Tel Aviv Family Court 51601/98 (unpublished); *Doe v. Doe*, Tel Aviv District Court 20209/99 (unpublished).
18. *Association for the Protection of Individual Rights et al. v. Minister of Education*, Supreme Court 51(5) P.D. 822 (1997).
19. *CLaF—Lesbian Feminist Community et al. v. Minister of Education*, Supreme Court 7869/98 (unpublished).
20. *Human Rights Association et al. v. Film Review Committee*, Supreme Court 4902/00 (unpublished).
21. *Doe v. Rabbinical Court*, Supreme Court 55(3) P.D. 318 (2000).

THREE

The Story of CLaF: The Community of Lesbian Feminists

Haya Shalom

One July evening in 1998, a number of women in their forties and fifties gathered in my home in one of the outlying Jerusalem neighborhoods with a wonderful view of the Judean Hills. Common to all these women was a history of revolutionary-radical lesbian feminism, and all were alumnae of the Kol Ha-Isha (“women’s voice”) Women’s Center from 1979 through 1984.

This was not just a social gathering to trade memories of the old days and poke fun at each other. It was that and more.

I called the meeting in shocked and angry response to the political stupidity of the organizers of the feminist conference that had taken place in May. At that conference, space was made for presentations by professional political women from the fascist and fundamentalist right wings of the Israeli political spectrum.

The waning of radical feminism and its transformation into a liberal and opportunistic feminism willing to embrace convictions opposed to the feminist message, stirred up no small number of women, including us. As radical, revolutionary lesbians, we saw the revolution fading and feminism not only being usurped by the establishment, but disappearing entirely. To some women, particularly young ones, the struggle seemed to be over and won. These women were not just unaware of alternative, progressive ideas, but exposed daily to opportunistic beliefs that dominate society without challenge or rebuttal.

Similarly, the 1998 feminist conference replicated these trends and worked in collaboration with our chief enemies—the establishment and the government—to prevent any alternative discourse that could seek the next level of feminist thought and action.

Thus, we found ourselves, some ten women, discussing what to do for ourselves and what was required to meet our needs and carry on in this insane world.

The feeling I had—and not just I—of sitting among friends with whom I share a basic political language was like coming home, to the home I grew up in eighteen years ago. This was the home that equipped me with tools and honed my opinions and beliefs, a safe and supportive place in which the first seeds were sown of the separatist feminist lesbian organization that celebrated its thirteenth anniversary in the year 2000. This home was the feminist center Kol Ha-Isha, which opened in the summer of 1979 and closed in Fall 1983. Those were the years that brought about a revolution for many women and, in significant ways, changed the conception of women in Israeli society.

But Kol Ha-Isha was also the product of an eight or nine-year odyssey in which Israeli feminism bubbled and boiled, finally giving birth to the lesbian-feminist movement.

It was Marcia Freedman around whom, in 1970–1971, a group of women gathered in Haifa. This was the first known consciousness-raising group in Israel, and its participants became the founders of the feminist movement. These eight women grew into approximately one hundred who attended the seminar given at the University's Hillel House (Freedman 1990, 45–47). Reactions of hostility and fear were not long in coming.

Meanwhile, the idea spread to Tel Aviv. Academic Zionist women characterized the Tel Aviv group. The Jerusalem group, having no connection with Haifa, grew with women from the non-Zionist and anti-Zionist socialist Left. They viewed the feminist struggle as inseparable from the struggles against other forms of oppression, but also the opposite: they took pleasure from the way men related to them, despite their so-called “progressive” and “enlightened” views. In 1972 the group formally registered as a nonprofit: the Women's Liberation Movement. Four years later the movement's newsletter revealed a problem: those at the university and other locations where the journal was distributed did not know the meaning of the word *feminism*. Hence, a proposal was made to call themselves the “Women's Liberation Movement,” with “the Feminist Movement” following in parentheses.

Three years later, in December 1979, I climbed the stairs of an old building in downtown Jerusalem and for the first time entered the new women's center that had been founded just six months earlier: Kol Ha-Isha. A friend from work had suggested it. “Go there,” she said. “You'll meet women.” She was the first person to whom I had divulged my love of women. On that day, I walked into a small, 2½-room apartment that held a library and office, and my eye caught a notice: “You are invited to a women's party, Saturday night, at Yehudit's house on Bethlehem Road.” I took down the particulars. To this day, I still can't believe I did it: going to a women's party where I probably wouldn't know a soul. Still, I hoped to find a woman there from my student days, whom I had not seen for many years, but had heard was one of the leaders at the center. She was there.

It was a party I'll never forget. The energy that flowed, the strong and handsome women I saw, the secure and open atmosphere, all won my heart.

As a graduate of all-girls schools, it was not strange for me to be in a group with women only, and I quickly felt at home.

The next day I returned to Kol Ha-Isha. I was unemployed at the time and could easily afford to spend lots of time there. My head was fertile for new ideas. Freedman notes (412) those women's centers served as a natural environment for lesbians. And there, lesbians were exposed to feminism for the first time.

What happened to the lesbians in the years 1970–1979 before the advent of women's centers? I asked the women who were active during that period. Ofra, my former classmate, was one of the founders and leaders of Kol Ha-Isha. She relates (interview, August 1998), “We were deep in the closet. At the time, we really did not think that it was good for the movement for us to be ‘out.’ Two American lesbians arrived in Jerusalem and asked us to publicize the formation of a support group for lesbians. But the organization's steering committee did not think well of this, concerned that it would ‘spoil’ the movement and give it a lesbian image.” Clearly, Israeli lesbians had internalized the homophobia of society.

This was true until August 1976, when Ofra was one of the organizers of a conference held at Kibbutz Gezer called “Female Sexuality.” At the beginning of the conference, a woman stood up and announced haughtily, “I am bisexual and I don't have any problem being with men or women. What's the big deal?” Her attitude incensed Ofra, who, until then, had been deep in the closet. Says Ofra (interview, August 1998), “For the first time, I presented myself as a lesbian, and attacked the woman's smug indifference and lack of political awareness.” Other women then identified as lesbians and the discussion flipped from one about women's sexuality to lesbianism.

This was the first time that the subject was openly discussed (other than an academic discussion at the university on July 14 that same year, where the personal/political aspect was not addressed). “From then on,” continues Ofra, “the subject was never again purely theoretical. We stopped stuffing ourselves into the closet, and started talking frankly. It was a great relief.” But even then, as during the first three years of Kol Ha-Isha, the activities were social only—parties, picnics, potluck dinners. Although these were political events by virtue of their having happened, there were no support groups or discussions around them. Only in Kol Ha-Isha's final year, in March 1983, did the lesbians take the issue in hand: the center newsletter began to carry a column called “Women Who Love Women,” despite fears and misgivings over possible reactions. As one of the editors, I recall how much we vacillated and worried. Nonetheless, we held to our convictions to run the column. Consciousness-raising groups for lesbians started, especially for women just becoming aware of themselves as lesbians. There was even some planning for a “Purple Hotline” for lesbians, though this did not get off the ground until ten years later as CLaF's information hotline.

Thus, Marcia Freedman describes (207, and interview, August 1998) that the Haifa lesbians were so deep in the closet that at meetings in private homes,

they closed the shutters. The first time Marcia confronted the issue was in 1975 when a lesbian couple, one of them from the United States, asked her advice about how they might continue in a consciousness-raising group when they were afraid to come out of the closet. "I was shocked," recalled Marcia. "My whole body trembled and I didn't know why. But it was clear that they could not continue in the group without coming out to it" (interview, August 1998).

Prior to that, the word *lesbian* was known as the most humiliating pejorative that an angry crowd could throw at a group of women demonstrating or passing out leaflets. "Back then," continued Freedman (interview, August 1998), "there wasn't even one 'known' lesbian. We were all straight—mothers, academics, and students." The next year—1975–1976—a small core group of lesbians met socially behind closed doors and shuttered windows. Not until Kol Ha-Isha was founded was there a physical place to get together.

In Tel Aviv, things were different. All the founders of the feminist movement were straight academics, and the lesbians among them never considered raising the issue. The atmosphere was so straight that it could not come up. Then a new factor entered the picture—the association of homosexuals and lesbians, then known as the Society for the Protection of Personal Rights (SPPR), founded in Tel Aviv in July 1975. Within the SPPR there was a small core of lesbians, and SPPR meetings were mixed—men and women together. The situation changed a year later when Ziva placed an ad calling lesbians to show up and meet separately within the SPPR. From that moment, the SPPR became the only known venue, and it attracted an audience. Within a year, more than fifty women had joined from greater Tel Aviv, Haifa, and Jerusalem. Six months later, this doubled to some one hundred lesbians. "There was a need for separate meetings," recalls Hannah Klein (interview, October 1989), "because a good many women found it uncomfortable to be in the company of men, transvestites, and transsexuals. This mixed space did not always suit us, and we needed a space of our own. Thus a 'women only' group started at SPPR. At first this meant separate parties, but that was not enough. Yochi initiated a discussion group that dealt mostly with ways to support the homosexual community."

"By the end of 1976," continues Hannah Klein, "the idea of feminism had begun to filter down to the SPPR and some of the women began to feel that the organization lacked an ideological message. Feminism began to intrigue the women there. Then, one day, we decided to go to one of the meetings of the Feminist Movement. It was exciting. We saw lesbian symbols on the earrings and necklaces of several women and they gave us a warm welcome. This was the beginning of reciprocal relations between the lesbians of the Feminist Movement and those of the SPPR. Lesbians became more and more active in the Feminist Movement, to the consternation of many straight women there who feared for the image of the movement." Hannah reveals that the consciousness-raising groups lacked an atmosphere of frankness, thus, when she would talk about her relationships, she would "forget" to mention that they were not with men. But this situation did not last long and she remem-

bers how, at one heated discussion between lesbians and straight women, the straight women refused to listen to the lesbians and finally the lesbians walked out, slamming the door behind them.

Involvement in the Feminist Movement was another stage in the women's gradual disengagement from the SPPR, where they were unable to meet their needs and which was dominated by the men. It was a slow process. First the women set up guidelines for themselves, such as permitting alcohol at women's parties. Explains Hannah (interview, October 1989), "The women were much more moderate drinkers, and for them a bit of alcohol added to the merri-ment. The ban on alcohol for the men stemmed from their tendency to over-drink and the negative byproducts."

Thus, the lesbian community in Israel began to take shape in the context of feminist ideology spreading through the country, while feminism discovered fertile ground for its new ideas with the rise of social protest movements such as the Black Panthers, the New Israeli Left, and others.

POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT

The years from 1972 to 1980 were fraught with political activity for the feminist movement. The fervor and conviction to change society motivated thousands of women who, until then, had never been involved. Women in Jerusalem saw the women's liberation movement as part of the struggle against every form of oppression—of the poor and the Palestinians—and therefore emphasis was placed on equal pay for equal work by women, support of the nurse's strike against their pathetic wages, permission for telephone operators to work the night shift, opposition to rape and violence against women, and support of the Palestinian women's struggle for independence. This last issue disrupted the feminist conference in 1980 due to the opposition of Zionist feminists.

All the women of the movement from the three large cities concentrated their efforts on a campaign for the woman's right to make decisions about her own body, symbolized by the right to a free abortion. In practical terms, this meant advocacy for a clause in a law that would allow abortion for socio-economic reasons. The struggle reached a climax in 1976, when women led by Knesset Member Marcia Freedman burst into the Tel Aviv Hilton where a gynecological conference was taking place. The demonstration, broken up by the police, won headlines and photos in all the media.

At the 1977 elections, many women, including closeted lesbians, joined hands to put *Ness*, the women's political party, into the Knesset. According to Marcia Freedman (160), "Most of us never believed that we would ever win. We meant to take advantage of the election campaign to publicly expose the state of women in this country, to define the problems, and propose solutions."

One aspect of the election campaign, reveals Ofra (interview, December 1988), was a division within the feminist movement. The radical socialist women saw no justification for a women's political party so long as the occupation of Palestinian land was the paramount issue, and insisted that

connections should be drawn among the various forms of oppression. Ofra notes that preoccupation with the elections drained energy from the main work of the women's movement. Thus, the 1977 elections marked a schism within the women's movement.

ALEPH

Although lesbians were among the leaders of the extensive political activity of these years, they were pushed into a corner because of the pressure of women who were concerned about their heterosexual image. This pressure was not articulated, but clearly sensed. Therefore, the first feminist conference, held in Beersheba on May 1, 1978, marked an important milestone for the lesbian movement in Israel. Many lesbians felt uncomfortable about being silenced as lesbians. And thus Maya arose at the conference and announced the founding of a lesbian-feminist organization called Aleph. On signal, a group of women stood up and applauded in solidarity, despite concerns about the media. Indeed, the announcement was covered and reported in the press, which she had expected: feminists = lesbians; and she licked her fingers in delight.

Ten years later, when I met Maya who had come for a short visit to Israel, she said, whether seriously or in jest, "The announcement was political and intended to announce publicly the existence of lesbians in Israel, rather than to found a new organization, which we were not yet ready for."

Indeed, the organization functioned somewhat lamely for a year and a half, with internal tension between the feminists and the nonfeminists. Tough, stormy discussions were held at parties and social events. "The summer of 'seventy-eight," says Hannah Klein (interview, 1988), "was a period of flourishing. There were cultural evenings, poetry readings, singing and music," and especially, says Klein, there was a course in feminism led by Marcia Freedman . . . a course that led to a revolution in the thinking of the women who attended. According to Klein, many of those who attended as a result of hearing about it at the feminist conference were lesbians. However, with no clear ideological framework, the activity of Aleph decreased and finally ended in early 1980.

Thus, the first attempt at lesbian-feminist self-expression faded, but served as a milestone on the way to autonomous organizing. Hannah Klein (interview, 1988) even views this as "all's well that ends well," in that the stage was set for establishing the new feminist center in Tel Aviv—Tsena U'rena—which provided an alternative to the center of the Feminist Movement, which was Zionist.

FEMINIST CENTERS AS A HOME FOR LESBIANS

KOL HA-ISHA—HAIFA

While Aleph was fading, a new initiative, a bookstore and women's center began in Haifa in an attempt to draw lesbians out of the closet.

There was more women's literature available in this one room than in the entire country. Of all the little signs, there was one that women either rushed by very quickly or lingered near overlong. It said "Lesbian Literature." Never before in Israel had the word LESBIAN been written large and clear. (Freedman, 213)

In no time at all, this space became a community where lesbians and straight women could gather and feel safe. Lesbians, in particular, felt safe (interview with Marcia Freedman, August 1998) because of the design of the apartment, in which interior rooms allowed them to create a safe space for themselves.

Marcia notes (in this interview) that the opening of the center heralded a process of normalization in which lesbians were an integral part of center activity. The newsletter publicized lesbian discussions and social activities within the list of other activities. Identification of the center with the lesbians was so strong, however, that it increased the homophobia and worked as a boomerang by causing deep and profound conflicts. The place developed a reputation as the lesbian center (Freedman, 221), homophobia grew, and the hundreds of women who first visited the center now dwindled.

For three years, the Haifa center flourished and had a marked impact not just on the local community, but on other cities as well where similar centers opened. In 1981, the Haifa center closed and Marcia Freedman left Israel, creating a large vacuum. It took another five years until, in 1986, a new Haifa center was opened, one that stands to this day, called *Isha L'Isha* ("woman to woman").

TSENA U'RENA

According to Hannah Klein (interview 1988), a group of women emerged in Tel Aviv who had no connection with the Haifa center and were not willing to compromise with the centrist orientation of either the Feminist Movement or Aleph. These were left-wing women, including some anti-Zionists, as well as feminist lesbians and others—women who were unhappy with the Feminist Movement in Tel Aviv, whose members did not go along with their views and gave them no room to express them.

In 1979 a nucleus of women began to hold meetings and discussions with the intent of slowly but surely establishing a safe space in which a strong, cohesive group could emerge that would create a framework and program for a new feminist center. At that same time, Amira Geldblum, coveting the bookstore that had done so well in Haifa, decided not to wait for a center to open, but to start a bookstore. This was the catalyst that brought about the decision to rent an apartment with a bookstore at the center. Marcia and Maya from Haifa divided the stock of books and gave half to the new store (Freedman, 214). The center was called "Tsena U'rena," the same name used as a guide to Jewish women about religious commandments and behavior. The center operated as a collective. Cooperation and relations among the women were very

good. The women showed their commitment by paying annual membership dues in the amount of a month's wages (an average then of \$200–300). Their enthusiasm and faith in their cause was contagious to others. This was a pleasant, cultured, exciting place, in which there were discussions, parties, and, above all, a feeling of home.

In the book *Lesbiot* (Moore 1995, 283), Emma Gilbert writes, "I joined the collective of Tsena U'rena . . . the place was alive . . . we also had parties, and with all the lesbians around, we felt free. I am saying this because at the [Tel Aviv] Feminist Movement's center a few years before, visible lesbians felt strain around the straight women . . . it felt safer to be outrageous on our own ground."

Hannah Klein recalled that lesbian feminism is very radical, ideological, and tough, and therefore Tsena U'rena fit them like a glove (interview 1988): "Although the [Feminist Movement] center was open to lesbians, it was not geared to meet their specific needs. A new lesbian would find it hard to fit in because she was threatened by the large amount of feminism." Thus, because the agenda did not include the subject of lesbianism and its issues, the lesbians felt: "Again we're working on behalf of women, but what are we getting out of it for ourselves?" Thus, a group of lesbians with no connection to Tsena U'rena decided in 1982 to establish a consciousness-raising group. This was a mix of lesbian women, feminist lesbians, and others. Some fit in well with the activities of Tsena U'rena, but many others did not. For almost two years, the group was active. Over time, they turned to areas that the feminists among them were not interested in pursuing. And therefore, due to differing approaches, this group also disbanded. This happened at about the same time that Tsena U'rena closed, in 1984. There, the burnout was great, as the collective had invested all its efforts, energy, and personal resources in the group, but differences of opinion led to a situation in which the center could not continue: The rift between the radical feminists and the left-wing radical and anti-Zionist feminists was growing. The feminist lesbians were not willing to introduce patriarchal issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict into their struggle, contending that wars between men are not part of the feminist agenda, while the left-wing feminists thought differently. It took another four years, when the first Intifada broke out, for the left-wing feminist approach to prevail and address the current realities. And thus, the third radical feminist center, after Kol Ha-Isha in Haifa and Jerusalem, closed.

JERUSALEM

The radical feminist centers held out for three or four years. They did not have strength for more. Their bold, innovative ideas did not reach broader circles and the number of members never increased. That is the nature of a small group of radicals—they refuse to go with the mainstream or compromise or to say things that will be easy to hear. And thus the Kol Ha-Isha center that had opened in Jerusalem in July 1979 closed in October 1983: "The feminist

movement,” says Nurit (Moore, 126), “was so glorious, so exciting and fresh and new and creative. . . . We [Nurit and her partner Terry] decided to open another branch of the Women’s Center in Jerusalem.”

In 1978, Nurit, her two children, and Terry left the kibbutz near Haifa for Jerusalem, whose soil was fertile for the ideas of these two women. The enthusiasm was great. Women responded to the initiative and through the first year of preparation, group bonding, conceptualizing the center, and collecting money, a small and suitable apartment was found in the center of town. The main players were mostly lesbian: “The whole core group was lesbian and we all knew about each other” (Moore, 128). Despite everything, lesbianism was not a priority and yet, adds Nurit, “It wasn’t [meant to be] a center for lesbians, nor was it meant to be run only by lesbians, but in fact, in the end, it primarily was.”

The Jerusalem center offered women a bookstore, a lending library of feminist newspapers and books that could not be acquired even in the universities, women’s music, social events, discussion evenings, and conversations. There were parties and social activities, suppers and picnics, courses and seminars, and of course CR (consciousness-raising) groups, as well as counseling and information services. For the first time, Jerusalem women were exposed to women’s culture and many attended the center’s activities and took advantage of its good services. Since it was a voluntary organization unaffiliated with any political party or establishment institution, the center allowed women to acquire skills of leadership and public service activism. Its growth, activities, and especially the decision-making processes—through listening, persuasion, and consensus—gave women the very best training for public service activity.

The center quickly became a magnet for lesbians—some veteran feminist activists and some who had just come out of the closet with the support and encouragement of other women in the center. The unique activity and openness of the center attracted many lesbians to join the action.

I took my own first steps at the center. Until then, it had never even occurred to me to dedicate myself to political activity. Politics did not interest me—I viewed it as corrupt and a place for power struggles. However, the way the center operated, the passion of activity, the dedication of women, the free expression of feelings and emotions, the language and new terminology—all jolted my system. With the support of the women, I quickly became integrated into the unique atmosphere. I learned the new ideas, came to understand things that had not previously been explicable, and very soon I began to volunteer and even take responsibility for some key activities—organizing cultural and discussion evenings, being the spokeswoman for the center, serving on the newsletter editorial committee, etc. In other words, the center did for me something that no other institution had before—it allowed me to realize my potential and aspirations, to discover and express skills and talents that until then I didn’t know I had. Thus, at age forty, I reached a level of self-actualization that I clearly could not have attained in other frameworks.

The physical place enabled lesbians to coalesce into a small, radical community that, from 1980 to 1983, became a national radical lesbian center that held leadership positions in both the feminist and lesbian communities of Israel.

In Jerusalem, as in Tsena U'rena in Tel Aviv and Kol Ha-Isha in Haifa, we were exposed to a culture of women and lesbians that was imported directly from the United States—records, videos, books, periodicals, an astonishing and enviable profusion. Lesbians and other women who came from English-speaking countries played musical instruments and sang songs that they wrote. Alongside this culture a local culture began to develop: in the culture evenings that we held, even Israeli women began to read aloud their poems or stories, play guitar, and sing songs. In these sessions, I myself read out loud the first poems that I ever wrote to women.

FORMING A COMMUNITY

Having physical space enabled the growth of a community in Haifa, Tel Aviv, and Jerusalem. A center made possible the main features of a community—social events, social circles, a support network, and mutual help. In other words, it helped the emergence of a commitment to each other's welfare—hosting women who were alone, helping maintain them apartments, aiding those who were sick, helping them move. Dorit O. expressed this in *Lesbiot* (Moore, 71–72) and in an unpublished interview (1984): “To be a lesbian is not just a sexual preference for me, but a rejection of all the patriarchal values that are part of the social mainstream. After work hours, my social group is composed of 99% women and they are all the systems that I need socially and personally: support and care when I am ill or stressed, and company for holidays and the Sabbath, outings and picnics. Lesbians,” she continues, “who rely solely on their income are doomed to a relatively low economic status. And therefore they choose to make use of the tools of mutual help. For example, when one of us rents an apartment, instead of hiring movers, who can be very expensive, some 20 women get together and use their own cars to help you move.” Another interviewee adds, “A barter system also exists: Women with different skills—electricians, plumbers, carpenters, sewers, for example—work on the basis of trade-in. For example, a friend sewed some clothing for me and I gave her lessons in Hebrew and massage. I don't remember the last time I was in a beauty parlor: I model for a friend who is an artist and she cuts my hair in exchange.”

A special characteristic of the Jerusalem community is the large number of lesbians from English-speaking countries, especially the United States.

Jerusalem, more than any other location in Israel, is a magnet for visitors, especially Jews from other countries, some of them here for longer periods, some for days or weeks. The Kol Ha-Isha center attracted young feminist women and university students, and served as an information source for them, a place to connect with Israeli women and an open house. The lesbians among

them were happy to find a dynamic local community, and joined the activity. Little by little, they comprised about half the members of the community, then about one hundred women, and their presence was significant and impressive.

The mutual exposure of these two groups—the Israeli and the foreign—was not always easy. After the initial enthusiasm and mutual discovery of the first meeting, the cultural and class gaps created a tension between us. Tension was apparent on several levels of the relationship: The American women conveyed arrogance and were infuriating in giving advice to the locals, as if the Israeli feminist movement and the lesbian community had not already come a long way in the previous decade. Many American activists had also been active for a year or two in one of the feminist organizations over there. The financial base and economic security characteristic of the lesbians from the States—still getting support from their families back home and insensitive to the economic difficulties of the local women, many from working-class and often poor families—increased the tension between the two groups.

One of the characteristic problems in this encounter was language. The Israelis, sensitive to the language limitations of the foreigners, conducted most of the meetings and discussions in English. The foreigners, most of them Americans, took this for granted, but it created a deep problem for the Israelis: not only were few fluent in English and therefore limited in their ability to express themselves, but the language dominance also came with a feeling of oppression. The foreigners had a sense of superiority, often exploited by dominating the conversation. Hence, the question of language was very sensitive. Knowledge of Hebrew among immigrant women was often considered a measure of the sincerity of their desire to integrate into Israeli society and the women's community in particular. Today, the language of choice is Hebrew and, when necessary, as in discussions or meetings, simultaneous translation is provided to guests or new women by one of the Israelis.

The misunderstandings and tensions, like the need for different forms of expressions, led the women from other countries to create a subculture within the lesbian subculture of Israel. Sometimes there were even outbursts of anger that threatened the very survival of the community. But in the final analysis, this intercultural meeting and the differences of opinion on ideological and practical matters fertilized the lesbian community, hardened it for social and political struggles that would yet emerge, and sharpened the Israeli lesbian-feminist identity.

THE CLOSING

As happened in the other centers, so too in Kol Ha-Isha in Jerusalem, despite the flourishing of a vibrant and radical lesbian community, the lesbian issue was not on the official agenda of the center. This was the case even though controversial political issues did appear on the agenda, such as the invasion of Lebanon in 1982, which the center spoke out against. The center provided the

first feminist reaction to the policies of Israeli occupation, which six years later became the Women in Black movement. Only in the final year of Kol Ha-Isha was there a rejuvenation of women in the collective and an editorial committee that demanded action. For the first time, the center newspaper carried a column called "Women Loving Women," CR groups for beginning lesbians were opened, and there was even an attempt to set up a "purple hot line," an emergency hot line for lesbians (see also Moore, 70–71). Dorit notes, "As it turned out, 95% of the activists in Kol Ha-Isha were lesbians. Yet we were a feminist center, not a feminist/lesbian center. At first, there was a lot of homophobia . . . we lesbians were providing services to straight women—so what about our own needs? . . . Only in the third year of the center did we start lesbian CR groups" (Moore, 70–71).

Four years of vibrant activity, enormous burnout within the collective, inability to recruit women to the center, the image of the center as a radical-lesbian-feminist center—all these ultimately brought about the closure of the center.

Kol Ha-Isha had become a lesbian center, which deterred many other women while the lesbian community was not large enough to maintain it on its own (Moore, 128).

Thus, the last feminist center was closed and the lesbian community in Israel was left without a physical home.

But the power of the community was greater than the gloomy reality. And in Jerusalem, community activity continued in monthly discussions on various issues. A group of more than thirty-five women was created, the parties continued to blossom, and in Tel Aviv a CR group was formed with no connection to Tsena U'rena, which began to meet in 1982 and continued through 1984.

HAIFA

While the centers in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem were closing, the Haifa feminist community began to revive in 1984. After a year-long process and the coalescing of a group, a collective emerged whose core was a CR group. Hannah Levy, in an interview (August 1998), says that because one of the reasons for the closing of the three centers was the lesbian image that put off other women, this was the main issue in establishing guidelines for the new center. Marathon meetings and debates were held. Some of the collective was lesbian, including Hannah herself, and they were opposed to the exclusion of the subject of lesbianism from the center. Thus, in a long and extended process, the Isha L'Isha center, which opened in August 1984, saw the lesbian community as an integral part of the new center. From the very beginning there was a support group for lesbians divided into veterans and newcomers, and all discussions on subjects such as health, relationships, etc. included a lesbian perspective. Thus, the new center walked the thin line of feminist activity without denying or hiding the lesbians. Hannah Levy, then coordinator of the

center, relates (interview, August 1998) that the difficult struggle was with the local press, which looked for a sensational exposé about the center's being lesbian. But Hannah tried to draw a full picture of an inclusive center that intended to encompass all components of the women's population, including lesbians and Arab women, and not to deny or ignore them. This conception gradually led to an integration of lesbian activism within the general activism. Many parties took place with a mix of straight and lesbian women. And when CLaF was founded in 1987, the first independent, lesbian separatist organization, it was an integral part of the center and its activities.

Hannah relates a small anecdote: In 1988, the position of coordinator for Isha L'Isha was advertised, a year after CLaF began. The candidates were presented with situations that the center coordinator would have to deal with, and one question was, "What would you do if CLaF women came to you and asked to use the center for their activity?" One of the candidates, clearly angry, retorted, "That's impossible. It must not be allowed, it's against the law!"

PRE-CLaF

The absence of a women's center and home base eventually brought about the decline of the lesbian community in Jerusalem, and abandonment of the city by many lesbians, first the foreigners who returned to their lands of origin and then quite a few Israeli-born women who left. The latter could no longer tolerate the political-social situation and the ongoing oppression of lesbians. They preferred to move to communities in other countries where lesbian culture flourishes and the distance from political involvement opens opportunities for professional and personal growth.

The closure of Tsena U'rena also brought to a sad close another stage in the evolution of the lesbian community. The vacuum that remained and the cumulative experience from years of intense activity led some to search for new avenues and other lesbian frameworks.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE

During the years of activity in the three radical centers of the main cities (Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and Haifa), the social and cultural life of the lesbian community was enriched. Although feminist organizing focused on creating one network for the entire lesbian community, it also had significant cultural and social effects: discussion evenings, social events, parties, picnics, outings, and cultural evenings of poetry, music, and literature, in which lesbians for the first time found a forum for recognition and enrichment of their lesbian experience. The shutting down of the centers left a vacuum.

In Tel Aviv in 1985, a group of women tried to establish "Reut Nashim" [women's friendship]. Although organizational institutions were created, and a computer was even purchased—a rare commodity in those days—the organization

breathed its last before it could even stand on its feet. The reason for its failure to attract a wider audience was largely that it lacked ideological underpinnings.

At about that time (Winter 1985), I spent several months in the United States and experienced the full power of belonging to a feminist, lesbian community. I discovered and learned to appreciate the rich community life, with its diverse lesbian cultures. In March 1986 on the way back to Israel, I participated in a conference of the International Lesbian Information Service (ILIS), based in Amsterdam, but organized by lesbians in Geneva. I tried to learn from the experience of lesbians from all over the world. I also took advantage of the (then) rare opportunity to learn about third world lesbians and how they waged their struggle. Since their culture is not dissimilar from that of the Mediterranean—given the oppressive roles of religion and the military—I tried to learn from their experience.

The most lasting impression I had from these encounters was the awareness that, despite the terrible, sometimes life-threatening oppression, they found ways not only to meet with each other, but also to define their lesbian identity in autonomous cultural terms—separate from conventional Western definitions.

This wealth of new experiences that I brought back to Israel reawakened my desire to have a specifically lesbian organization in the country. It was my belief that an organization like this was necessary for developing and nurturing a distinctive lesbian culture in Israel, one that would draw upon the lesbian experience here and now, and not be rooted in foreign sources—American or other. I believed that fostering lesbian culture and identity would strengthen the community for the political struggle over its rights, which lay ahead.

At that time, several other efforts to organize were made. In early 1986, Hadar Namir, one of the activists in SPPR, started the Mobile Coffee House, in which women took turns hosting lesbian groups in their homes for an evening of socializing and discussion. After several months, Tel Aviv's Feminist Movement agreed to open its doors and allocate space to this group.

But these get-togethers did not address the desire of many lesbians to tackle political and ideological issues. Thus, in December 1986, as part of the national feminist conference, I ran a workshop on "Lesbian Culture and Organizing." Some twenty women came to this workshop, and agreed to broaden these discussions to include as many lesbians as possible. As a result, fifty lesbians met in January in the Feminist Movement offices in Tel Aviv, for what now appears to have been a historic meeting that laid the foundations for new lesbian organizing, which ultimately became a real community. This meeting revealed the full depth of the need for more content and meaning in lesbian gatherings in Israel, as well as the desire for lesbian separatist activity. Nevertheless, everyone agreed that the place to begin was by clarifying and creating a feminist-ideological platform.

That April, a seminar on "Lesbian and Feminism" was held at Isha L'Isha in Haifa, with sixty women participating. Half of these were "graduates" of the

feminist centers that had closed down, and half were lesbians from SPPR, who were new to feminism. The encounter between the two groups was productive, and it was agreed to continue biweekly meetings in Tel Aviv, with women from the lesbian group setting the agenda for discussion and activities. This was unquestionably a milestone in the creation of the lesbian-feminist organization that exists today.

In that first year, 1987, I initiated and coordinated activities, trying to involve as many women as possible. The name CLaF—an acronym in Hebrew for Lesbian Feminist Community—was chosen after feeling that we needed a logo for the newsletters we issued. The word *CLaF* is easy to pronounce and, in addition to its service as an acronym, means two things in Hebrew: “card,” as in playing cards, and “parchment”—the material on which important statements and decisions were inscribed in ancient times. CLaF quickly became a popular framework, and the only association of lesbians in Israel (Kantrowitz and Klepfisz 1998, 225–26). Over time, the meetings became a social and cultural forum for local and Western poetry and music, as well as a forum for discussions about subjects such as lesbians in the kibbutz, lesbian mothers, sexuality, and ideology. An effort was also made to keep up with and learn from the experience and struggles of lesbians in other countries.

The success of CLaF over the years can be ascribed to having informal leadership and organizational structures, flexibility and ideological openness, and a wide variety of events. It met the day-to-day needs of lesbians to get together, celebrate holidays with each other, exchange views, and, above all, create a space in which everyone would feel at home—artists, poets, musicians, thinkers, community organizers, and others.

In an interview in 1988, Hannah Klein summed up the spirit of CLaF: “Unlike its antecedents, CLaF succeeds because it is closer to the community. Its liberal feminism does not threaten others with super-feminism, and it is open to every woman. In the past, some women had been uncomfortable because of radical ideas. But there is ideology and there is reality.” CLaF is realistic and manages to walk the fine line between being a feminist organization and being open to women with other ideas. There are still many lesbians who avoid CLaF because of its elitist Ashkenazi image, and its compromising feminism. Today this is a problem that CLaF needs to address.

The voluntary nature of CLaF placed great demands on its members, and that took a toll on many. In late 1987, I withdrew from CLaF to continue my studies and, in November, a group of women undertook the tasks of coordination. Activity began in earnest, but the harsh political climate in Israel as a result of the first Intifada (the Palestinian struggle for independence), Israel’s brutality in the occupied territories, and the sense of a closed society inside Israel led some key women to emigrate to the West, primarily the United States and England, where they felt more comfortable partly because of the larger lesbian community and partly because of their distance from the grim realities in Israel.

The new collective launched in 1988 sought to create a feminist organization with a new spirit—in activity, decision making, values, and internal work. This was the first and only collective that did not hide its support for the Intifada and the struggle to liberate Palestine, and understood the connection among all forms of oppression. An English-language leaflet describing CLaF at the time included a statement expressing opposition to the Israeli occupation, and a newsletter in May 1988 stated, “We must take a clear stand about it [the Israeli occupation].” An evening devoted to discussing this was held in June 1988, but no record remains.

During this period, CLaF joined a feminist forum headed by NOGA, the only feminist magazine in Hebrew at the time. This forum met in order to renew feminist conferences in Israel, marking two decades of Israel’s feminist movement. For the first time, lesbians were openly part of a feminist coalition, and participated in organizing the conference. Indeed, a decision was made in 1993 that every conference forum must have representatives of each of the following four groups—Mizrahi women, Ashkenazi women, Palestinian women, and lesbians.

However, organizational crises set in, as documented in the newsletters. In the February, June, and August 1989 issues, Tal Yaros-Hakak calls upon women to join the shrinking collective, initiate and attend activities, or at least provide feedback. In *Lesbiot* (Moore, 314), I also point out the low energy and my own disappointment that women do not understand the connection between the oppression of lesbians and others. Some of the crisis was due to the tension between lesbians who saw no connection between their lifestyle and feminism, and lesbians who defined themselves as feminists. This tension exists to this day, deterring lesbians who are reluctant to identify as feminists as well as those who think that CLaF is not radical enough on feminist issues. The conflict peaked in the summer of 1993 when a group of CLaF women decided to publicize events without the organizational name, to avoid using the word *feminist*. They believed that this might entice new women to the movement for whom “feminism” was a dirty word. To my relief, this initiative came to naught, and CLaF continues to publicize its activity under its full name.

JERUSALEM

The crisis in Tel Aviv led women from Jerusalem to initiate their own activities. These women had begun to tire of coming to Tel Aviv for activities, and they also wanted activities more suitable to the needs of the Jerusalem community. Thus in the years 1989–1991, and later 1992–1995, the Jerusalem community flourished and drew many lesbians to it. CLaF women initiated coverage in the local press and radio, and pasted stickers everywhere. During this period gay-friendly bars and coffee houses opened in Jerusalem, where women held monthly meetings. But above all, political activism increased when lesbians joined and often organized protest groups of women against the

occupation—Women in Black, the Women and Peace Coalition, and others. Most of the lesbians in this activity were deep in the closet, but once in a while we counted our share of the vigils, and noted that we comprised some 25–30 percent of all the Women in Black vigils, then numbering 30–130 each week.

The women's peace movement itself ignored the large presence of lesbians, and failed to see a correlation between lesbian oppression and the oppression of others. Hannah Safran deals with this in another chapter.

THE TURNING POINT

The turning point came in the summer of 1989 when CLaF's August newsletter reported on a meeting in which women expressed their desire to resume activities with new commitment. The October 1989 newsletter celebrates the joy of creativity and activism, and suggests new avenues of activity for the coming months.

One of the most successful outcomes of this period was the *CLaF Hazak* magazine, edited by seven women. Once a sparse, amateur newsletter, this magazine is today a forty-page, full color process print with a professional graphic layout. The production of this magazine sorely strains the CLaF budget and incurs heavy losses, but because of its importance as the only feminist-lesbian magazine, it continued to appear till the end of 1999 when the budget of CLaF couldn't cover its expenses any more.

CLaF Hazak responded to the need of feminist lesbians to express their unique feminist agenda. This agenda is not carried in gay magazines like *Maga'im* and *Zman Varod*, which cater to gay men, or even *Noga*, the only feminist magazine in Israel. *Noga* has been publishing since the late 1970s, but has addressed the lesbian issue only twice, a surprising fact that can only be attributed to homophobia.

New initiatives evolved during this period, such as a study group that lasted for more than a year and included women from different parts of Israel; or the "House" group—a collective of women who established a (rented) resort home in a village near the Sea of Galilee that for two whole years was used by the collective or any woman seeking refuge and wanting a lesbian-women's space in the heart of nature. With ten radical feminist lesbians, this group also applied feminist ideology and theory to their activities and life (such as consensus-driven decision making, banning meat from the house, not admitting adult sons, etc.) The house remained open throughout the Gulf War (Winter–Spring 1991), and served as a refuge for women from the central region of Israel, at the time under attack by Iraqi SCUD missiles.

The first conference, "Open CLaF," held in November 1990, strengthened the organization with new and ongoing activities, but the subsequent Gulf War paralyzed it, as well as the rest of the country, for half a year. This blow led to renewed crises in the years 1991–1994. The CLaF publications indicate repeated calls of activists asking for feedback, and in issue #6, Tal

Yaros-Hakak, the leading CLaF activist in the 1990s, notes the apparent lack of interest and asks, “Am I organizing evenings and working on the magazine for my own pleasure? Or are there others who also benefit from this? What subjects interest you? What are you personally willing to do?” Such questions appear from time to time and indicate the decline in interest in CLaF’s activities.

THE MAJOR MILESTONE

February 2, 1992, marks the most significant milestone in the politics of the gay-lesbian community in Israeli society as a whole.

Knesset Member Yael Dayan, then serving as chair of the Knesset Committee on the Status of Women, decided to establish a Subcommittee for Gay and Lesbian Rights. In a conversation with Yael in January 1999, she told me the reasons for this decision—her interest in human rights in general, and the fact that friends in the gay-lesbian community urged her to take on the issue.

There can be no doubt that the media exposure of activist men and women from SPPR—Hadar Namir and Liora Moriel, in particular—was the trigger to place the issue of gay and lesbian rights on the public agenda.

This radical initiative, unprecedented in Israeli history, ironically turned the Knesset and its legislation for gay rights into one of the most progressive in the world. Needless to say, the event met with vehement opposition of religious and conservative Knesset members. They made a huge scene that day, declaring that the meeting would be held only over their dead bodies. But despite their opposition, and thanks to the support of Shevah Weiss, then Speaker of the Knesset, who declared that no person should be barred from entering the Knesset, the first meeting was held in a festive atmosphere, fully recorded by journalists and cameras. Dozens of gay men and lesbians filled the corridors and meeting hall of the Knesset. For many, it was the first time out of the closet. The excitement was palpable. I remember how I, then employed by the Knesset, strutted around like a proud peacock. There is no way to describe the feelings of those present that day: faces were radiant, eyes gleamed, and some saw this as the dawn of the messianic age.

The enormous media coverage was not only balanced, but also even sympathetic, bestowing legitimacy upon the gay-lesbian community and transforming social perceptions. The speeches made by gay representatives—Uzi Even and Sharon Gershoni—were broadcast in prime time on Israel’s only TV channel, and were seen by hundreds of thousands of Israelis. Their words and proud, radiant bearing significantly undercut homophobia and the negative image of homosexuals. What’s more, the events had a profound effect on the self-image of gays. The weak, docile, apologetic attitude brought on by prolonged residence in the closet gradually turned into a powerful and audacious pride, reaching a peak in a large, gaudy gay pride parade on the streets of Tel Aviv in June 1998.

The impact of this event on CLaF was tremendous. From then on, more women were willing to appear in the media and educate the public regarding the difficulties that lesbians face—discrimination, social rejection, fear, hatred, lesbian parenting, relations between parents and lesbian daughters, treatment at work, and others. In media articles, lesbians described a vibrant community, life as a couple, parent–daughter relations, lesbian motherhood, children of lesbians, and the destructive effect of being in the closet and its implications for one’s life at work, in society, and on oneself, in particular. This coverage motivated many to join CLaF.

In Jerusalem, in February 1992, the stronghold of conservatism and fundamentalism in Israel, women dared hold their first lesbian-rights demonstration. This was in response to an attempt to shut down an exhibition of photos of a lesbian separatist community in San Francisco. The demonstration was a declaration that lesbians are alive and well in Jerusalem, too, to the shock of fundamentalist groups. The demonstration, though small, had considerable media coverage and gave a push to the establishment of a hot line in Jerusalem, which existed for the next six years.

HAIFA

Since the establishment of CLaF, attests Hannah Levy, the Isha L’Isha center in Haifa underwent a transformation, as CLaF members began autonomous activity under the auspices of the center. These changes can be attributed to the special character of Isha L’Isha, which found a way to reflect the diversity of the women—straight, lesbian, Jewish, Arab, Ashkenazi, and Mizrahi women—and thus CLaF became an integral part of the center.

This policy and its support for CLaF was reflected in Isha L’Isha’s hiring, in 1995–1996, of a half-time lesbian community coordinator for CLaF activities—to establish support groups, open a hot line, etc. Hannah Safran, who had been overall coordinator of Isha L’Isha between 1988 and 1995, notes in an interview (August 1998), “Isha L’Isha was a safe haven and a place to absorb new lesbians. It provided a home for them. Many were integrated and stayed to take on leadership roles in the community, and the roster of sixty lesbians in Haifa grew longer and longer.”

TEL AVIV

In Tel Aviv, the national center for organizing, many groups and media approached CLaF for information about lesbian life. CLaF participated regularly in the Subcommittee for Gay and Lesbian Rights, ensuring that lesbian needs would also be heard even though committee members tended to discuss issues only from the gay male point of view.

During 1992–1993, many lesbian couples found CLaF to be a good forum from which to address political issues—the rights of lesbian couples, recognition of lesbian motherhood (even nonbiological) and their children, artificial insemination, adoption rights by the nonbiological mother, etc. The ferment during these and later years corroborate Hannah Klein’s prediction that “CLaF will succeed because it is not too radical and open to a wide range of women.”

FROM AN UNDERGROUND TO AN OFFICIAL ORGANIZATION

From its founding, there was talk of turning CLaF into a registered nonprofit for purposes of fundraising and as a political statement. In 1995, CLaF finally came out of the closet.

A general meeting was called for April 29, 1995 (preceded by preparatory meetings), and the response was impressive—some two hundred women came from all over Israel. The discussion revolved around whether to register CLaF as a nonprofit or remain a volunteer effort with no formal legal status, other than as a project of a registered organization. The deliberations were intense and stormy, raising issues that had never before been confronted. Arguments against a change in the status of CLaF included: being registered requires public exposure, but many women are still in the closet; being registered entails bureaucratic administration and accountability—why not remain a project and see how it goes? Another strong argument was ideological: a revolutionary movement does not need legitimacy from the establishment (i.e., the Ministry of the Interior) and should steer clear of establishment institutions.

The arguments in favor of registering CLaF as a nonprofit organization carried the day, however: women spoke of the difficulty of working with gay men in mixed-gender organizations and the ongoing struggle to prevent them from dominating. But in women’s organizations, as well, there were apprehensions that conflicts of interest would arise between the feminism of CLaF and the sponsoring organization. Even a feminist organization, experience had taught, might not give due attention to the lesbian issue. (Avital Yarus-Hakak—interview Aug. 1998—recalls that an effort at cooperation had been made in 1989, in a meeting with the chair of SPPR. A serious conflict emerged at the meeting, as the chair was unwilling to draw the link between different types of oppression—specifically of the Palestinian people by Israel—at a time when the Intifada was raging. The meeting ended with nothing having been accomplished.) Activists also pointed out that in its nine years of existence, CLaF had grown from fifty to two hundred women and its activities had expanded both within the community and in public advocacy work together with other feminist and human rights organizations. Another argument was that being a registered nonprofit would allow CLaF to receive grants without depending on other organizations. Finally, the transformation of CLaF into a nonprofit was regarded as a political statement that testified to its maturity.

The first decision of the newly elected board of the CLaF nonprofit was to run a mock trial as part of Gay Pride Day, scheduled for June 1995, on the subject of the adoption of children by nonbiological mothers—an issue of urgency to many lesbians. The debate was co-sponsored by the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, which had begun to expand its work to include lesbian and gay rights, and this may also have been a product of the work of the subcommittee chaired by Yael Dayan.

The mock trial was CLaF's first public media exposure, and it was extensive: TV, newspapers, and radio stations were full of interviews and discussions about an issue that few had ever discussed until then. The larger surprise was the willingness of lesbian women to expose themselves to the media.

Motherhood and couplehood were issues that had constantly been part of the lesbian community—in discussions, publications, and even a study day held in November 1996. Following this study day, a documentary film was broadcast in prime time, on national TV, which catapulted the issue into the headlines and kept it there for weeks. In the film, lesbians were interviewed, especially Tal Yaros-Hakak, who, in 1996–1997, led a personal battle that became a public struggle to eliminate psychological examinations by social workers for single women (including lesbians) who request artificial insemination. The Association for Civil Rights in Israel filed a petition on her behalf, and the court ruled that application of this examination was discriminatory. Tal and her partner also asked the court to allow adoption of the children by the nonbiological mother. In January 1999, the court ruled in favor of custody of the children, an important milestone on the way to adoption. In its decision, the judge asserted that the decision for custody does not add to or detract from the demand for adoption, and thus another barrier to recognition of lesbian parenthood was dismantled. Tal's unprecedented struggle for the lesbian and gay rights, her courage and the extensive media exposure of her case, won her international recognition and she was awarded the Philippa de Souza prize in 1998, given by the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC)—the first Israeli to win an international award in the struggle for gay and lesbian rights.

Throughout CLaF's existence as a nonprofit, it has participated in and led many public campaigns for gay and lesbian rights, such as the fight against the education ministry's censorship of a TV program for youth showing lesbian and gay relationships, and protest of the bigoted statements made by Israeli president Weizman about gays and lesbians.

During this period, the number of CLaF members has doubled, from two hundred to four hundred, and the newsletter now reached six hundred women, including many lesbian couples.

The more publicity CLaF received, the more small groups of gays and lesbians sprang up—a student group called “The Other Ten Percent” was launched at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and the Open House was founded, also in Jerusalem, as a meeting place for all gay and lesbian groups in the city, including Palestinians from East Jerusalem.

CLaF's cultural activities blossomed. In Haifa a "chamber club" was founded comprised of lesbian artists who performed once a month. The high point was a community theater group called "Zoo-Show," which performed comic and satiric lesbian sketches all over the country, not just to lesbian audiences, in Tel Aviv, Haifa, and Jerusalem. Some of these settings included International Women's Day, Gay Pride Day, and others.

Since the closing of the Feminist Movement offices in Tel Aviv, SPFR now provides space for CLaF's activities in Tel Aviv. At the last annual CLaF conference, a long list of yearly activities was reported—in coffee houses, pubs, and other places, especially in Tel Aviv. But activity also thrives in Jerusalem—practical and theoretical seminars, social events for different age groups, parties, and cultural events. When CLaF marked its tenth anniversary, a record number of five hundred lesbians gathered—the same number of women who participate in the annual feminist conferences. A festive evening to mark the end of the celebration took place in a hall belonging to Tel Aviv City Hall, with the participation of lesbians, family, and other supporters.

At the end of the millennium, December 1999, the new and first home of CLaF was opened with the participation of the Tel Aviv mayor and members of the Knesset, Yael Dayan and Zehava Galon.

THE PAST FIVE YEARS

The last five years have seen a profound transformation in the gay-lesbian community of Israel—objective and even sympathetic media reports about legal battles to recognize same-sex marriage and artificial insemination, interviews with lesbians and their mothers, and the formation of many support groups. In Tel Aviv, bars, coffee houses, and discotheques open (and sometimes close due to competition). Tel Aviv has become the gay capital of Israel, outshining Jerusalem and Haifa, which have their own gay nightlife but can't compete with Tel Aviv. Drag queens are adopted with love and a smile by straight society—not surprising that chauvinistic Israel loves the grotesque portrayal of women by men. Even the lesbian community rejects the protests of radical feminist lesbians, challenging them, "Don't you have a sense of humor?" More and more same-sex couples hold hands walking around town, and public parks are full of gays (not without some incidents, but they are relatively uncommon). Homophobic comments made by Israel's president or other celebrities meet with loud public protest, led by human rights organizations. The community is no longer attacked with impunity: announcements about gay and lesbian activities are on the rise (together with attacks by ultra-Orthodox and fundamentalists). These attacks and the subsequent public outcry only empower the gay-lesbian community.

The empowerment of the community and need to act have led to an increasing number of people who view politics as an arena for action. They

include Uzi Even, who ran for the Knesset, and Michal Eden, one of the leaders of CLaF and the first Mizrahi lesbian who not only ran, but also won election from the Meretz Party to Tel Aviv's city council. In a hotly contested race, many gay supporters in Tel Aviv and even farther afield joined hands to help get Michal elected, in an extraordinary effort of canvassing and support. This support inspired sympathetic media coverage, and ultimately Michal won second place in her party, which ensured her a seat in the council. For the first time in the history of Israel, an out lesbian is serving in a serious political office.

Running for political office is one of the symptoms of change in the community, as individuals, with the full support of the organizations in which they evolved, try to penetrate the corridors of political power in an effort to increase their impact. During these years, liberal parties from the Left and Center (and a few from the Right) have come to understand the electoral power of the community as a group. These trends have also strengthened the establishment character of the community, for better and worse.

Thus, at the first Gay Pride Parade held in Tel Aviv in June 1998, with thousands of gays and lesbians participating, a small number of Knesset members from the Left showed up, and even one from a right-wing party.

The victory of Dana International, a transsexual singer, at the Eurovision Song Festival in Europe again brought pride and empowerment to the community. Dana used every occasion to express her political views on behalf of gay and lesbian rights, and quickly became the queen of the movement. Another important event that helped advance the political agenda of the community was the Drag Show in May 2003, which was followed by a spontaneous parade in the streets of Tel Aviv led by two lesbians—Hadar Namir and Michal Eden.

But, ironically, now that the lesbian community has been so successful, there are threats to the F-word in CLaF—its feminist ideology. CLaF can be proud of the fact that many young women have joined and are assuming positions of leadership, playing a role in shaping policies and activities. Today's young women, however, interpret feminism in a liberal vein and often take things for granted. Many believe that the struggle is over. For them, coming out of the closet is not difficult and sometimes even "in," as opposed to middle-aged and older lesbians, many of whom still find it difficult to come out of the closet, as married women, divorcees, mothers of children, and even old-time lesbians

Tal Yaros-Hakak (interview Sept. 1998) notes that "The CLaF board is no longer homogeneous, meaning purely feminist. Today CLaF is much more heterogeneous, and each faction pulls in its own direction. This leads to harsh criticism." Radical feminists claim that CLaF is not sufficiently feminist, while many lesbians, especially the young ones, claim that CLaF is too radical and scares away nonpolitical lesbians who would otherwise join. In either case, this is an ongoing struggle. It even affects the decision-making process of the board:

the more radical women want to make decisions by consensus, while the others demand efficiency and majority rule. Some demand the professionalization of CLaF, that is, introducing professional women into operational positions, while others want to retain the popular and egalitarian character in which each woman can try out her skills and grow through hard work and activism. I myself am an example of this, as I have acquired my experience by activism, with support from my friends, and today I have human assets that I could not have acquired anywhere else.

Unlike the past, today's opportunities are endless, especially in the central region of Israel. Activity is open and advertised in the local newspapers in Tel Aviv. And in the national magazine *Zman Varod*, announcements for women's parties proliferate, indicating that CLaF no longer has a monopoly over them, even though they are its main source of income. Cultural products—CDs, videos, and audiocassettes—are openly sold in alternative stores located side by side with regular stores. Small entrepreneurial initiatives have also begun to sell stickers, T-shirts, jewelry, etc.

Avital Yaros-Hakak in the same interview, continues, "Young lesbians came into a different world than the one we were born into. They don't feel that they have to be constantly on guard and struggle, as we had. Everything was given to them on a silver platter. Feminism doesn't interest them. They are more interested in spiritual experiences, games, parties, and having a good time. Lesbians are more a part of society at large, and there's no reason to join CLaF in order to feel safe or meet more lesbians. Until two or three years ago, we were the only act in town for lesbians who took an interest in couplehood or parenthood, today there's an entire network of lesbian mothers who know each other. So even about this, CLaF has no exclusive rights." She adds, "Where we think we can still make a difference is in public education."

Despite the feeling of progress, freedom, and empowerment, letters have appeared lately in the *Zman Varod* ("Pink Time") magazine in which young lesbians who live in outlying areas of Israel (small towns or villages distant from the larger cities) note the difficulty of living in a closed society. The openness and fun that appear in national publications seem very remote to them. They ask that we remember that the situation in greater Tel Aviv is not true all over Israel. Indeed, we must not forget this. Our achievements have not reached into every corner of Israeli society. A young lesbian can still feel enormously isolated living far from the big city.

Today a handful of radical feminist lesbians have begun to meet to clarify and renew the ideology we believe in and the social revolution to which we aspire. It is clear to us that despite the signs of progress, we are very, very far from realizing our vision of society. We want to remind women all over that the struggle is not yet over. When we lift the veils of liberalism and pluralism, we see the true problems facing society—sexism, patriarchy, racism, nationalism, oppression, militarism, capitalism, classism, and environmental neglect.

REFERENCES

- Freedman, Marcia. *Exile in the Promised Land: A Memoir*. Ithaca: Firebrand, 1990.
- Kantrowitz, Melanie Kaye, and Irena Klepfisz, eds. *The Tribe of Dina: A Jewish Woman's Anthology*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1989. 214–26.
- Moore, Tracy, ed. *Lesbiot: Israeli Lesbians Talk about Sexuality, Feminism, Judaism, and their Lives*. New York: Cassel, 1995.
- Rosenbloom, Rachel, ed. “Unspoken Rules: Sexual Orientation and Women’s Human Rights.” *International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission*. U.S: 1995. 95–100.
- Torton-Beck, Evelyn, ed. *Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology*. Watertown, MA: Persephone Press, 1982.

HEBREW SOURCES

- CLAF Hazak—CLaF magazine.
- CLaF newsletters.
- Shalom, Haya. “Culture and Lesbian Organizing,” position paper prepared for a feminist seminar in December 1986.
- Unpublished manuscript, written for a local Jerusalem newspaper, 1984.

INTERVIEWS

- Yael Dayan—January 1999 (informal conversations).
- Marcia Freedman—August 1998.
- Tal and Avital Yarous-Hakkak—September 1998.
- Ofra Kamar—August 1998.
- Hannah Klein—October 1989 and August 1998.
- Hannah Levy—August 1998.
- Hannah Safran—August 1998.

This page intentionally left blank.

FOUR

To Re-Construct the Community: Lesbians on a Kibbutz

Nurit Barkai

A small house, built without a red-tiled roof because of the Katyusha missile attacks from Lebanon, the greenery of trees and lawn, banana fields leading down to the blue of the Mediterranean Sea, and two cats: an inviting, pastoral, kibbutz scene. Stepping back for a moment from the pastoral visuals and delving deeper, we discover a community that shares a routine and day-to-day life that is at times both difficult and convenient; the kind of life that characterizes a group of people who believe in the same ideology and build their lives based on it. It is a community that has built its life outside the country's urban centers, a community that has chosen to adopt communal and egalitarian values and norms in an individualistic, materialistic world and has adopted tools for formal and informal social supervision in order to preserve the "straight and narrow path."

It may very well be that an encounter with the kibbutz community's way of life will stand in strong opposition to the pastoral image of the kibbutz as a place to live. The kibbutz contains the promise of a life lived in nature, far from the noise and pollution of large cities, a place where one can create an alternative communal existence and belong to a group that shares visions and accomplishments. It also contains the promise of difficulties that occur in a small and closed society, in which everyone knows everyone else and there is no room for even a moment of anonymity. This inviting pastoral scene can quickly turn into a veritable prison.

Living on kibbutz as a lesbian emphasizes the contradiction between the pastoral invitation extended by kibbutz life and the feelings of rejection and alienation experienced by the member whose personal life does not conform to the informal social norms of the kibbutz community.

In order to better understand the challenges facing lesbians living on kibbutz, I will describe a number of central elements that shape the kibbutz lifestyle.

The kibbutz is a voluntary social framework, situated in a defined, and often enclosed, geographical area. The territory is physically marked off. Kibbutz members jointly own this area and most of the activities of the residents occur here.

The average kibbutz community consists of three hundred to seven hundred adults. Everyone knows, and knows about, everyone else. The community's small size and fixed location cause the continuous meeting of the same people in different life spheres: at work, in child rearing, and in social and cultural contexts. Both public and private life occur in the same place with the same people. This poses a real difficulty for those interested in creating the "double life" that characterizes closeted lesbians and homosexuals.

Though this dense reality creates pressure caused by unrelenting encounters with the same small number of people, it also enables special relationships to be forged between people who live side by side and are acquainted with each other through the various facets of their personalities. Kibbutz members are not one-dimensional to each other, they have many personas: as workers, family members, and community members. This kind of interaction allows for more holistic relationships to evolve between group members than those that generally exist between individuals in modern society.

A conscious choice must be made to live, let alone to stay, on the kibbutz. The decision to stay is influenced by many factors, with the main factor being the mutual commitment that is created over time between the individual and the community, and vice versa.

Kibbutz members invest of themselves in social, work, and family arenas. They send their roots down into the soil and gain support and encouragement from fellow members. In turn, the community provides them with their livelihood, home, social benefits, education, culture, and community. This mutual dance strengthens the connection between individuals and the community in which they live.

The fact that its members have chosen to live on kibbutz is not enough to maintain the kibbutz community, which creates formal and informal social control mechanisms to ensure that members behave according to kibbutz objectives.

This social control includes clear codes of behavior that are accompanied by sanctions against members who transgress these codes, as well as informal mechanisms such as public opinion and intensive gossip. The mechanisms tend to be effective in small communities with clear and rigid norms of behavior.

As the kibbutz is a cooperative community, every member is accountable to all other members for his or her actions. Though this creates an atmosphere that might be perceived as "nosy" in other contexts, on kibbutz it is legitimized and points to the ways in which the community as a whole influences the behavior of its individual members. The legitimacy of talking about anyone you want wherever you may be, being judgmental toward their actions, stems in part from a purported need to exert social pressure in order to guide

individuals toward normative behavior. This is one of the most effective ways the kibbutz community has found to enforce its written and unwritten rules and norms.

The kibbutz was established as a revolutionary, cooperative, and egalitarian society and it still demands loyalty and high levels of identification with the community and its objectives from its members. Nevertheless, in many respects, the family unit has become the kibbutz's main social unit, due to its role in educating the next generation; in determining its members' primary social status; and in creating a safe and supportive environment for individuals.

The kibbutz initially supported a revolution that defied the unequal, patriarchal structure of the traditional family, replacing it with the egalitarian group, creating shared education that included children's houses, a child-raising method based on the belief that the next generation must be raised and educated by the community as a whole and not by the biological parents. Despite this attempt to create something radically different, the family is currently the strongest social unit on kibbutz and it is the basis for most of the kibbutz's lifestyle. Today's kibbutz has a clear (heterosexual) family orientation. The kibbutz society is multigenerational and the family, with all its branches, has become its leading social and political force.

The mixture of parents and children and multigenerationality characterizes all the kibbutzim today: parents who raise their children, children who grow up in close proximity to their parents, adult kibbutz members who live near their parents who are also kibbutz members, and kibbutz members who care for their elderly parents living on kibbutz. Family circles grew and broadened within the kibbutz, with the family continuing to be a strong social force. The family unit has become the most influential factor on kibbutz public and social life.

The kibbutz family is generally a traditional one, with clearly defined roles for men and women. The revolutionary kibbutz did not succeed in bringing about a real revolution in gender equality either in the family unit or in society. Nevertheless, by creating shared services such as laundry and childcare and by expecting women to work outside of the home, the kibbutz did free women almost completely from financial dependency on their husbands.

Women, who were forced to fight for equal status from the very beginning of the kibbutz movement, eventually chose the family as the arena in which to accumulate status and influence and this contributed to elevating the family unit to the most significant social and political factor in kibbutz life.

A heterosexual, family-oriented, multigenerational, unegalitarian community, which maintains a rigid normative lifestyle in an isolated, and physically fenced-off, location, offers a very complicated life for its "deviant" members. The loneliness experienced in a community of this sort can be unbearable.

Members whose lifestyle is perceived to deviate from formal or informal norms find themselves isolated from society. Individuals who do not situate themselves within the heterosexual family lifestyle are perceived as deviant and threatening to the families surrounding them.

There is no doubt that the deviant on kibbutz can expect loneliness within a community that, at its base, is an “all together” community. The loneliness experienced in a community of this sort is magnified, and at the end of the day, it forces deviants to leave. A methodical process in which deviants and different individuals leave the kibbutz community “assists” it in remaining very homogeneous socially, as well as anachronistic and underdeveloped.

THE KIBBUTZ “CLOSET”

The messages—to be like everyone else, to be “all right,” to be what I am expected to be—have accompanied me all my years on the kibbutz. Who wants to be deviant, different, the other, anyway? Ultimately we all want to be beautiful and perfectly suited to the society in which we were raised. To be honest, I made significant attempts at constructing a life that would suit me with the kibbutz milieu: a life that includes involvement in kibbutz community through the creation of a normative “kibbutz” way of life. (Marriage, childbearing, etc.)

Many men and women who were born on kibbutz leave the kibbutz early in their lives, generally during their twenties, when they discover their homosexuality. At this stage, the possibility of integrating a lesbian or homosexual life with kibbutz life seems impossible. The difficulty inherent in being deviant on kibbutz is reinforced when the difference also embodies a negative stigma.

Shaping one’s life as an adult on kibbutz starts after mandatory military service, when young people return to the kibbutz. This move marks the beginning stages of integration into the kibbutz society and the accumulation of social status. This transition requires energy and willingness to adapt to community needs.

For lesbians it is particularly difficult to deal simultaneously with questions of sexual identity on both personal and social levels. At this stage, the “closet” would enable individuals to focus their energy on social integration. However, it is nearly impossible to be a closeted lesbian and develop a meaningful life on kibbutz because of the intense and constant interaction with people that occurs in the various social and work circles. This reality does not allow for clear separation between private life at home and public life at work. Therefore, there is no way to maintain a double life—to be both straight and lesbian.

On the kibbutz you are either in the closet or out of the closet. When they finally come out of the closet, many women who thought that they had succeeded in maintaining a duplicitous life discover that all along the entire kibbutz knew that the “good friend” was really a lover. The choice to stay and integrate into kibbutz life requires coming out of the closet at some point. Difficulties with, and fear of, the community’s response cause many young women to distance themselves from this challenge and leave the kibbutz.

My choice to continue to live on kibbutz after choosing to live my life as a lesbian was influenced by my strong attachment to the kibbutz and my

family, as well as a strong feeling that I had a place and position on kibbutz and that if I had the strength to meet the challenges ahead, the kibbutz community would also have to meet the challenge of dealing with the lesbian "otherness" I brought into its midst. The kibbutz closet quickly becomes very dark, very cold, and very constrained and one constantly checks for opportunities to leave it. The deeper one's roots are on kibbutz, the more possibilities exist for staying and being out within the kibbutz. Yet without a doubt, the strongest feeling I had during my closeted period was a feeling that my life was a dead end; that in order to be out I had to leave the kibbutz. This was because at the time I felt strongly that my lesbianism and my kibbutz life simply could not coexist.

BEING OUT

The decision to be out on kibbutz requires a preliminary process of accepting one's lesbianism on a personal level. Choosing to be out and stay on kibbutz means choosing to live as a deviant in a society that does not accept deviants and tends to straighten them out or eject them. Therefore, this phase needs to be entered from a place of internal acceptance and completeness that is strong enough to face the community's response.

I approached my coming-out phase after bringing myself to the point that I felt sure enough, safe enough, and strong enough to face my kibbutz community and say, "I am a lesbian and I am here." There is one aspect of coming out on kibbutz that is very easy. You need only tell one person, who tells another person and another, and within a matter of hours the entire kibbutz knows.

The intimate and intense familiarity among kibbutz members, becomes, during the initial period after the kibbutz discovers the lesbian in its midst, a significant advantage, both in regard to the speed in which the message is transmitted and in relation to the fact that it is new information about a well-known member of the community. Familiarity plays a central role here as it is much more difficult to affix stereotyped lesbian characteristics to a person whom one knows intimately. The individual is well known to the community and everyone is aware of many facets of her personality. There is no mysterious part of her upon which to attach stereotypes when everything about her is exposed and well known. The rapidly transmitted information regarding my lesbianism became the story of the week for a period and there was not a table in the public dining hall at which it was not discussed. Yet the status I had accumulated over the years both in my work and public life did not allow the story to become intolerable. The community was forced to deal with me as a lesbian and to reexamine its own interpretation of the phenomenon. From the days after I came out, the community had to deal with woman they knew well, who also happens to be a lesbian. In this way, my coming out introduced a new issue into the kibbutz's public and private discourse, an issue that had

to be truly examined rather than dealt with on the basis of stereotypes. During this early phase, the public discourse raged on without my participation. Everyone was talking about “the lesbian” but nobody spoke with me directly about it. The topic was new and strange and most of the people didn’t know how to talk about it and whether they could speak to me about it. The main feeling was of a big secret that everyone knew but could only discuss in whispers so that I shouldn’t hear. At the coming-out stage I felt the eyes boring into my back and heard the whispers as I walked by in the dining hall or any other public space. I knew that everyone knew but no one was talking to me or asking me about it. The issue was firmly positioned under the table. On the surface, all continued as if nothing had happened. I continued to teach at the local school, to perform public functions, and to carry on with my day to day dialogue with other kibbutz members. At the same time, the community transmitted its hesitation and curiosity. While there was no overt rejection, the silence and the knowledge that every one knew but nobody was talking with me conveyed a clear message: “You are allowed to be a lesbian in this community, but keep a low profile with no provocations.”

It was difficult for the kibbutz to accept me as a lesbian, but it would have been more difficult to kick me out because I was a central, significant figure in the kibbutz community, a functionary that nobody wanted to do without. Initially, a status quo was created that permitted me to live and function in a community that had not yet decided how to relate to its lesbian and who still harbored the notion that it was a passing phase and that they, with their collective strength, would be able to return me to the right, heterosexual path.

There is defiance and boundary testing in coming out into such a conformist and heterosexual community. The community learned, over time, that lesbians don’t have horns and that horns do not grow on women despite their adopting a lesbian lifestyle. In addition, it became apparent that my personal and public skills were not adversely affected because of the fact that I chose to live with a woman and not a man. Even my parents continued to treat me as their daughter and my son continued to function like every one else in his peer group. The real community acceptance of me and my lesbianism started after I passed these tests.

BEING AN OUT LESBIAN ON KIBBUTZ

Living as an out lesbian on kibbutz was really just living a regular life with the lesbian issue raised to the surface. People started asking me what it was like being a lesbian, and talking to me about life as an out lesbian on kibbutz in Israel. They started asking to meet and get to know my partner and treated my relationship with her as the basis of a formal family unit.

The denial of my lesbianism that characterized my coming-out phase gave way to a lot of interest and desire to know more about the lesbian

community, the connection between homosexuals and lesbians, and my choice to be a lesbian and stay on kibbutz. Even though it seemed as if the topic has stopped being a hot agenda item, and it had stopped being discussed incessantly around every table in the dining room or corner of the kibbutz pathways, in fact, a lesbian lifestyle within a heterosexual milieu created an alternative at the very center of the social consensus. It was constantly present and served as a marker of the options that exist in relation to personal identity and lifestyle choices.

There is no doubt that people in constant contact with lesbians change their stereotypical attitudes and perceptions, allowing them to share in the shaping of a community. I have spent my years on kibbutz educating children at the kibbutz school, managing the community life, and accepting and fulfilling roles in various fields such as education, community, and human resources. My "other" lifestyle did not prevent me from advancing either socially or professionally.

In reality, it is not especially difficult to reach a decision to leave the kibbutz and indeed many men and women who were born on kibbutz make the decision to do so. I decided both to stay on kibbutz and not concede my lesbian identity. Formally, on my kibbutz there is no difference between heterosexual couples and lesbian or gay couples in either rights or responsibilities. The children and young people growing up here live a day-to-day life with lesbians and gay men and their children. Nevertheless, even if the formal equality is upheld and realized, it is still possible to note the disparities in the way kibbutz members and youth regard "our lesbians" in comparison to their regard for lesbians and homosexuals in general. It is still possible to hear homophobic jokes and comments at various events and places. Despite the openness within the community, it continues to be difficult for young men and women to examine their own identities freely. Nonetheless, I have become the person to talk to for young women on the kibbutz who are questioning their sexual identity.

During recent years, more and more lesbians and homosexuals are deciding to stay on kibbutz after coming out. The conflict between the desire to formulate a different and deviant personal identity and the desire to live life within a heterosexual and normative community has started to break down. This is the beginning of a process of liberalization of the kibbutz community on all levels of life. This process is affected, without doubt, by the development of the gay and lesbian community in Israel, and perhaps in large part because of the flood of media coverage of the issue during the last five years. The issue is at the center of the Israeli secular and civil discourse.

Despite the liberalization of the kibbutz movement regarding gay members, very few kibbutzim would accept out lesbians as candidates for becoming kibbutz members. The kibbutz continues to adhere to a lifestyle that is intolerant of differences. One can still notice the large gap between the declared principles of human rights and equality and people's day to day behavior and treatment of the "other" and the "different."

My kibbutz is very regular and very Israeli and it also includes voices that cry out to scapegoat the “other.” Nonetheless, when the kibbutz institutions and day-to-day public activity include lesbians and gay men at their very core, a local sanity prevails that returns these voices to the margins, their rightful place.

Nobody will roll out the red carpet for a lesbian interested in joining my kibbutz, but the community’s handling of the request will be much more practical, less stereotypical and homophobic.

In order to influence the belief and moral system of the community in which we choose to live, one must take an active part in its public and social life. Sometimes one must stand up and be the voice that speaks out clearly and sharply in defining the community’s red lines.

If the kibbutz society continues its path of homogenizing its population, it ultimately will die socially. The contemporary kibbutz is committed, as part of the process of change that is underway, to encountering the diversity within it as well as outside its framework. Day-to-day encounters, even if they prove difficult and painful, afford the opportunity for growth stemming from cross-fertilization of the various diversities of both individuals and groups. The renewing kibbutz contains various and many reference groups and cultures and it needs to learn to give these groups a real voice.

Translated by Dina Walk and Nicole Berner

FIVE

Emigration: The Case of the Israeli Lesbian

Chava Frankfort-Nachmias

Although the experience of women in international migration has received increasing attention from feminist scholars and practitioners (e.g., Cole, Espin, and Rothblum 1992; Gabaccia 1992; Tienda 1991; Tienda and Booth 1991), the experience of lesbian immigrants has been largely neglected. In fact, the majority of studies on women and migration focus on adaptation to the host country in terms of labor force participation and how it affects gender and power relations within the family. Little is known about the experiences of either heterosexual or lesbian immigrant women in the realms of sexuality, sexual orientation, and identity (Espin 1997).

What we have learned about the experience of migration and its function in the development of sexual identity and community comes from studies focusing primarily on gay men. These studies by historians such as John d'Emilio (1983), Alan Beruber (1993), and George Chauncy (1994) show that economic conditions and freedom from family constraints encouraged migration to large cities such as San Francisco and New York, where same-sex contacts were easier and where individuals were freer to develop sexual identities in the context of thriving communities (Cant 1997).

Chauncy argues that the complexity of the city's social and spatial organization made it possible for men who had moved to New York in the 1930s from small towns that frowned upon homosexuality to find a circle of homosexual acquaintances and a definite social life. The city was thus a logical destination for men intent on freeing themselves from the constraints of the family (Chauncy 1994). In a more recent work, Cant (1997) interviews a diverse group of eighteen lesbians and gay men in Britain who have all made the decision to leave the community that reared them. Their narratives illustrate that lesbian and gay men differ from other groups of migrants in that there is no homeland that can validate their group identity. Rather, theirs are

“invented identities” which draw on both the lesbian and gay community and their community of origin (Cant 1997).

Olivia M. Espin (1997), who studied the immigration experience of Latina lesbians (1984; 1987a; 1987b; 1990), notes that for many lesbians the border/boundary crossing may also relate to the coming-out process. Coming out may have occurred in the home country, but in some cases it may have been the motivating force behind the migration or it may have occurred after the migration as part of the acculturation process.

For lesbians and gay men, the crossing of borders through migration opens up different possibilities to develop new lives for themselves that may have been previously unavailable. Homophobia and the unquestioned status of heterosexuality “leave no room for negotiation or the development of alternatives. Away from the pressures of family and community, lesbians and gay men are able to develop new lives for themselves, to find their own voice and to explore their own histories in a new light” (Cant, 1).

ISRAEL

While Israel is best known as a country of immigrants, Israelis have been leaving the country since 1948, shortly after the state of Israel was founded. It is estimated that since 1948, about a half-million Israelis have emigrated from Israel and reside abroad, primarily in the United States. Approximately 11,000 or 2.5/1000 residents leave Israel every year (Hartman and Hartman 1995).

Migration has always been significant to the destinies of nations, societies, and individuals. In Israel, while immigration to the country has been considered a significant collective act in the process of nation building, departure from the country, termed “*Yerida*,” which literally means descending, is by its very nature an individual act, which is attributed to the absence or relative weakness of a sense of national identity.

Perhaps the question most asked and least understood about migration is, “Why do people move?” (Jansen 1969). Studies of Israeli immigrants to the United States have shown that there are both “pull” and “push” factors accounting for emigration from Israel to the United States. Among the “pull” factors were job opportunities and family reunification, as well as curiosity and adventurousness (Freedman and Korazim 1986; Ritterband 1969, 1978; Fein 1978; Mittelberg and Sobel 1990). Other studies, playing down the relative role of economic factors, argue that “push” factors have had primary importance in explaining emigration from Israel. For example, Sobel (1986) has emphasized the “quality of life” in Israel, such as the limitations on opportunities resulting from the small size of the country, intrusive bureaucracy, and a general small town atmosphere that make it difficult to locate a space for self-expression or simply to experience anonymity. More recent studies have attributed emigration to ideological shifts and social changes in Israeli society, which resulted in the decline of collectivist commitment and the increased legitimacy of individualistic orientations (Mittelberg and Sobel 1990; Ichilov, Haymann, and Shapira 1990).

Israeli lesbians have received no attention in the literature devoted to Israeli emigrants. The present study attempts to shed some light on the experience of Israeli lesbian emigrants and the key factors underlying their emigration from Israel.

METHODS

Three methods of data collection were used. First, a focus group was conducted with a group of ten Israeli lesbians living in the San Francisco area who emigrated to the United States between 1980 and 1991. The main purpose of the focus group was to draw upon the women's attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences, and reactions regarding their immigration experience and how it related to their lesbian identity. Second, in-depth, face-to-face interviews were conducted with a sample of fifteen women. A snowball sampling technique starting with those women who participated in the focus group located these women. A third data collection technique, telephone interviews, was conducted with a sample of an additional ten women. Interviews were conducted between 1993 and 1998. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. In total, twenty-five women were interviewed. They range in age from twenty-eight to sixty-one years old, with an average of forty-six years of age. They are well educated—80 percent had college education. Sixty-four percent (16) emigrated to the United States between 1980 and early 1993. The remaining 32 percent (9) left Israel between 1994 and 1997.

FINDINGS

In Table 1 we present the distribution of primary causes for departure from Israel by period of immigration.

Table 1. Departure from Israel by Period of Immigration: Israeli Lesbians' Primary Cause for Emigration Period of Departure from Israel

	<i>1980–1993</i> <i>(N=16)</i>	<i>1994–1997</i> <i>(N=10)</i>
Push Factors		
I. Lesbian Identity (Coming out; Smallness)	76%	20%
II. Other Factors (Economics and Political)	12%	10%
Pull Factors		
I. Education and Job Opportunities	12%	40%
II. Family Unification or Adventure		30%

The major finding of this study is that the experience of lesbians who left Israel between 1980 and 1993 differs greatly from that of lesbians whose emigration is more recent. For lesbians who left Israel in the '80s and early '90s, emigration was directly related to their lesbian identity. Seventy-six percent of the early emigrants indicated that the primary cause of the departure from Israel was their lesbianism. For these women, "push" factors associated with the "quality of life" for gays and lesbians, in particular issues associated with the coming-out process, account for their decision to leave Israel and remain in the United States. In contrast, for lesbians who left Israel between 1994 and 1997, emigration is accounted for primarily by "pull" factors such as educational and job opportunities as well as "push" factors not necessarily associated with lesbian identity. Only two (20 percent) women left Israel between 1994 and 1997 due to push factors associated with their lesbian identity.

For early (1980–1993) emigrants, there were two major factors accounting for their decision to leave Israel. The first factor was the conflict between collectivist orientation and individual expression of sexual identity. The second factor was the relatively small size of the country. In contrast, for more recent (1994–1997) emigrants, emigration is no longer the only way to express and develop their sexual identity. For these women, the reasons for emigration varied from frustration with the stalled peace process to seeking educational and professional opportunities in the United States. In this chapter we argue that the dramatic economic, political, and cultural changes in Israeli society during the 1990s altered the narratives of the ten lesbians who left Israel in the 1990s and were interviewed for this study. Whatever their reasons for leaving Israel, the lesbian emigrant of the '90s did not differ much from the average Israeli for whom emigration is justified as means to the achievement of personal goals.

COLLECTIVISM VERSUS INDIVIDUALISM

For the Israeli lesbian, the constraints on individual expression of sexual identity are closely linked to an inherent conflict between collectivist orientations associated with the Zionist goal of nation building and expressions of individualism. Since Israel is still engaged in a nation-building process and is constantly facing security threats and challenges to its existence, collectivist ideologies, which give a premium to group interests over individual needs and sectorial subcultures, have usually overruled (Yishai 1997).

For many Israelis the idea of Israel as a "national home for the Jewish people" left out "Jews" as individuals, left out the idea of home as a sanctuary of the person apart from the group, left out the life of the private individual apart from the life of the public-regarding citizen. . . . Expressions of individualism have been perceived as symptoms of the breakdown of high ideals and the disintegration of communal life, not as the inner spiritual dramas of the individual. (Ezrahi 1997)

In such a society lesbians are caught between their wish to be part of the collective and their desire to be heard and allowed to develop their own identity and culture. A lesbian choosing to define herself as “loving other women” is challenging the hegemony of nationalism and is depicted as a traitor who puts her own needs for fulfillment above the needs of the country (Yishai 1997; Bar-On 1997).

Tali, a fifty-six-year-old lesbian, born and raised in Israel, emigrated fourteen years ago. She resides with her partner in a lovely suburban home in Southern California. She talked about her struggles in a society where “fitting in” was a national obligation:

I knew I liked women from the time I was ten years old. I didn't know how to call it, but I was in touch with my attraction to women from very early on. I grew up in a small village outside Jerusalem in a very Zionist family where your loyalty to your country came above anything else. My family, the neighbors, perceived my lesbianism, *not* as a moral sin but as a selfish act of betrayal of putting my own needs before the needs of the country. More than anything else I saw myself as a traitor!

Thus, the Israeli lesbian poses a threat to the Jewish-Israeli society not in terms of her transgressive sexuality but because she refuses to shoulder her share of the revolutionary burden (Bar-On 1997).

THE FAMILY

For Israeli lesbians, the conflict between collectivist orientation and the need to develop and express their own identity and culture is most evident when you examine the role of the family in Israeli society. Although Israel has been characterized as a developed, urban-industrial democracy, it is a family-oriented society with strong traditional-patriarchal elements more typical of agrarian societies. The centrality of the traditional family is demonstrated in demographic indicators such as the divorce rate, fertility rate, out of wedlock births, and single-parent families, all of which are similar to those of traditional and agrarian societies. Marriage and children are the norms for women in Israel and are not seen as a choice. The pressures for women to find their identity and security in marriage produces a society where approximately 98 percent of the women are or have been married.

The importance of familialism is attributed not only to a core of Jewish values but to Israel's precarious security situation and to the Zionist goal of increasing the Jewish majority through procreation. Women are expected to contribute to the national effort by fulfilling a traditional nurturing role in the family as wives and mothers, providing a safe haven for husbands and sons, and helping in the nation's rapid growth (Yishai 1997).

Most women interviewed for this study talked about the pressure they felt to marry and have children, forcing them to define their identity and social role only through marriage. However, only the early emigrants identified this as a primary cause in their departure from Israel.

Rinah, who was born in 1960 to parents who came to Israel from Morocco, was twenty-three when she married and a mother of two when she was twenty-eight and discovered that she was attracted to women:

I had very close connections with women as long as I remember. I lived in a household with my parents, my brothers and sisters, my aunt and my grandmothers. I loved being in a women-centered world; women were the source of joy and support in my life. But when I turned twenty-one I was expected to find a man, get married and have children. I felt a lot of pressure and I knew that as a single woman I would bring "shame" to my family. Israel is extremely family-oriented. To be married and have children is a central foundation of the society. . . when I was twenty-eight I had my first sexual relationship with a woman and struggled for years trying to stay married while being intimately involved in what seemed then as the most profound relationship of my life. I knew that a divorce would be extremely difficult for my family to handle. I wasn't sure I could handle it either. For me, leaving Israel, gave me enough space to finally break away from my husband and come out.

Yael is a forty-eight year old working as a full professor of Jewish Studies at a prestigious college in Los Angeles. She has a Ph.D. from NYU in Hebrew literature and graduated from Tel Aviv University. She came out in Israel when she was nineteen and left Israel in 1980. She has been in the United States ever since and is in a sixteen-year-old relationship;

I did not want to hurt my parents; being closeted, hiding so much from them caused a lot of distance. There was always pressure to get married; because my parents were Holocaust survivors; my responsibility for continuity; there was a lot of respect for education and achievement. I did very well; but the assumption was that once I found the right man I will give it all up.

The task of being a wife and a mother is thus seen as falling in the public rather than the private sphere. Having a family, preferably with many children, became a national priority encouraged and rewarded by state authorities. For lesbians, refusing their social assignment to a traditional familial role is seen as a rejection of their national identity as Jewish-Israeli women (Bar-On 1997)

SMALLNESS

The pressures to conform to a national ideal of what it means to be Israeli-Jewish women are compounded by the relatively small size of the country, which impacts the experience of lesbians in at least two areas. First, privacy or anonymity is difficult to maintain in a society where the likelihood of being recognized by family members, friends, or acquaintances is very high, whether an individual “escapes” to the large cities or to relatively remote parts of the country. In such a dense social milieu it is difficult to locate a space to develop an identity that falls outside of what is considered acceptable. Israeli Lesbians struggle considerably with the coming out process and remain closeted and invisible in order to “remain part of the accepted social fabric, and to retain the feeling of belonging to a family” (Oppenheimer 1991).

Almost all the women who emigrated from Israel through the early '90s talked about the difficulty in locating a “space” to experience anonymity and to escape the “social gaze.” For them, this space was crucial for coming out and for developing stronger identities as lesbians. Emigration to the United States, especially to New York and San Francisco, which have open and thriving gay and lesbian subcultures, thus provided an arena in which to express or develop a long-suppressed identity and to live an openly lesbian lifestyle.

Yael talked about her lesbianism as the major factor accounting for her emigration to the United States:

I left because I could not take being closeted; being a lesbian was a driving force in leaving Israel. I needed to get out in order to come out. I couldn't take being closeted anymore. I came here to pursue a graduate degree; however, after a year I realized that the kind of freedom I have here—personal, religious, I made a clear and conscious decision to stay.

Miriam, forty-eight, immigrated to the Bay Area in 1991. She talked about the sense of freedom she felt after leaving Israel. Away from the pressures of family and community, following the death of her father, she was finally able to come out:

Yeah, let's talk about how easy it was to come out when you are about five thousand miles away from home, and how difficult it is .for Israeli women to come out in Israel. I think what triggered my ability to actually come out, live the way I want to live, was my father's death. When he was there I just couldn't do it to him . . . it would have been a punishment for him to find out. Even after he died and I decided to be with women and I started to feel very good about it, it took a while until I could tell my family. And before I told my

family I needed to be deep down in the closet because I couldn't afford to have the gossipers go around and tell my mother, "You know, your daughter is a lesbian."

Similarly, for Sharon, forty-one, who struggled with forming a sexual identity throughout her adolescence, leaving the country provided the necessary space to come out away from the intrusion of family and friends:

I feel very strongly about coming out but not in my homeland. Because I even went back with my first long term relationship and I came out to all my friends and I lost everybody, and so it's my family and all my friends. I have nobody. I might not have been able to come out if I still lived in Israel.

Ruth, who is forty-eight, is an accomplished scientist. She immigrated to New York City in the mid-1980s. She comes from a progressive background and her parents, who had initial difficulties with their daughter's sexual preference, have become very supportive. Yet, their daughter's sexuality is not a big source of pride. Coming out had implications beyond her and her family due to the proximity of neighbors, friends, or co-workers.

I think there is a difference [between coming out in Israel versus coming out abroad]. When my mother finally began to accept that this [being a lesbian] is okay and maybe even a good thing, it was: "Don't tell anybody else." You know, she didn't want the neighbors to know, she didn't want her brothers or sisters to know, and in Israel you could never have that. Whatever anybody knows, everybody knows; so I think for parents it would be a lot harder.

The second area of concern voiced by most of the women who left Israel between 1980 and 1993 is that the smallness of the country and thus of the lesbian community, limits opportunities to meet and interact with new people or find other women who share a common interest apart from their sexual preference.

Yael, who was one of the earliest emigrants interviewed for this study, talked about the loneliness she felt in the early '70s when the lesbian community in Israel was small, closeted, scared, and self-hating:

In Israel I tried to network with other lesbians. But there was nobody! My mentor at the university who was gay knew about me. But then I worked in radio for two years and half the staff there was lesbians but I didn't know about it until I left. I was active in the early feminist movement and I hoped I would meet lesbians there; but even there nobody talked about it. Nobody came out. It was very

frustrating when you tried to meet someone; it was sort of hit or miss; you had to guess and sometimes you were right but often you were wrong.

Dorit, who left Israel in 1987, was an active member of the lesbian community in Jerusalem during the '80s. Belonging to this tiny community not only prevented any possibility of anonymity and an occasional escape from view, but also limited considerably her choice of friends or lovers with whom she shared a common interest:

Israel began to seem very small to me in many ways. I wanted to come to where I knew there was a very large lesbian community, which is exactly what I did. It was comfortable for me to find women who were much more like me and in other ways, in addition to being a lesbian. That it is not the first thing that binds us together. We share a lot of other things and that's good, very wonderful.

Gila, forty-two, who loves the outdoors, was thrilled, after arriving on the West Coast, to find other lesbians who shared her interest:

I thought that, first of all, to find a community in Israel was a big thing for me because there was so little of everything. . . . The first two years of the community were very happy for me . . . but a couple of years later I was sitting there in a group of women and I felt like if I had another option I would probably choose other people as my social circle. However, I didn't have other options if I wanted my social circle to be a group of lesbians. I had these dreams about being in a large community where I could eventually move and choose my social circles to be made of people that I really have more fun with, that I like to spend more time with. One of the nice things that happened when I came here is that I was actually looking for women who like outdoor activities, which I enjoy very much. I found women who do that and that group became a social circle for me and encompassed everything that I like to do in my free time.

Lila, fifty-one, was an active member of the Jerusalem community in the mid-'80s. She and her partner of ten years were recognized as a "model couple" and as "pillars of the community." When they broke up after more than a decade together, Lila decided to leave Israel because she felt that emigrating was her only chance of starting over:

I think that the nature of the Jerusalem community, being so small, people end up incestuously together when they have no business together. I mean we have this elaborate family tree. "Who was with

whom." And they all overlap. Leaving the country was very difficult for me but I felt that this was my only chance to start over.

Thus, for lesbians who emigrated to the United States through the early '90s, Israel's smallness made privacy and anonymity impossible. For a majority of the early emigrants interviewed for this study, the small size of the lesbian community in Israel limited the possibility of finding compatible partners who were outside one's immediate circle of ex-lovers and friends. Both factors could more easily or more successfully be dealt with abroad.

CHANGE

The environment for lesbians and gay men in Israel improved dramatically in the early 1990s. The political and social turning point came in February 1993, at a conference in the Knesset. Convened by members of Knesset, in particular Yael Dayan, the conference brought more than one hundred lesbians and gay men to the Knesset to testify. Since then, public attitudes toward gays and lesbians as expressed in the media and as felt by lesbians and gay people themselves have markedly improved (Moore 1995). Israel is currently in the forefront of countries granting gays and lesbians freedoms as advanced as those in the Netherlands and Scandinavia. Highlights in the past decade include the inclusion of "sexual orientation" in Israel's sexual-harassment legislation, the passage of laws banning employment discrimination, and the granting of spousal benefits to gay El Al employees and others.

The equality that lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals are beginning to experience in Israel is not merely legally formal but it has a culturally public aspect too. For example, a national Pride Day began to be celebrated in June 1993, and like other lesbian, gay, and bisexual public events and issues, the Israeli media generally covered it sympathetically. In 1999 Haifa held its first Pride festival, with five hundred in attendance at a local park, and in Tel Aviv, the Pride parade was funded by the Tel Aviv municipality under the slogan "From Tel Aviv with Pride" (Walzer 2000, 258).

The shift toward legal equality and the development of gay and lesbian culture and community would have been impossible if there had not been significant internal changes in Israeli culture, society, and politics. The tremendous growth of the economy and the rise of a broad middle class in the early '90s have coincided with the emergence of Israeli individualism. During that time the convergence between the narratives of the state and the family has been questioned more and more. This process is probably one of the most significant developments in the culture and politics of modern Israel (Ezrahi 1997). The Israeli individual has come of age as a private person, not just a reflection of the group, and has begun to challenge the hold of Israeli collectivist orientation at all levels (Ezrahi 1997).

It is instructive to see how the changes in Israeli society during the '90s have taken shape in the perspective of Israeli Lesbian emigrants. Ten respondents in our sample left Israel between 1994 and 1997, during this major transformation in Israeli society. For eight of these women, sexual identity was not a major factor in their decision to leave Israel for the United States (see Table 1).

I interviewed Sara, thirty, in 1998, a year after her arrival in Silicon Valley to work for a startup company. Sara came to the United States for purely professional reasons. When I asked her whether being a lesbian played a role in her decision to leave Israel she said:

I had been thinking about leaving Israel for seven years. But, none of it, none of it at all was based on being a lesbian. But, see it was easy for me, because I lived so close to Tel Aviv, and considering the size of Israel, I mean, there's a large active community there and especially the past few years. I guess in the past five or six years, the community has really grown and gotten very strong and active. So, for me, there was no problem.

Vered, thirty-one, is pursuing a graduate degree in the social sciences in one of New York City's top schools. She arrived in the United States in 1996 and is unsure about her plans to return to Israel after she completes her studies. For her, what initiated the departure from Israel were better educational and professional opportunities abroad. "It all depends on what kind of job offers I get." Vered, too, did not see her sexual preference as impacting her decision to leave Israel.

I don't think it is a problem anymore to be gay in Israel. The environment for gay and lesbians has changed dramatically in Israel over the last five years or so. Coming out to my parents was not an easy task—but is it ever? Once my parents got used to the idea, however, they were very supportive. Israel is a small country—for me that was a problem as far as professional opportunities, less so in terms of being gay.

Ronit, thirty-six, left Israel in 1995 because she wanted a change. "I got tired of my old job and old routines needed some fresh air and I wanted to travel and explore the world." She was only planning to leave Israel for a short period but delayed her return and settled in the Bay Area after meeting and moving in with her lover.

The responses of Sara, Vered, and Ronit and the other seven women who left Israel between 1994 and 1997 represent a different narrative of emigration. For these women, emigration is accounted for primarily by "push"

factors not necessarily associated with lesbian identity as well as “pull” factors such as educational and job opportunities.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The major finding of this study is that the experience of lesbians who left Israel between 1980 and 1993 differs greatly from that of lesbians whose emigration is more recent. For lesbians who left Israel through the early '90s emigration is directly related to their lesbian identity. For these women, “push” factors associated with the “quality of life” for gays and lesbians, and in particular, issues associated with the coming out process, account for their decision to leave Israel and remain in the United States. In contrast, for lesbians who left Israel after 1993 emigration is accounted for primarily by “push” factors not necessarily associated with lesbian identity as well as “pull” factors such as educational and job opportunities.

The different narratives of these two groups of emigrants support the observations of d'Emilio (1983), Chauncey (1994), Cant (1997), and Espin (1999). The motives for Israeli lesbians who emigrated to the United States through the early '90s are similar to the experiences of gay men who escaped small towns where homosexuality was frowned at and migrated early in the 1920s to large cities such as San Francisco and New York, where they were freer to develop sexual identities in the context of thriving gay communities. For Israeli lesbians who left Israel through the early '90s, the crossing of borders through migration opened up different possibilities to “invent” new identities and new lives for themselves that may have been unavailable to them in Israel. In contrast, advanced gay and lesbian legislation and the developing of flourishing gay and lesbian communities have altered the narratives of those who left Israel in the mid to late 1990s. For these women, emigration is no longer the only way to express and develop their sexual identity. The reasons for emigration for these women vary from frustration with the stalled peace process to seeking educational and professional opportunities in the United States. Whatever their reasons for leaving Israel, the lesbian emigrants of the '90s do not differ much from the average Israeli for whom emigration is justified as means to the achievement of personal goals.

REFERENCES

- Bar On, Bat-Ami. “Sexuality, the Family, and Nationalism.” *Feminism and Families*. Ed. Hilda Nelson. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Berube, Allan. *Coming Out under Fire: The History of Gay Men and women in World War Two*. New York: Plume, 1993.
- Cant, Bob. *Invented Identities? Lesbians and Gays Talk about Migration*. London: Cassel, 1997.
- Chauncey, George. *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940*. New York: Basic Books, 1994.

- D'Emilio John. *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940–1970*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983.
- Espin, Olivia M. *Women Crossing Boundaries: A Psychology of Immigration and of Transformations of Sexuality*. New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Espin, Olivia M., and Mary Ann Gawelek. "Women's Diversity: Ethnicity, Race, Class, and Gender in Theories of Feminist Psychology." *Latina Realities: Essays on Healing, Migration, and Sexuality*. Ed. Olivia M. Espin. Boulder: Westview, 1997.
- Ezrahi, Yaron. *Rubber Bullets*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1997.
- Fein, A. *The Process of Migration: Israeli Migration to the U.S.A.* Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University, 1978.
- Freedman, M., and J. Korazim. "Israelis in the New York Area Labor Market." *Contemporary Jewry* 7 (1986).
- Gabaccia, Donna R., ed. *Seeking Common Ground: Multidisciplinary Studies of Immigrant Women in the United States*. New York: Greenwood, 1992.
- Hartman, Harriet, and Moshe Hartman. "Israeli Students' Attitudes toward Emigration." *Youth and Society* 26(1995).
- Ichilov, Orit, Flor Haymann, and Rina Shapira. "Social and Moral Integration and Attachment to the Nation-State: A Case Study of Israeli Adolescents." *Urban Education* 25 (1990).
- Mittelberg, David, and Zvi Sobel. "Commitment, Ethnicity, and Class as Factors in Emigration of Kibbutz and Non-Kibbutz Populations from Israel." *The International Migration Review* 24(1990): 768–82.
- Moore, Tracy. *Lesbiot: Israeli Lesbians Talk about Sexuality, Feminism, Judaism, and Their Lives*. London: Cassell Wellington House, 1995.
- Oppenheimer, Jo. "The Pressure to Be Heterosexual." *Calling the Equality Bluff: Women in Israel*. Ed. Barbara Swirski and Marilyn P. Safir. New York: Pergamon, 1991: 108–17.
- Ritterband, P. *Education, Employment, and Migration: Israel in Comparative Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1978.
- Shokeid, Moshe. *Children of Circumstances: Israeli Emigrants in New York*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988.
- Sobel, Zvi. *Migrants from the Promised Land*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers, 1986.
- Tienda, M., and K. Booth. "Gender, Migration and Social Change." *International Sociology* 6(1991): 51–72.
- Walzer, Lee. *Between Sodom and Eden*. New York: Columbia UP, 2000.
- Yishai, Yael. *Between the Flag and the Banner*. Albany: State U of New York P, 1997.

This page intentionally left blank.

Orthodox Lesbians: Not a Contradiction in Terms

Devorah Esther

Picture this scene: *The home is dimly lit, with only a few essential lights that will not be touched for the duration of the Shabbat. Lit candles resting in a candelabra sit on a silver tray in an honored corner of the dining room, casting a warm light that fills the entire space. Smells that hint at the delicacies to follow perfume the air. The specialties of the house and the most savored will be served this evening, on fine china, with shining cutlery, on the finest tablecloth, set before the family dressed in their best clothes, everything cleaned to a sparkle and crisply ironed. All of the senses are catered to, to enhance the pleasure and holiness of the day.*

The father and the children who have accompanied him to prayer that evening return from Beit Kneset. His face is filled with delight, happy to be surrounded by the ones he loves, relieved to have left the worries and demands of the temporal world at the door. The mother looks with affection as her family assembles in the dining room. As each child stands before their mother and father, they place their hands on the child's head and whisper a blessing, concluding with a kiss. Song and ritual begin as soon as each family member finds a seat, a happy participant in the experience of Shabbat, enjoyed by every generation of Jews.

Now picture this scene: A lone woman is standing at her window, peering in at the loving family's enjoyment, following their movements from the shadows so she won't be seen. She pulls herself away and turns to her own Shabbat table, to her own experience of the holy day. Her candles are lit, illuminating the table set for one. She begins to sing, welcoming the angels of Peace, and her singular voice echoes in the room. She says the kiddush demarcating the day as separate and holy, says the blessing over the challot, the Shabbat bread, and rises to serve herself a fine meal.

Her observance of the day is proper and precise and all its elements are carried out fully. But an observer looking in her window knows there is a difference. She has chosen not to marry, and, as a consequence, she finds herself at the margin of the Jewish

religious experience, alone, able to take advantage of only part of the pleasure of the holiest day of the week as well as a multitude of other religious occurrences.

These contrasting descriptions of Sabbath observance depict the unavoidable social consequences for Orthodox Jewish lesbians who have made a conscious choice not to marry. One cannot comprehend the situation of Orthodox lesbians without understanding the role of the family in Jewish religious life. The experience of Jewish life is a three-legged stool—the synagogue, the study hall, and the home are the legs upon which the whole of Jewish religious life stands. For women, the home and family is the main sphere of religious activity. A woman who does not have a home and a family is forever placed outside the gate of mainstream Orthodox religious life.

Of course, it is possible to imagine an Orthodox lesbian couple with children having a fully developed religious home life. But even then, there are many issues they must confront as Orthodox lesbians. For if the family is the heart of Jewish life, the emotional and religious center of the family is the relationship between husband and wife in Judaism. The Torah says, “Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and cling to his wife and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24).

In Judaism the relationship between a husband and wife is far more than either a love story, or conversely, a structure in which to raise children. Ideally, within and through this mutual love relationship one awakens an aspect of religious experience that reflects some of the most sophisticated realms of Jewish thought and belief, and this is one of the most important teachings of the Torah: the husband-wife relationship is as close as we can come to understanding what love toward G-d can be. This is the major dilemma that many religious lesbians need to work through, and it is not an easy one.

What if this level of relationship is only possible, for me, with another woman? Does G-d want me to attain true love, working through life together, providing a base to work through all else that life brings, or to be with a man and to bear children? The two do not go together for some of us.”¹

That which is considered a mitzvah² in a heterosexual marriage, for lesbians, is a sin we are taught to resist.

Imagine the sorrow, the despair of women who understood that they do not easily fall into the prescribed and idealized role of women in Judaism.

I thought it just couldn't be, being *frum*³ and being gay is impossible.

I will do anything to change.

I must be doing something wrong. If I repent, improve my observance, quantitatively and qualitatively, I'm sure it will go away.

Faced with, “I have met the enemy, and she is me,” many of us spend years in isolation struggling with this split, wondering how to fix this dread-

fully wrong thing—our gayness. Almost all of us do our rounds of rabbis, religious teachers, and/or therapists, looking for guidance. Some date many men for many years without finding one they feel they can marry, and many marry, for staying single is not an option for most people in the religious world, including lesbians and gay men.

Each one of the many Orthodox lesbians with whom I have spoken in the past ten years has spent lonely time, often decades, thinking that she is the only one! I am sure that there are many more women still trying to change, isolated from all others like her, thinking that she is “the only one.”

Five women sat nervously eyeing each other at the first meeting of the group that would eventually become known as the Orthodykes. We weren't really sure why we were there, other than some vague sense that it would be a good idea for each of us, who were Orthodox Jews and lesbians, to meet. By the second meeting, we were six, and while we were not yet comfortable being together, the chill was off. More importantly, there was an overriding sense that we were doing something significant just by being together. Over time we also came to understand that one of our reasons for being together was to find ways to try and sensitize rabbis and Orthodox educators about what it means to be a lesbian and an Orthodox Jew.⁴

Before the establishment of Orthodykes, to be a religious lesbian was to be without a home. Most secular lesbians view religion and the religious with feelings that range from suspicion to hatred. Even with those who have no negative feelings, differences in practice, such as *Kashrut* (Jewish dietary laws) and *Shmirat Shabbat* (Sabbath observance), create a barrier to easy social relations. Many religious Jews, on the other hand, find homosexuality so radical and such a deviant way of living, that it is impossible to tolerate openly lesbian or gay people.

Some people I can talk with, some people I can eat with, and usually they aren't the same people.

Even the more open-minded, accepting individuals in the Orthodox community cannot understand why anyone would “choose” to be gay. Why wouldn't you just “fix it,” that is, choose to fit in with the rest of the religious world.

I remember feeling a tremendous sense of joy at our early meetings; at last my isolation had ended. I was no longer a freak, the only one like me. I wasn't the only person alive who struggled with maintaining religious observance and at the same time, a very basic part of my identity, loving other women.

Our conflict is personal and social, but it is also religious. For an Orthodox Jew, one's world view, one's understanding of the meaning of life and *Halacha* (the body of Jewish law that governs all aspects of life) are connected and psychologically inseparable. The spiritual, philosophical, emotional, and psychological are meant to be connected in order to bring our whole being to a high level of consciousness. The *mitzvot* (plural of *mitzvah*)—expressed through action, speech, thoughts, and feelings—bind all these levels of experience together. (The Hebrew root of the word *mitzvah* is “to bind,” “to become a unit.”) We believe that the mitzvot are given to us to enhance our lives, our community, and the world. The Torah tells us we are to *chai b'hem*, to “live by them” (Deuteronomy 30:19).

What does the *Halacha* say about lesbianism? There are two places in which the sacred literature seems to be referring to lesbians. It is written in Leviticus 18:3: “After the doings of the land of Egypt, where you lived, you should not do, and after the doings of the land of Canaan where I bring you to, you should not do, and do not walk according to their laws.” According to most commentaries, this means: “Do not let the pattern of the Egyptians and Canaanites be the guiding influence for your social, moral and sexual life,” with the assumption being that both cultures engaged in same-sex sexual practices. Another text, the *Torat Cohanim*,⁵ goes into more detail as to what these practices were: “A man would marry a man. A woman would marry a woman, and a woman would be married to two men.”

A second reference to lesbianism (*nashim mesoleloth*) is found in the Talmud.⁶ It's not totally clear what *nashim mesoleloth* means; literally, it is “women rubbing against one another.” Rashi, an important biblical commentator who lived from 1040 to 1105, interprets the expression as referring to sexual activity because, he says, its meaning is “in the way of heterosexual intercourse, they rub their sexual organs against each other.” With both of these references, and whatever the interpretation, G-d's will seems quite clear: lesbianism is forbidden.

Because of the deep personal conflicts experienced by Orthodox lesbians, and because of the obvious social/religious conflicts created by these clear prohibitions, most Orthodox lesbians start with the premise that choosing to marry and have children is the most obvious, correct, and seemingly simplest option; from there, we each go on to find our own way. Only afterward do we begin to confront the many questions this choice entails: What are the consequences to the heterosexual spouse? What are the consequences to the lesbian who tries to find a spouse or marries, while knowing that in some significant place in herself she does not want a man? It is a terrible struggle, psychologically and religiously. “G-d's stamp is truth.” “The heart and mouth should be as one,” say the teachings. By marrying and having children, though I know that I am a lesbian, am I being a hypocrite? Am I being honest with others and myself? Am I honest to each part of myself? Either choice seems a lie to the other part of me, the choices seem to be mutually exclusive.

Some of us found our early path through the teaching of Maimonides in *Mishnah Torah* that provides an approach to changing character traits as well as our obligation to do so. Maimonides acknowledges that everyone has tendencies toward particular traits that are religiously undesirable. He describes a method of getting to the desired “golden mean,” the balance between two extremes. By going to the extreme opposite to which one is accustomed, or to which one is naturally inclined, we can eventually reach the middle, the desired place. In this way one can work on any “shortcoming.”

*Sefer Hachinuch*⁷ also stresses that by “doing” one “becomes” who they desire to be, according to their actions; “minds are shaped by deeds.”

I was one of those who tried to do as Maimonides suggested. I thought that if I acted as a heterosexual, and prayed to be one, married a religious man, and dedicated myself to Jewish family life, I’d become heterosexual. As I and many others like me found out, this is an example of a misplaced use of advice. We didn’t realize at the time that homosexuality is not rooted in the mind, nor is it a character trait.

There are claims in the mainstream religious community that there is “no such thing” as a gay or lesbian Orthodox Jew, on the grounds that this is a complete contradiction in terms. For both religious and secular Jews, this is a comfortable position. One does not need to acknowledge that which does not exist. The message to one who claims to be lesbian or gay is that he/she is either inadequately committed, lacks knowledge of traditional Jewish thought, errs in their understanding of the words of the Sages, or, at worst, lacks the “fear of G-d” and is unable to hold G-d’s word as important. Thus, a woman who “thinks” she is a lesbian is simply wrong about her own perceptions of herself.

But over time I and others have come to understand that, even from a religious perspective, self-knowledge is a more reliable gauge of who we are than some else’s perception. In Jewish law, for example, the perception of a patient regarding her own illness is more trustworthy than a doctor’s perception when there is a difference between the two. As Rav (Rabbi) Dessler writes, “There are certain items discerned by our inner consciousness which include our feelings and perceptions, and the point of ‘attachment’ of ego to body (our sense of being alive) . . . these are given without need of intellectual justification. . . . [T]heir essence cannot be grasped by any rational argument; they cannot even be conceptualized. They are all grasped only by the inner self; they are what we call inner intuitions.”⁸

Still, for Orthodox Jews, within our closest circles, we find that some of the most respected people to whom we look for wisdom and direction are misinformed, misunderstand, or at best are ignorant about the lesbian and gay experience. It is jarring, always, to hear homophobic remarks. The community that is so very safe in some important areas of life becomes extremely unsafe in others. In an Orthodox Jewish English-language newspaper, for instance, someone wrote a letter to the editor that said, “Enough gay bashing, maybe; enough Orthodox lesbian bashing, never.” In the Israeli religious papers, there

has never yet been even this kind of mention of Orthodox lesbians. Uneducated comments about other areas of life are often challenged, but they are most often accepted without comment when homosexuality is the subject matter.

Over the years I have come to understand that I cannot deny the lesbian identity that is an undeniable part of who I am, and many other Orthodox lesbians have done the same. The initial coming together of the Orthodykes in Jerusalem, both as a support group, a study group, and an advocacy group with a societal purpose, facilitated not only our own acceptance of our identity but also a sphere in which to come out of the closet.

Coming out is most commonly a slow process for Orthodox lesbians. Finding other religious lesbians took some of us many years (as many as ten to twenty years) to discover that there were actually others like ourselves. I have heard one woman after another say, "I was sure I was/am the only one." Most of us spent a very lonely time thinking either, "I must be the only one," or, "There may be others, but how can I possibly find them."

Of those with whom I have spoken, they are by definition no longer completely alone in their closet. They have found someone to speak to, or open up to, are in a relationship, or are open enough/feel safe enough to join socially with others. Personally, I went through many stages, very slowly, very cautiously, careful not to lose the spiritual stamina that I worked toward for so many years. I had to internalize a different way of understanding G-d and Torah. My approach stays within, and is dedicated to a traditional *halachic* philosophical framework.

The space outside the closet we have carved out for ourselves is, however, limited. Within the Orthodox world, we fear "being found out" because we live in small, tightly knit communities that are connected to others worldwide.

In some ways I'd call it a "double hiding." Not only am I "not out" to people in any of my circles, I feel that I must do and say things that are not true. At the same time being untruthful goes against my basic religious beliefs.

I was afraid that I would cast a bad impression (*chilul haShem*) on the greater religious community because "Orthodox Jews aren't gay, therefore I must not be a good enough Jew."

Most Orthodox lesbians have often been asked: "Why, as a lesbian, do you stay in a place/lifestyle/belief system that is so unwelcoming to you?" For many of us the answer is that our Orthodox spiritual practice has enormous meaning for us, certainly no less than our lesbian identity, and we do not wish to give it up.

As a practicing Orthodox woman, I feel "let in"—through the Torah and the *mitzvot*—on the cosmic "secret" that actions, words, and thoughts contribute positively to the world. I believe that G-d doesn't "need" our observance, but rather that through our observance of *mitzvot* we can activate the

necessary spiritual components needed to create a positive affect on the universe. The *mitzvot* are a gift, given to me for my/our own growth and good. I consider it a privilege to reenact the thoughts of G-d by bringing the *mitzvot* alive in my life. G-d bestows goodness on us constantly; each person has a unique opportunity to activate that goodness. I want and pray to be such a vessel. I understand the gift of 613 *mitzvot* as constant actions of consciousness through which we create the circuit or channel for a constantly flowing spring (*bracha*) of goodness to the world.

The constant spiritual preoccupation that Torah observance demands is meaningful, fulfilling, and fills a place that nothing else has.

I may be lesbian, but I am also a Jew, and for me that mean that I remain obligated to fulfill the *mitzvot*.

I try to be as true as I can to our heritage; when I find difficulty or contradictions in certain areas, that's the message to dig deeper; experience has shown me that it's more about my lacking, not a lack in the wisdom in the Torah.

My goal in life is to achieve closeness to Hashem (G-d). It's my responsibility to forge a relationship which includes all of me, with all that I am, or it's not real.

Even today, many Orthodox lesbians and gay men accept the dichotomy between being gay and being Orthodox as unbridgeable, assuming they must pick one or the other. But we are learning from our collective experience. Most religious lesbians at some point in their lives have tried opting for one identity and leaving the other behind, but many of us have found that choosing one option over another is not really possible as a long-term solution.

One of the things that I have learned from being a lesbian and an Orthodox Jew is that it is possible, even rewarding, to use my lesbianism and the tension it creates in my life as a positive religious impetus.

As the Creator, S/He knows in a way more profoundly than any of us ever can know anything. Not only have I seen this in my own life, but also most of my ancestors for the past few thousands of years have striven to understand the wisdom that G-d has shared with the Jews via the Torah—the mouthpiece of G-d, so to speak. This spiritual system includes all paradox and opposites; chaos and order; unity and friction; complexity and simplicity. G-d, as I understand Him/Her is the Connector of all that ever was, is, and will ever be. G-d is THE Stretcher. Stretching not only to hold all that exists in this world, the physical with the spiritual, but also as the Connector of all worlds. The ability that people have to stretch and connect is because of that quality that G-d infused into our souls, and into the world. I use this tool of stretching and connecting to accept both these parts of myself.

The spiritual, philosophical, and emotional are meant to be connected in order to bring our whole being to a higher level of consciousness. There

are *mitzvot* that are to be performed constantly, at every moment, expressed in thought and emotion; these form the foundation of a system of thought based on an innerness that is intrinsically connected to one's emotional makeup. It has taken me many years of resisting this shift from the way I understood the law; to change my perspective felt like defeat. But I accepted that the questions I need to ask myself must be different than those I had been asking. I was wasting my energy in ways that weren't productive; it was clear that I must transform the emotional turmoil into spiritual development. I had to go in a more positive direction.

A number of years ago, during the introspective spirit before Rosh Hashana, I realized that I was at a dead end. After forcing myself repeatedly to open a locked door with variations of the same key, I thought, "Hashem wants me to try another door!" That day I committed myself to use my energy to work toward accepting myself as a lesbian and to strive to integrate these sides of myself. I am still trying, but I have definitely made progress. I am a lesbian, and still a part of the Orthodox world. I have children and grandchildren and a rich, traditional homelife. But I have begun to view my lesbianism as an important part of my spiritual practice.

I asked other Orthodox lesbians about the ways that their acceptance of their own lesbianism make them more dedicated to a spiritual/religious path? ("How are you able to turn the 'curse' of homosexuality into a blessing in your life?") I found that I am not alone in opening this new door.

I have had incredibly connected prayers at the Kotel [Western Wall] and some other holy sites, but one of my most intense experiences of prayer happened at a time when I didn't expect it. I was lying next to my loved one, about to go to sleep, and, as I said "Shma Yisroel" [bedtime prayer], as I do each night, I was hit with a clarity that I had never experienced before. Hear! Israel, Hashem is OURS, Hashem is ONE. In this moment I was encompassed in an incredibly strong flow of all loves and connections. With this came gratefulness in knowing that I have the opportunity and ability to connect to G-d, to be part of the Oneness. The involvement in Torah and Mitzvot being the most direct way for me to achieve this. At that moment the Oneness became obvious to me. The same G-d, whose "Oneness" is ungraspable, gave me a partner with whom I can emulate this same flow of love. That in this relationship, this lesbian relationship, which I was having trouble accepting in the framework of my religious practice, I have found understanding of true love, of true oneness. This relationship has opened my heart to feeling/seeing that same flow of love between my Creator and me. Years of confusion melted before me, my love towards G-d, the Jewish people, the entire world, my partner, all blended together, making complete sense at that moment. "ALL" is part of G-d's Oneness; I am part of the "All," I have

found my place in the Oneness. I continue to use these moments. I feel blessed to have personally experienced the shifting of seeming chaos to creativity.

Only G-d (as Creator and Sustainer) can truly know our (human) differences.

I have learnt to deeply appreciate human differences. Different things affect each individual in the world in such different ways; there is so much to learn from each person.

It has shown me the meaning of tolerance.

I don't have the "luxury" to see things superficially; it helps me delve into areas that I probably wouldn't have otherwise.

Everyone has their own struggles, in all types of areas. As some people couldn't possibly understand my makeup, I can't understand theirs. One of my favorite religious mottos is "don't judge anyone until you stand in their place." The commentaries say that "No one can ever stand in another's place!"

The direction I have taken, learning and teaching Torah, I think partially stems from a strong urge to "understand," as I feel surrounded by a (heterosexual) world which I can't feel as my reality, I must delve into the deeper worlds of understanding contained in Torah.

Maybe we can bridge and reduce the tensions and antagonism between the religious and gay communities.

"You are with me everywhere, even when I fall" (Psalms 23: 4). "Falling" may constitute acting against the Halacha, or following an interpretation of Torah which is not the preferred one. A "fall" can and should turn into a learning experience that brings one closer to G-d, and therefore, it works retrospectively as a merit/ mitzvah. To relate to a "fall" as a "loss" is unproductive in the long run; it is more useful to see and use it as a redirection to gain momentum to reach our larger life goals. When I don't want to continue looking at it as a "fall," that fills me with too much self-blame and negativity.

I tried to change, ignore, redirect, my lesbian feelings. Now I need to see my lesbian part as something positive. I want to use the energy that I receive through loving to do good things in the world.

Ambiguity and paradox: only G-d knows the greater plan. We "know" that the plan is for the good, although in this world we aren't let in on the "whys." We believe that G-d created homosexuals and that, for us, a loving relationship, an ideally loving relationship, is possible only with another of the same gender.

Appreciating the power of wholeness: this is not to say that a lesbian "can't" set up home and have a marriage with a man that she can care about and love, or that a homosexual "can't" carry out the act of heterosexual

intercourse. Nor is it to say that every heterosexual has an ideally loving relationship. But in Judaism there is a clear ideal of a loving relationship that definitely does involve a mutually loving sexual relationship. It is one in which “giving” and “taking,” rather “receiving,” are the same—the mutual act of contributing to the benefit of the other is the goal. Within this mutual love relationship one awakens an aspect of religious experience, some of the most sophisticated realms of Judaism. G-d is the Giver, all of our giving is an emulation of G-d; this is a major goal of the Torah.

The issue that Orthodox Judaism must deal with, therefore, is not whether or not a homosexual can “change” or simply not act upon her or his feelings and desires. It is, rather, that if there is an ideal in Judaism of what a loving relationship can mean religiously, then this possibility must be allowed to exist for everyone. Where is there integrity in entering an agreement—the sanctity of marriage—knowing that the usual sexual relationship/intimacy will create friction in place of harmony and closeness? There are those within the Orthodox community—and they are still the overwhelming majority—who believe that homosexual feelings are an “evil inclination” (*yetzer harah*). But there are a growing number of Orthodox homosexuals who are discovering that an important component of these yearnings is spiritual.

Orthodox lesbians and gay men, rather than denying either side of ourselves to conform to the stereotypes of others, are, instead, claiming both identities in the ways I have described. And having worked these issues out for ourselves, we are also working toward challenging our rabbis to develop a serious and respectful rabbinical response.

An Orthodox Jew goes to a rabbi with questions about behavior that may seem in conflict with G-d’s laws in order to get an evaluation toward an unbiased reflection of G-d’s will. She or he does so trusting that the rabbi, who has the broadest and deepest knowledge and understanding of spiritual principles, strives to gain insight into what this law means in all its connotations, from all angles. The challenge to the rabbi is to respond to individuals; there is no responsibility to respond to an issue. The goal of a *Halachic* decision is to create synchronicity between the “words in the books” and “life”—in all that it is for a particular individual. This rabbinic evaluation decides if and to what extent various commandments can be adapted (sometimes temporarily) for this individual. Many of us are going to our rabbis, asking them to revisit the question of homosexuality in a way that has not been done yet. We have faith that there are rabbis who are willing and capable of doing this.

When we come to our rabbis, who know us personally, we do so with their knowing of the sincerity, commitment, integrity, and respect that we give to the *Halachic* system in other aspects of our lives. We do not come to the rabbi looking for a “way out” or to do away with the laws that are difficult for us, but rather with trust that the rabbi will apply the breadth and depth of his knowledge and understanding of spiritual principles to insightfully understand what this law means in all its connotations. We come before our

rabbis asking them to embrace and accept who we are, in both of our deepest truths: our gayness, what that is and the weight it carries for each person in their individual way, together with the eternal truth of Torah and the importance of its truths being carried out for the benefit of the individual and the world collectively.

The power of the personal connection and joint goal of coming to truth opens channels that until now have been closed. We believe that this process can/will be a catalyst for our rabbis and teachers to move to another level of interest and responsibility towards those struggling with their gayness. Within the *Halachic* framework, a rabbi will evaluate the weightiness of a particular law against the effects it has on a particular individual presenting the question or issue. Relevance to the concept of *chai b'hem* (to live according to the *mitzvot*) includes emotional and spiritual danger as well as physical danger. To be in a same-sex sexual relationship is forbidden; being in a loving relationship has positive ramifications for spiritual life. The opposite is also true: it is an uplifting religious experience to do G-d's will¹⁰ even when it is different than what one would choose for oneself, but where is the cutoff line here?

Is it possible to transcend one's homosexual longings for an unlimited amount of time? In my experience, I've seen many people who can do it only for a set amount of time (up to fifteen years) until other signs manifest, physically or psychologically.

Many of us still struggle as to whether to approach rabbis (and which rabbis), or other influential people within the Orthodox community about the issue of homosexuality. It may be a personal risk, yet it may be a place to influence having these truths incorporated into a broader framework within *Halacha*. The openness of our inner experience together with the sincerity of our faith can guide the rabbis toward a true Torah-based evaluation, free of the biases of society. We gather strength to do what we need, knowing that as rabbis are better equipped to deal with gay issues, it will be easier for other gay people to come to them and get an understanding and compassionate response. This social responsibility stems from our responsibility to "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 9:18).¹¹ We have already seen that just beginning the process, broaching the subject of Orthodox Jews facing their gayness, has a ripple effect on social consciousness within the Orthodox community. This approach can also help people who are in conflict and don't even know where to start.

In some ways, the work we are doing within the Orthodox community can also increase the possibilities of connecting with gays and lesbians who are not in our community. Hopefully, the experiences and struggles of Orthodox Jewish lesbians and gay men could help in breaking down false attitudes in both the religious and secular communities that are damaging and oppressive to others. Helping other people see the harm in the falsehood of stereotypes and the hatred that they foster is an important *mitzvah*. The Second Temple was destroyed because of causeless hatred. There are many places in the Torah and

*mitzvot*¹² that support Audre Lorde's observation that "there are no hierarchies of oppression." When the poison of oppression is present anywhere, it has the ability to spread everywhere.

To sustain the paradox of conflicting inner truths is a challenge that many Orthodox lesbians are beginning to accept—we have taken on the task of living fully both as lesbians and as Orthodox Jewish women. We have not chosen an easy path, nor do we believe that we have all the answers. But in accepting the challenge we accept the obligation to identify as both Orthodox and lesbian and to live our lives in a way that respects these different parts of ourselves. Multiple identities are often complicated when they collide with each other, yet both are vital to our life force, and it isn't really possible to choose one or the other and maintain our integrity.

APPENDIX: ORTHODYKES LETTER TO RABBIS AND EDUCATORS, JANUARY 1992

When two people marry the effects of their union reverberate through the cosmos and bring wholeness and healing to all the worlds. There is perhaps no single act that is more imitative of G-d than male and female coming together for the sake of generative union. The wedding blessings teach us that just as the original ADAM, created in the image of G-d, was male and female joined, so this couple now becomes an ADAM, entering into the fullness of what it means to be a human being, in the archetypal sense of the word.

And yet the wedding ceremony, with all its truth, mystery, and power is premised on one essential ingredient which is the life and heart of it all. That is the longing that this couple feels for each other, their desire for intimacy and union . . . their love.

There are certain of us who find ourselves in an extremely painful predicament. We are religiously committed women (from both observant and secular backgrounds) wanting nothing more than to realize the full potential of Jewish life which revolves around marriage and family as the most basic unit of community. And yet it doesn't work for us. The longing just is not there. After years of trying, we have had to accept the stark truth that we do not feel this inner drive or desire for emotional and physical intimacy with men.

That most essential ingredient which is the heart of any relationship, the desire to share time, give of ourselves, share vulnerabilities, probe the depths of another's soul . . . the feelings of love . . . don't happen in our relationships with men. And what complicates matters even more, all of these feelings do arise, and with a will and intensity of their own, in our relationships with women. All the things that most women feel toward men we feel toward women. It just is. Every shadchan can testify that love is a mystery. No matter how two people line up on paper, the attraction is either there or it isn't.

And so we have had to acknowledge the reality of who we are. For some reason Hashem created us with this nature. We say it like this to emphasize the

depths of the dilemma. Our orientation comes from somewhere very deep inside us. It feels to be among the most basic truths of who we are. All of us tried to deny it for years. We tried to change. We tried to imitate the behaviors and life choices of those around us, but it didn't work. We finally had to face the truth that we are different in this way.

Whether it is a trait of our soul or a combination of physical and environmental influences, it is very deep. The consequences and sacrifices are so excruciating that we would not choose this if not compelled from some deeply inner place. Most research indicates that sexual orientation is fixed within the first few years of life, which means that it is a very primary and primal trait.

Unfortunately the term homosexual obscures the issue. As a result most people view the matter in sexual terms and reduce it to a question of self control. We constantly hear statements equating homosexual love with adultery or bestiality. Just as one is expected to harness one's lusts and passions in these areas, so should the homosexual constrain him or herself. And yet this misses the point altogether. We are not talking about a fetish or an occasional attraction to an inappropriate partner. We are talking about the deep psychological mystery of love which is the core of a person. The human being's capacity to love is the greatest gift that Hashem bestows upon us. It is the most noble and Divine emotion.

You who are heterosexual have never had to question this part of yourselves. Your natural and instinctive desire was always toward the appropriate sex (or at least primarily so). Maybe you have had to curb your passions toward an inappropriate partner on occasion. But your natural drive and longing was toward the opposite sex and you just had to limit yourself to monogamous marriage with an appropriate partner. As primal and innate as your heterosexual orientation feels to you, so do we experience our homosexuality. And yet we emphasize that it is about love, and only secondarily about sexuality.

Since we do not have the option to express and formalize our love through marriage, we are left with two options. The first is a lifetime of celibacy (which generally also includes years of unsatisfying shiduchim). Many would call this our only option since it is the one most consistent with halachic parameters. Yet let us look at its implications. It means that we spend our lives alone, grow old alone, die alone. It means that we never feel the deep abiding joy of sharing the most beautiful, intimate parts of ourselves (our deepest feelings, loves and passions) with another. It means we never know the challenge of committing ourselves totally to the growth and well being of another human being, and the bittersweet pain and pleasure of making sacrifices for them and for the "marriage." It means that there are whole dimensions of ourselves that we don't have access to, that we can't work on, since they are only tapped and drawn into awareness through the issues and conflicts that arise in marriage-type partnerships. Other less committed and/or intimate relationships don't touch these deep places and force process to happen there

as well. It means that our love, the most beautiful and precious gift we can give to another becomes something shameful, hidden, frustrated, and painful. This is a very high price to pay yet some of us are willing to do so. We continue to pray and go out on shiduchim hoping that if we sacrifice enough, and if we believe enough, Hashem will turn our nature and our mazel around and we will find our marriage partner, our heterosexual soulmate. We know it would take a miracle, but Hashem works them all the time. Our attachment to family, community, and Halacha prevents us from accepting anything less than that, even if it means we remain alone for the rest of our lives.

The other option is to accept the paradox of who we are, and somehow face and embrace the contradiction. We are seriously committed to our religious life and our halachic practice. We understand that Torah is a package deal and make no attempt to institutionalize any exceptions to its rules. We accept that lesbianism (and to a greater degree male homosexuality) is an unsanctioned lifestyle incompatible with today's halachic and sociological norms.

And yet we are lesbians. Our relationships with women are what draw us, satisfy us, engage us. We were, for some strange reason, made that way. As much as we wished and prayed that it were otherwise, this is who we are. And so we search our souls and, with utmost integrity, try to discern what Hashem wants from us under the circumstances.

Some of us feel that His will is not for us to repress our capacity to love intimately. When we look inside, and meditate on our dilemma we cannot deny our inner truth. The same part of us that knows Torah is true and uncompromisable, knows that we are lesbians and that our love is not bad, ugly, or sinful.

Every soul is here for some purpose and receives whatever challenges and life circumstances it needs to accomplish its work. The details of its mission and accountability are a secret covenant between the soul and G-d. No one from the outside can truly know what another's task is, and what decisions he or she must make to complete it. No one from the outside can know whether a person is succeeding or failing in his or her life's work. The Torah's truths apply to all, eternally, and yet each individual life has its own mysterious truth and destiny which, on the surface, may sometimes appear to violate the Torah's commands. Every person must balance these two imperatives. Neither can be compromised.

And so, some of us, in fear and trembling, feel that our personal truth is to accept our inner nature and to create a responsible, deeply committed, marriage-like relationship with another woman. We do not make this decision lightly. It separates us from family, friends, and community. It estranges us from the heart of Torah. It is a lower path in the objective scheme of things, and yet for us it feels like the deepest truth. We feel that our work in this life still includes the dimension of intimate relationship, even though it must happen outside of heterosexual marriage.

And so we send this letter to you for several reasons:

1. In order that you should have a more sensitive, compassionate, and tolerant attitude toward your neighbors, students, clients, and family members who are struggling with these issues.
2. In order that you should be more careful and sensitive in your conversations and teachings, refraining from derogatory remarks about homosexuals. You should not presume that none are present, even among your most intimate companions. Statistics indicate that one in every ten people has a significant degree of homosexual inclination and/or experience.
3. Most important of all, we are a minority in the sense that we are lesbians who have insisted upon maintaining our love and commitment to Torah in spite of the apparent contradiction of it all. Many others (maybe a hundred-fold) have rejected Torah because they see no place for themselves in its world. There needs to be a more tolerant acknowledgement of the dilemma. People need to be encouraged to embrace Torah in spite of their sexual orientation. A Jewish lesbian is still a Jew which means she can and should keep Shabbos, kashrut, say prayers and blessings, etc. And yet when she hears people equating her most precious love of another human being with bestiality and adultery she is not going to stay around to learn about mitzvot. When she hears the ignorant sarcasm, disdain, and total lack of sensitivity to the reality of her dilemma, she doubts (and logically so) the wisdom and relevance of the whole system.

And so we ask you to make a space for us in your hearts and in your communities. Without sanctioning homosexuality as a lifestyle, we ask you to acknowledge the deep mystery of it all. To see that it is about love, not lust, and to affirm your commitment and loyalty to us as Jews. We ask you to encourage people who are struggling with these issues to nevertheless maintain their commitment to learning and Torah, and even more, to be available as loyal and non judgmental supports for them as they explore their options and decide how they will face the deep paradox at the root of their souls.

We solicit your feedback and comments on this letter, as well as any other thoughts and advice you may have on the subject. We are also available for peer counseling for those in need of a sympathetic ear.

Sincerely,

Orthodox Women Struggling to Reconcile Inner and Outer Truths
Jerusalem, Israel

NOTES

“Devorah Esther” is the pseudonym of an ultra-Orthodox woman living in a *Charedi* community in Israel. She is one of those featured in the documentary about Orthodox homosexuals, *Trembling Before G-d*, by the filmmaker Sandy (Simcha) Dubowski.

1. In preparing this article, I have interviewed a number of Orthodox lesbians. Here and throughout, their words are indicated by the use of indented quotations.

2. For lack of an English word to express the concept of *mitzvah*, I define *mitzvah* as “a commandment from G-d the fulfillment of which exposes us to the spiritual workings of the universe, by helping others and improving ourselves at the same time.”

3. Yiddish for living with constant consciousness of G-d, Torah, and *mitzvot* as the top priorities in life

4. See the appendix at the end of this article for the text of a letter sent by the Orthodoxy to selected rabbis and educators.

5. Sifra: Midrash on Leviticus (Ancient oral tradition, 220 C.E.).

6. *Yebamoth* 76a; *Sanhedrin* 69b; *Shabbath* 65a

7. Written by Aaron Halevy in the thirteenth century.

8. *Strive for Truth*, Vol. 3, 31.

9. As in this verse, the “fall” is represented by “the valley of death”; approaching death is one of the most significant learning experiences any of us experience.

10. “Do G-d’s will as if it were your will.” *Ethics of the Fathers* 2:4.

11. Rabbi Akiva says, “This is *the* teaching of the Torah.” Hillel adds, “The rest is all commentary on this.”

12. Exodus 22:21; Deut. 10:19; Deut. 22:9; Deut. 15:7, 8 are a few examples.

Part II

Culture and Identity

This page intentionally left blank.

SEVEN

Toward a History of Gay Bars in Israel: A Memoir

Amalia Ziv

The gay bar provides an informal, semi-public place where homosexuals may meet, socialize, and make sexual contacts. It is a place to congregate away from the hostile pressures of the straight world. The bar is the central institution in homosexual group life.

—Esther Newton, *Mother Camp*

Narrators consistently told us about the wonderful times in bars as well as how terrible they were. We came to understand that both of these conditions were part of the real experience of bar life.

—Kennedy and Davis, “Oral History”

People criticize this style and say it’s all a lie, they take one quick look in through the door and they say that we are all acting madly to conceal some great sadness from ourselves. All I can say is, I think they must never have spent a night in The Bar if they think that, or never a good night.

—Neil Bartlett, *Ready to Catch Him*

For lesbians and gay men, bars mean more than a place to have a beer, more than a place for a fun night out, even more than a cruising site. For many of us, these are the places where our sexual identity is confirmed and consolidated. There we learn the rules of the game, learn to understand and speak a new language. There we learn what it means to be gay and how to fashion ourselves as such. In other words, bars are a central institution of lesbian and gay culture and one of the major sites of socialization into it.¹ Entering a gay

bar is often a significant rite of passage in the process of acquiring a lesbian/gay identity.

Bars have played an important role in the emergence of modern gay identity, and form a central aspect of contemporary lesbian and gay experience, yet in terms of historical documentation and scholarly research, bars are a largely underexplored facet of gay life.² There appear to be two main reasons for this neglect. The first has to do with the negative valuation of bar culture, particularly by the political segments of the gay community. In Israel, as elsewhere, many lesbian-feminists and gay activists, consider bars as the underside of gay life.³ Alongside parks, bars connote cruising and sexual promiscuity, as well as alcohol and drug consumption, late hours, and hedonism—in short, everything that does not go together with a respectable, productive, monogamous lifestyle; everything that contradicts the “normal” image that most representatives of the community attempt to project to the straight world. Even within the community itself, bar culture is often faulted for its alienation, superficiality, ageism, and lookism.⁴ Many lesbian-feminists reject bar culture as commercial, male-oriented, and male-dominated. The negative valuation of bar culture is so prevalent and ingrained that even people who take an active part in it may tend to devalue it, regard their participation in it as a weakness or an addiction, or simply as something you do but which does not warrant much reflection.

Besides this ambivalence toward bars and bar culture, another reason for the scarcity of scholarly engagement with the subject probably lies in the fact that bars are an elusive object of inquiry. By day a clutter of tables and chairs, a sticky floor, and a moldy smell, by night they are exciting, magical, charged with emotional significance. At times they are wonderful, at times horrible, and often both at once. They are too intertwined with our own personal history—friends we used to hang out with, affairs we had, conquests and disappointments—for us to be able to write about them with any scholarly distance. It is hard to separate a place we used to go to from the person we used to be. Besides, a proper historical study about bars runs the risk of capturing only the husks of these places and leaving out their complex essence.⁵ This essence is real and distinct and at the same time it is seemingly vacuous: bars *are* nothing more than the sum total of our experiences in them, yet they have shaped us—they have given form to our desires, and have provided us with notions and images with which to conceive ourselves.⁶

There exists as yet no historical account of gay and lesbian bars in Israel. The following memoir, or rather fragments of a memoir, is offered as a first—admittedly subjective, partial, and rudimentary—contribution toward such a history. It is a personal account of three bars/clubs that were important in my own gay life in the early eighties, an account that attempts to integrate history, autobiography, and theory.

But first, a few preliminary remarks. There is something universal about the experience of the gay bar—its centrality as a place of socialization, a site of initiation into gay culture, its function in confirming and affirming indi-

vidual gay identity. On the other hand, as Kennedy and Davis stress, the prevalent tendency to “treat bar communities as an unchanging part of the gay landscape” relies on “a static model of bar culture” that is refuted by historical research.⁷ Their study documents the evolution of lesbian bar culture in Buffalo over a period of several decades. Similarly, when discussing gay bar culture in Israel, one needs to take into account the specificities of Israeli society and the distinctive features of its gay community.

The history of the gay community in Israel is significantly different from the U.S. model, where for several decades before the eruption of the gay liberation movement bars were the central institution of a pre-political community. In Israel the first gay bar sprang up in Tel Aviv in 1978,⁸ while the first homophile organization, the SPPR (Society for the Protection of Personal Rights, to this day the central gay organization) was founded in 1975. In the fifties, sixties, and seventies, the only meeting places for gays beside cruising areas for men were at private parties.⁹ In the seventies, the newly founded feminist movement provided an additional meeting place for lesbians. Thus the appearance of gay bars in Israel is more or less simultaneous with the emergence of a homophile movement, and certainly postdates the emergence of the feminist movement.

There was therefore no significant lesbian bar culture that predated the emergence of lesbian-feminist consciousness. With the founding of CLaF, the lesbian-feminist organization, in 1987, a certain division between “political lesbians” affiliated with CLaF and “nonpolitical lesbians,” whose lesbian life centered around gay bars and especially “women only” parties at clubs, became manifest. Yet this division was never clear-cut, and some members of CLaF, particularly the younger ones, frequented the bars. If lesbian-feminists avoided the bars it was probably due mostly to separatism, since except for weekly women-only nights, gay men have always dominated the bars. Unlike the U.S. case, lesbian-feminists did not identify the bars with butch-fem culture, so this did not constitute a reason for their rejection. The fact that there was never an explicit lesbian-feminist repudiation of bars probably has to do with the fact that Israel never had a developed lesbian bar culture. Even for the nonpolitical lesbians the bars were never the locus of a full-fledged subculture that could provide its members with a complete sense of identity. This is probably due, among other things, to the small size of the lesbian community, which could not until recently support an all-week-round lesbian bar.¹⁰

It is therefore my belief that in Israeli reality the often-invoked division between political (lesbian-feminist) and nonpolitical (nightlife-oriented) lesbians does not represent a deep, significant split. Moreover, if there had been such a rupture, it has been largely healed in the last few years. In the nineties the gay and lesbian community as a whole underwent a rapid process of politicization, and concurrently, both the SPPR and CLaF reached out to the nonpolitical segments of the community by sponsoring parties at commercial venues and collaborating with nightlife entrepreneurs.

THE A.M.—ON WANTING TO BE A FAGGOT

I was first introduced to the A.M. by Yael¹¹ one winter night in 1982. Having transferred to my school from a trendy art school, Yael had trendy friends, and the A.M., Tel Aviv's only gay bar, was in vogue with the arty teenage crowd. This was my very first visit to a bar. As she, I, and the two guys we were with, one of whom was her boyfriend, sat sipping our too sweet San Franciscos, her foot searched for mine under the table and I fell in love with her. That night I didn't see much else beside her. I only really got know the A.M. when I came back there two years later.

The A.M. was a small bar on Yordey-Hassira Street, a side street by the entrance to the old Tel Aviv harbor. The harbor, no longer serving its original purpose, has become a half-deserted assemblage of lofts, but the bordering streets, crammed with restaurants and bars, were one of the centers of Tel Aviv night life, lively in the early eighties. The bar was narrow. In front, in the part that faced the street, were two rows of tables, between which Avi the waiter used to glide with the grace of a dancer. At the back, there was a small courtyard with tables, covered with tarpaulin. On Friday nights the place was so packed that the crowd spilled out onto the street.

Though I first came to the A.M. at seventeen, I only started frequenting it regularly at nineteen. In the process of forging a sexual identity one goes through various stages, some of which may seem curious. At nineteen, although I was still desperately in love with Yael and at the same time engaged in establishing my heterosexual credentials by exploring relationships with men, I was also attracted to the world of gay men. In short, I wanted to be a faggot.¹² If called upon to account for it, I could offer the explanation that my male identification and my distaste for the straight world combined to form an implausible identification that nevertheless had logic of its own. Thus, when on my second visit to the A.M. I met Amos, who was twelve years my senior and a fag-about-town, I became his girl-boy, an insider-outsider, participant and observer. Every night for a couple of months we used to go to the A.M., and Amos, who was a master of conversation, his way of compensating for being remarkably overweight, drew young boys to our table. The gay world I discovered through Amos was a cruel one: older men with money and perhaps an air of tarnished acculturation or charisma; young boys, running away from home or kicked out by their parents, who had quickly learned to be survivors, and with that distinct cruelty of youth, exploited and mocked these men behind their backs. I neither spurned this world nor pitied its inhabitants—it corresponded to a cultural schema that resonated for me even if I wasn't consciously familiar with it. It was the world of Wilde and Proust, and it shone with the dark splendor of decadence. I was fascinated by its intensity, by the relentlessness of the constant pursuit. I envied the elegance of Avi the waiter, which made me feel awkward. I admired Lenny, who was the most beautiful man in the world until he went to Amsterdam and became a

woman. I feared the drag queens, in whose eyes I read implicit criticism for being a born woman—I who gave up all vestiges of femininity—while they, so much more qualified, were considered false women. I feared also the sharp tongue of the feminine boys who armed themselves with mockery against a hostile world, sparing neither each other nor anyone else in their range of fire.

THE SPARK—INITIATION

Most of the A.M.'s patrons were men; the few dykes who hung out there eyed me suspiciously and kept their distance, probably writing me off as straight or a fag hag. The first to talk to me was Billy, a new butch waitress who did occasional shifts. She told me about the Spark.

The Spark was on Namir Square, a concrete monstrosity overlooking the beach in central Tel Aviv. One of the sorry monuments of seventies architecture, Namir Square was a complex of restaurants, souvenir shops, clubs, and hotels built around a large open-air plaza. The plaza was seedy and generally overrun by tourists. The Spark was a straight club that held evenings of Turkish music for "ethnic" crowds, a place I would never have gone to and whose name I would never have come across, had it not been for the regular "women only" party it hosted every three weeks.

Having no one to take with me, I went alone, taking the bus from my parents' home in the North Tel Aviv suburb. I arrived just before midnight and wandered in the half-deserted plaza, asking directions from the owners of grill-restaurants. The club was finally found on the second floor of the empty, dimly lit shopping complex. When I entered, the place was still empty. Being unschooled in the time ethos, I had arrived too early. I sat to wait in the little vestibule. In front of me, by the cash register, sat the organizer, a determined-looking woman with long straight hair and wide cheekbones. After the initial brief exchange of words we remained silent. When the first women arrived, one of them inquired about me.

"This is something new," said the organizer, "all new things pass through me." That moment I vowed to myself that *this* "new thing" never would. Apart from her not being my type, I wasn't there to be treated this way; this wasn't why I had chosen women. To be entirely honest, what made me furious wasn't that a woman should treat another woman in this way, but that a woman should treat me in this way. My desire for women spoke, if more covertly, in that same possessive, objectifying idiom, that idiom which implied wholesale acceptance of the gender system with its entire range of cultural meanings—together with an adamant refusal to be "a woman." To love women was to usurp the ultimate male privilege, to claim the position of subject in a scheme that relegated me to the place of the object. Only several years later did I begin to ascribe a political meaning to this refusal to be a woman, and gave it the name *feminism*. At that time, I did not perceive the impossibility of being a woman as a general problem and wasn't perturbed by its implications. I was

happy with the personal solution I had found, and feminists were for me vague figures, harsh-faced and unsexy.

The club's decor was early seventies: little niches with red velvet sofas and coffee tables. In the center was a round, slightly raised, dance floor with flickering overhead lights, surrounded by decorative metal columns. This was very different from my previous club experience, which consisted of one place—the Penguin. The eighties were the decade when Tel Aviv acquired its modern club scene, and the Penguin was the mythological club that marked the dawning of the new era. The Penguin was a stark basement with black walls and no furniture; its crowd (mostly straight) teenagers and twenty-something, the music loud and strictly new wave; the dress code “black.” For me, raised on this austere esthetics, the cheap baroque of the Spark was offensive, and seemed related somehow to the dinginess of Namir Square, and to the strangeness of the women whom I thought very old and very butch (though I wasn't familiar with the term then).

It's hard to convey the complex web of sensations, thoughts, and impressions of a first time in a lesbian club—to be for the first time in a room full of lesbians, to watch the dancing couples and let sink the fact that both partners are women. The sense of novelty and strangeness is probably not so different from that of a straight person walking into a gay club, since we too are socialized as straight, but it is compounded by a whole bundle of conflicting emotions. If in the A.M. I was a spectator, here, nominally at least, I was among my own people. Do I resemble these unattractive women? Will I grow up to be like them? And should I wish to become one of them, will they accept me? Is this the Promised Land? In a straight club I could feel out of place, but I never judged the people according to such severe standards—they had no bearing on my own identity. Here, on the other hand, was the mirror that was supposed to reflect me, and what stared back at me out of it was the stigma.¹³

The mass of impressions gradually began to cohere into discrete observations. I was struck at seeing women whom, with my Ashkenazi middle-class upbringing, I classified as “frechet” (i.e. working-class Mizrahi women who looked “cheap”). I had always thought lesbianism a choice involving a certain degree of cultural sophistication. And these women who had probably never heard of Proust or Genet—I simply couldn't see how the idea had occurred to them. There were some butch-fem couples, mostly of Mizrahi women.¹⁴ One couple was making out outrageously on a sofa, the butch having half pulled off the fem's blouse.

Most of the women sat in groups engaged in animated conversation; others stood alone at the bar hunting around with their eyes. The groups ignored me, while I persistently avoided the gaze of the hunters. I didn't want to be courted by women who looked the way lesbians were supposed to look. Finally I saw someone my age, whose face I remembered from the Penguin. She wore black, had a trendy punk haircut, and sat alone. Relieved, I walked up to her and started a conversation, convinced of our stylistic bond. Shelly

put me in the picture and told me she was one of the “new things” who had passed through the organizer’s hands (my next lover, whom I was also to meet at the Spark, was another). The music was mostly undanceable as far as we were concerned—after all, we were the New Wave generation.¹⁵

When a slow song came up, Shelly asked me to dance. Soon we were kissing. With her black hair and white skin Shelly had a distinct ghostly beauty, but she was hardly “my type”: she was too tall, too slim, and too flat chested. But at nineteen, things like that would just happen—I couldn’t control situations, didn’t know how; I let every possibility materialize. And there was another thing too. I think that unconsciously I sensed that sex was my passport to this world. In order to belong, I needed to forge an alliance, and while I wasn’t attracted to Shelly, she did come from my world, I felt safe with her. As we kissed, I thought with satisfaction of the organizer and her likes, whom I expected to be watching, regretting that their prey had slipped away.

At the end of the evening, Shelly got us a ride home with an older butch, who poured her heart out about a woman who had used her, dumped her, stole her things, and was now harassing her with threats. I realized that, like the gay male scene, the lesbian scene was inhabited by very different people from the ones I grew up with in the North Tel Aviv suburb; shady people, whom my parents would have frowned at. I realized that I had reached the margins. Some months later, at the Theater Club, another gay venue, I found myself in the crowd that had gathered around two women fighting over a girlfriend one had stolen from the other. On another night I saw a dyke and a drag queen threatening each other with broken bottles. Belonging to a dark exotic world filled me with pride. It endowed me with a knowledge unavailable to other people my age, whose straightness kept them within circumscribed spheres; a knowledge that eluded my parents, whose claim to a monopoly over the world of experience stopped short at the club doors, through which I had right of entry solely by virtue of being a lesbian. It was a secret knowledge, because it had no place in everyday life, and also because it was impossible to formulate as a coherent chain of propositions. Knowledge made of places and their particular ambiance, of faces, a few names, behavior codes, and several words, like “the gang” (*Ha’chevreh*).¹⁶

DIVINE—PURE SEX

Those who remember Divine, remember it as the ultimate club, a pinnacle of gay and lesbian nightlife, followed only by decline. Divine opened in 1984 on Dizzengof Street, Tel Aviv’s central shopping and entertainment area. Coveted by straights, Divine was such an elegant club that being gay felt like belonging to privileged elite. I still recall the ceremonious feeling of going by the huge bouncer and descending the long stairway, aware of my image appearing that very moment on the monitor of the closed-circuit TV in the entrance hall at the bottom of the stairs. This televised documentation turned each entrance

into a very festive occasion, a sort of parade. I would make sure to straighten my back and stare straight ahead with the assurance of someone coming to conquer the place mixed with the nonchalance of an experienced clubber. The best, of course, was to arrive with someone. Then I could simply ignore the camera and wrap an arm around her shoulder in a show of possession, letting only the revolving doors at the foot of the staircase come between us.

Arriving accompanied was a show of power; coming alone was an adventure. Divine replaced the Spark's three-weekly Thursdays with a weekly women's night on Tuesday (thereby starting a long tradition of holding women's parties on Tuesday). The central component in the attraction of the women's nights was the cruising. On mixed nights, the male presence diffused the electric charge. The men were more numerous and more extravagant. The music was High-Energy, and the men took over the dance floor, swinging from side to side, sweeping the air around them with large arm movements.¹⁷ Even when it's gay men and women, the men still push us aside, and there's no better metaphor than the dance floor. But on Tuesdays the air was charged with pure sexual energy. I loved to dance alone in front of the mirrors and feel the stares in my back. Being a sexual object for women didn't detract from my power, it made me feel powerful. To be an object of desire here, I didn't have to be a woman—I didn't have to diminish myself, accommodate, and wait for the other party to make the first move. On the contrary, the stronger I was, the sexier I was. The gazes didn't bend me—they made me feel freer. The space was mine.

Sex in a lesbian context had an entirely different meaning than in a heterosexual context. In the straight world, fucking meant responding to male expectations, and beyond that, to cultural expectations. To fuck was to fuck against the notions of the frigid woman and the easy woman, and for the notion of the sexually liberated woman. But whether for or against, to fuck a man was to fuck within the space delimited by these coordinates. Every sexual encounter with a man was open to the interpretation that something was taken from me; with women I didn't stand to lose anything.

The bars introduced me to the experience of hunting, if not as something frequently enacted, then as an exciting potential. The partial darkness, the booze, and the music, diffusing everyday boundaries and creating a nocturnal persona. The enormous distance between two people traversed in a split second, with one touch. Entering the club, my steps became lighter, the soft springy steps of the predator. But at the same time I was also the peacock spreading its feathers—a combination of power and narcissism. What I loved about the bars was the way that the complexity of human relations got shorn down to the simple, sometimes cruel, truth of sex: yes-no, interested-not interested. This was a reduction of the human, but it was alchemy too. In the shimmering half-light of the club, sex was power and power was sex. Everyone was hunter and hunted at the same time. The eyes scanned the room quickly and efficiently, returning a blank stare to an interested one, resting for a

moment on an object of interest, but not too long, not to appear too eager, and moved on. The intensity of the hunt wasn't like anything that went on in a straight club, maybe because here there were no predefined roles: everyone was subject and object, predator and prey. This underlying equality heightened the tension—in a straight club only half the crowd are a potential object; on Tuesday nights at Divine, everyone was a possibility, and everyone was a potential suitor or a potential rival.

At times, of course, the spell would break or simply fail to materialize. The lead refused to turn into gold. The eyes scanned the room but found nothing to rest on; everyone was graceless, vulgar, too old, too young; the music silly and annoying, the body heavy, the soul tired, the time wasted, and the whole thing insipid. Today's bars may be as good as or better than those of the past, but for me the magic rarely happens any more. I think that for the cropped-haired kids with pierced eyebrows the bars still offer pure sex.

NOTES

1. There is, of course, variation in the degree to which a given lesbian/gay culture is centered around bars or around alternative institutions. The place of bars in Israeli lesbian and gay culture will be dealt with shortly.

2. A notable exception is Kennedy and Davis's book on the history of the lesbian bar community in Buffalo, New York, between 1930 and 1960, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*. Representations of bar culture are more common in gay and lesbian literature and cinema. Some examples include *The Well of Loneliness*, *The Killing of Sister George*, John Rechy's *City of Night*, Neil Bartlett's *Ready to Catch Him Should He Fall*, Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues*, and the BBC series *Queer as Folk*.

3. In the United States, the repudiation of lesbian bar culture by lesbian-feminism in the seventies has been followed by its revalorization in the eighties and nineties; and the fact that the gay liberation movement saw its inception at a bar, Stonewall, whose name has become synonymous to gay liberation, serves to counterbalance the anti-bar bias. In Israel, however, there are no known historical connections between gay bar culture and gay political struggle. And since, in the history of the community, bar culture does not much precede political organization, so that, unlike in the United States, the two can hardly be regarded as disparate and successive evolutionary stages, there has never been a complete repudiation of bar culture, and consequently there has never been a vindication of it.

4. Examples of such complaints may be found in the pages of the gay paper *Hazman Havarod* (The Pink Time), both in articles and in readers' letters.

5. Kennedy and Davis's study admirably eschews this risk by relying on an extensive oral history project and incorporating the voices of the narrators. Thus, in addition to sketching a general picture of working-class butch-femme bar culture, they also manage to represent a wide range of individual experiences.

6. In his novel, *Ready to Catch Him Should he Fall*, which revolves around life in a gay bar, Neil Bartlett highlights the elusive quality of this "essence" of a bar, the fact that the bar experience by definition defies description. As the narrator attempts to convey the uniqueness of a particular bar experience, a bar that nevertheless has an

exemplary, mythological status, as hinted by the fact that it is known only as “The Bar” (and this mythological, larger-than-life, quality is characteristic of bar experience at its best), he keeps stressing the ineffable nature of this experience by repeating how hard it is to try and describe it to someone who wasn’t there:

And because it was so normal to us, it is very strange now trying to describe it to you. Giving an account of it like this makes me feel as though you’re asking me to account for it, explain it for you. Explain our lives there—as if they needed explaining. . . . (23)

And it’s so odd; it’s hard now when somebody says, “What was it like? . . .” You were never there . . . you know nothing of our lives then, nothing, nothing, nothing, it’s extraordinary to me that. (59–60)

7. *Boots of Leather*, 30.

8. This bar was the “24,” in North Dizzengoff. Bars and pubs in general appeared in the Israeli urban landscape and became a popular leisure activity (mostly for young people) only in the late seventies. Prior to that, other than one exceptional establishment in Jerusalem, there have been only hotel bars, and some prostitution bars in Tel Aviv’s Hayarkon St. The bohemian circles hung out mostly in cafés, where alcohol was normally served.

9. In the late sixties there was even a gay bar, named “Oscar,” that operated in a private apartment. The pseudonymously authored novel, *Hadavka’im*, published in 1960, provides a picture of the life of a small gay and lesbian clique in Tel Aviv of the fifties. In spite of the fact that the author is a woman, the gay social life described is predominantly male.

10. The first such bar, Minerva, which is lesbian owned and run, opened in Tel Aviv in 1998.

11. The names of the main characters in this narrative have been changed.

12. Today, in the age of queerness and proliferating transgender identities, cross-gender identification and desire *within* the gay world is a much more spoken and theorized subject and no longer considered so odd (cf. Carol Queen’s “Beyond the Valley of the Fag Hags”). However, in the early eighties in Tel Aviv, I had no model with which to think such identification, and no frame that could legitimize or validate it.

13. Many accounts, both fictional and autobiographical, of a first time in a lesbian bar describe a euphoric sense of homecoming. For example, one of the narrators in Kennedy and Davis’s study recounts: “I just knew with all the questions in my mind and conflicting feeling about it, it was like I was home, even though it was strange territory. There was something about it, there were all women and immediately I saw the roles, the butches and the fems. And that’s what I wanted” (*Boots of Leather*, 78). And in Leslie Feinberg’s *Stone Butch Blues*, the protagonist’s mental reaction upon first entering a gay bar and seeing the butches and femmes is: “[T]his was everything I could have hoped for in life” (28). In contrast to such accounts, my own experience (probably due in large measure to my anxious adolescent snobbery) was marked by strong ambivalence. Far from experiencing an immediate sense of belonging, I wasn’t sure I wanted to belong. What I saw both attracted and repelled me, and in the social scene of the Spark I found no role models whom I could aspire to resemble.

14. It is my impression that traditional butchfem relationships are, or at least used to be, more prevalent among Mizrahi women. Israel does not have a developed class system, and the ethnic Mizrahi/Ashkenazi division functions as the major social division among the Jewish population. It can therefore be said that the prevalence of butch/fem roles among Mizrahi women is the equivalent of their adoption by working-class lesbians in the United States. The Mizrahi/Ashkenazi division does of course have a significant economic component.

15. To this day, lesbian parties in Israel are considered the worst in terms of the music.

16. A term, no longer much in use, that used to denote the gay community, e.g. "s/he is one of the gang" = s/he is gay. The term *chevreh* itself dates back to the pre-state era, and was in use especially in the Palmach and later on in the youth movements. It was appropriated by the gay community in its underground phase and used as an innocent-sounding code word, whose special meaning eluded the outside world.

17. One of the narrators in Kennedy and Davis's book makes a similar observation about the men taking over the dance floor in mixed gay bars:

[T]here would often be trouble on the dance floor because the men would dance and take up a lot of space, swing their arms and move real fast, and they'd tramp on the women sometimes, so there would be trouble. (73)

REFERENCES

- Bartlett, Neil. *Ready to Catch Him Should He Fall*. London: Penguin, 1990.
- Davis, Madeline, and Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy. "Oral History and the Study of Sexuality in the Lesbian Community: Buffalo, New York, 1940–1960." *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*. Ed. Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey Jr. New York: NAL Books, 1989.
- . *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community*. New York: Penguin, 1994.
- Feinberg, Leslie. *Stone Butch Blues*. Ithaca: Firebrand, 1993.
- Newton, Esther. *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1972.
- Queen, Carol. "Beyond the Valley of the Fag Hags." *Pomosexuals: Challenging Assumptions about Gender and Sexuality*. Ed. Carol Queen and Laurence Schimel. San Francisco: Cleis, 1997.

This page intentionally left blank.

EIGHT

The Presentation of Self of Young Israeli Lesbians: A Discourse on Split Identity

Diana Luzzatto

The research presented here focuses on the discourse through which young Israeli lesbians choose to define themselves in interaction with other women. In particular, the following have been analyzed: the ideas, concepts, and symbols portrayed as central to their identity. Analysis of the issue takes place while considering the meaning of lesbian identity in the context of Israeli society.

The research results have been analyzed by means of the anthropological method of participant observation in the course of face-to-face encounters, in which both lesbian and heterosexual women took part, mostly in academic settings, in feminist meetings, in informal gatherings such as parties or discussion groups in private homes, and in public places such as coffee shops or discotheques. Most of the relevant subjects were brought up spontaneously in the course of conversation, with no previous direction, except in academic discussions or workshops designed to deal with issues relating to feminine sexuality. The data were gathered between the years 1996 and 2002. The research group included women defining themselves as lesbians or bisexuals, most of them young women between the ages of twenty and thirty, in possession of academic degrees or students, and almost all of them of Ashkenazi origin. The majority of the lesbian members of the research group belongs to lesbian or feminist movements, or identified with them. The heterosexual women participating in these encounters, and characterized by similar socio-economic status, also stated their identification with feminist values, and some of them were very active in the field of women's rights. All the members of

the group lived in the central area of the country, and most of their daily activities took place in the city of Tel Aviv. The women taking part did not constitute a regular group, and their number, the nature of the relationships among them, and the extent to which they were familiar with each other—ranging from a one-time interaction to close friendship—differed according to the context in which the meeting took place.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The multidimensional nature of lesbian identity constitutes a field of research relatively new in sociology and anthropology. This is attributed, among other things, to a general preference of researchers to deal with male homosexual identity.¹ Within the scant body of research on the subject, it is possible to discern a number of main streams: the first is centered on theoretical aspects of the issue of identity while relating to postmodern conceptions, especially to “queer theory.” Queer theory rejects the binary conception that views human sexuality as revolving around two main dichotomous axes: male–female, heterosexual–homosexual. Until recent years, sociological research was permeated by this attitude, called “essentialist,” according to which sexual identity (learned or innate) undergoes a process of internalization and becomes permanent. As opposed to this perspective, the postmodern “constructionists” view sexual identity as a constant building process, depending on historical, social, and culture-specific contexts (for example, Plummer 1981, 17–29; Plummer 1996, 64–82; Seidman 1996, 1–39). In fact, historical analysis of developments connected to lesbian identity shows that it is multiple and variable according to the historical era (for example, Kennedy and Davis 1993; Weitz 2000, 115–27). However, there exists very little empirical research examining to what extent the “lesbian experience” matches theories. The limited available research relying on empirical data focuses on specific aspects of lesbian identity, such as overt and covert tension between lesbian sexual identity and ethnic identity (Mays et al., 1993, 1–14; Takagi 1996, 243–58; Brant 2000, 21–34; Pitman 2000, 49–64),² or on discourse about dimensions of gender identity, such as fem as opposed to butch (for example, Esterberg 1996, 259–79; Harris and Crocker 1997).

Though the above discuss the complexity of lesbian experience, they relate to the wider social context only indirectly, out of a tendency to limit themselves to social settings identified with the lesbian community.³ Moreover, they usually rely on autobiographical reports, individual in-depth interviews, or literary analysis, so that, with few exceptions,⁴ the way different dimensions of lesbian identity spontaneously arise in nonconstructed situations is not examined.

Thus, in this chapter, I attempt to strengthen the empirical knowledge on lesbian identity while at the same time considering the different contexts in which identity elements are enhanced during the flow of interaction. Similarly, attention is devoted to the dynamics of discourse revolving around iden-

tity, as it is expressed in the self-presentation of women defining themselves as lesbians, in interaction with others viewing themselves as heterosexuals. In this manner, a dialectical facet missing in the few works relating both to lesbian and heterosexual women is added. Previous research treated lesbians and heterosexual women as separate research groups, while relying on surveys for the purpose of comparing their sexual behavior (for example, Albrow and Tully 1979, 331–44; Whitam et al. 1998, 31–56).⁵ This research, stressing differences in behavior connected to sexual preferences, draws a line between lesbians and other women. The present research fulfills the need expressed by Faraday (1981, 112–29), who points out that the categorical division of women according to parameters of sexual preference, strengthened by research tendencies, separates women and prevents them from creating primal bonds among themselves, thus serving men's needs. According to her, the focus on lesbians as a category has to be shifted to emotional relations among women, whether or not accompanied by clear-cut physical expressions. Still, very little has been done to free lesbians from the research ghetto, as pointed out also by researchers acting in the spirit of queer theory (Seidman 1996, 1–29). Among the exceptions, we find anthropological works, such as Sheperd's (1987, 240–70), showing how Swahili men and women are able to shuttle between homosexual and heterosexual identities. Fieldwork of this kind, mostly carried out in non-Western cultures, supports works examining Western culture from the historical perspective (Dunne 1997; Foucault 1980; Foucault 1985), stating that homosexual and heterosexual categories are socially/culturally constructed and change according to context, often to a degree by which the boundaries between the two become significantly blurred. Therefore, in this study, the presentation of identities, as expressed in the observed meetings, is examined, while relating both to the wider cultural context and to the specific interaction context.

The theoretical concept adopted here holds that identity displayed in the course of dialogue does not remain a presentation alone, but becomes more constructed—and organized—while engaging in the same dialogue (for example, Butler, 1990; Esterberg 1996, 259–79). Using Simon's concepts (1997), the ever-evolving construction of identity takes place through the combination of different levels of discourse: intrapsychic, interpersonal, and cultural. In addition, the more a person attempts to interpret and explain his/her experiences to others, the more he/she becomes acquainted with him/herself, transcends the boundaries of his/her own subjectivity, and reaches a state of intersubjectivity. In this manner, intersubjectivity is transformed into a dialectical experience that creates meaning by means of language (Gurevitz 1997, 378). This theoretical concept has revealed itself as relevant particularly in the framework of the present study: by means of dialogue taking place in the guise of meetings, a two-way process is devised. And through said process, lesbians and heterosexuals construct a meaning to their identity, experience it, and test its boundaries. Thus, even though the focus in the present work is on the

presentation of lesbian identity, other women, interacting with lesbians, constitute an integral part of the research field.

LESBIANS AS WOMEN: THE CREATION OF SHARED SITUATIONAL DEFINITION

It has been found that the lesbian members of the research group alternately emphasize four main identity components: the feminine component, the lesbian component, the individual component, and the Israeli component. The first relates to gender identity common to other women as well, and it is principally presented from the feminist point of view, while raising subjects connected to the feminine experience, such as: obstacles to women's liberation, the "glass ceiling," patriarchal oppression, and feminine solidarity. The enhancing of this component, which underlines similarities among the women present, contributes to smooth interaction and creates safe ground on which women can connect to other women on the basis of shared destiny. For example, in a number of cases, common experiences from the army were discussed focusing on sexual harassment on men's part experienced both by lesbian and heterosexual women. Whenever such subjects are raised in a meeting, the conversation often shifts to issues regarding sexual preference, and a meaningful difference in its course is perceived when there is previous knowledge of the different participants' backgrounds. In cases in which this is unclear, a "tentative" stage, devised to reach a clearer situational definition, is notable, as exemplified in the following.⁶

In the course of a meeting, two heterosexual women, Sarah and Hanna, were joined by a third woman, Rachel, Sarah's friend. Hanna had no clue about Rachel's sexual preferences, and Rachel, for her part, knew nothing about Hanna's. After about half an hour, the conversation began revolving around feminist movements' activities. At this point, Rachel said: "I belong to CLaF." Hanna replied: "I am not familiar with it, but I heard its members do a good job." It is apparent how the two women provided each other with indirect information about their sexual preferences: Rachel chose to present her identity in the frame of an organization, and not by using sexual concepts. In this fashion, she could define herself as a lesbian without departing from her identity definition, common to the other two women, as a feminist. Hanna, on her part, showed empathy and support, in that she stated her positive attitude toward lesbian feminists, and at the same time clarified she does not belong to the lesbian community.

At times, clues on sexual identity are given by reference to types of leisure activities connected to the lesbian culture. For example, in the course of a conversation among a number of students in a university corridor, a young lesbian told another about a "women's party" that was about to take place, and in which a famous singer was supposed to take part. The second girl replied,

"She came out of the closet at last!" This way, the two provided the other students with clues about their sexual identity. In another case, a lesbian woman provided a heterosexual with clues about her sexual preferences by expressing her appreciation of a pop singer's group composed of members identified with the lesbian community. As can be seen from the above, clues on lesbian identity are given indirectly, without breaking the common definition as women, in such a way that other women may choose whether to react to the clues or not. On their part, by indirectly relating to the clues, heterosexual women can display their knowledge of the subject (for example, a lesbian organization or lesbian artists), to indicate their degree of closeness to the lesbian community. An explicit statement about lesbian identity will almost never be made in the course of preliminary meetings (except for those meetings designed to deal with the subject—for example, academic meetings about queer theory). A young lesbian explained, "When I was in the closet I couldn't say the 'word.' . . . It was frightening. . . . I came out of the closet seven months ago, when I began to study and live in Tel Aviv. I go out every night, I feel 'high' all the time because I am not afraid any more to explore sex with women. . . . But even now, when I talk to straight people it is difficult for me to say the 'word'; many girls don't like to say it."

Even when women have a friendly relationship, the word *lesbian* is not necessarily used, though they may relate to the subject fairly explicitly. For example, after the negative statements made by President Weizman about lesbians and homosexuals (which will be detailed later), a lesbian student asked a heterosexual one, "I am going to a protest against Weizman. Are you coming?"

From the data discussed above, it is possible to pinpoint a number of different strategies, indicating, on the one hand, young lesbians' avoidance of stating their identity in a clear-cut way, and, on the other hand, their willingness, or even desire, to reveal themselves before feminist women perceived as holding a view of the world similar to theirs. In the process of becoming acquainted, when there is no unclear point left as far as sexual preferences go, the word *lesbian* may be uttered clearly and obviously, at times due to a lesbian's initiative, and at times due to a heterosexual's initiative, and become a permanent concept in the conversation. In addition, a clear indication of the transformation of a superficial acquaintance into friendship is constituted by lesbian women's willingness to allow other women to participate in cultural and entertainment activities taking place in the frame of their community, as expressed by explicitly inviting them to go to a well-known lesbian pub, or to partake of different activities such as organization meetings, so that a heterosexual may become an "honorary member"⁷ of the lesbian community. Said willingness is mostly perceived by the heterosexual friends as an honor and a sign of trust. Following the above, it appears that the creation of definitions of situations enhancing common elements is connected to a mutual desire for social acceptance.

THREATS THAT UNDO DEFINITIONS OF SITUATIONS:
STRATEGIES TO PRESERVE A COMMON DEFINITION

Even the most relaxed conversation always holds the threat of a possible disturbance of the definition of the state of affairs. First of all, topics of conversation such as sexuality and couples' life often bring to light differences among the people present. These subjects will almost never be dealt with in the first stages of acquaintance, but only in the course of repeated meetings among friends, in which a sense of ease and reciprocated acceptance is felt. Most of the participants in these meetings are young women having romantic relationships, or interested in having one, thus, the issues of love, marriage and sexuality are often discussed. While most of the young lesbians have some idea regarding the characteristics of heterosexual love and sexuality, and some have even had romantic relationships with men previous to their coming "out of the closet," the world of lesbian sexuality is unfamiliar to most heterosexuals, who reveal a certain amount of curiosity toward it. Thus, the discussion revolves at times around the lesbian experience. In this kind of situation, it is apparent that young lesbians strive to preserve a situational definition based on similarities among women: they tend to depict the lesbian experience as built on the basis of mental and emotional elements common to other women as well, while minimizing the importance of the erotic aspect of sexual identity. In this manner, lesbian identity is often described using concepts perceived as comprehensible to feminist women's thinking. As one of the women in this research explained, "Being lesbian is not about sex alone, it is mostly about thinking, and a woman may prefer men and still have a 'good lesbian mind.' "

Similarly, lesbian experience is described by emphasizing the emotional elements of love between women that may be shared by other women as well, such as deep friendship, sensitivity toward other people's needs, and mutual support and encouragement. Such a presentation is meant to unite the feminine and the lesbian experience, as exemplified in the following description: "Love between two women means, she understands how I feel, we are on the same wavelength, and if she hurts me, it will be like hurting herself." The lesbian experience is often presented as being opposite to the male-versus-female experience, while being similar to the female-versus-male experience. For instance, when asked what is the first characteristic she notices in a woman, a student explained, "Her eyes . . . not if they are blue or brown, but what they express. I am not saying that physical appearance is not important at all, but it is secondary, not like men who first thing look at your ass or your legs. The character is more meaningful. Straight women do the same when they look for the right man; they look for signs of his nature."

The presentation of lesbian bonds as essentially emotional also comprises aspects considered problematic, as implied in the following description: "We are two women, and that causes a hysterical situation. When I cry, she cries; in movies we pass handkerchiefs from one to the other. When we fight, we

both get hurt, and it takes a lot of time to make up.” The presentation of emotional elements common to women as central to the experience of partnership, both from their problematic and their advantageous aspects, allows heterosexual friends to share their own experiences with others. For instance, a young woman who complained about her partner’s attitude stated, “At times, I am sorry I am not a lesbian; there’s more communication with a woman.” Utterances of this kind reveal that a heterosexual woman is capable of indirectly relating to lesbian love, and at the same time they strengthen shared female identity. Moreover, heterosexual participants in meetings often praise female friendship, which—they say—is more important than love.

Therefore, connecting the lesbian experience to characteristics of ordinary feminine thought and feeling not only does not threaten the similarity among participants, but can enhance this similarity. Talk of love and sexuality between heterosexuals and bisexuals may also focus on the erotic aspect of sexuality, a phenomenon that usually does not occur in the course of lesbian/heterosexual interactions. In the course of a heterosexual/bisexual interaction, the ability of the bisexual to cope with conflictual aspects of her identity without sensing a judgmental attitude on the part of friends demanding a clear-cut commitment to lesbian identity, is exemplified by the following words uttered by a young woman divided between different needs: “Sex . . . I enjoy more with a woman, men do not fully understand me, but then with them it is less emotional, sometimes this is good. I want to marry, have children; I would like a partner different from me that will complete me.” Confidences of this kind often encourage heterosexual women to talk about situations in which they felt attracted, to a certain extent, to another woman. In this state of mind, a young woman talked about a “leisure day” she spent at a beauty institute: “A girl gave me a massage, and it was very exciting, really sexual.” Similarly, a lesbian woman admitted that sometimes she misses the times when she was still in the closet: “I quite enjoyed sex with my boyfriend, I sometimes miss it.” To summarize, subjects such as sexuality and partnership, while constituting a risk of disrupting the situational definition by raising points of difference among participants, may, on the contrary, in many cases be exploited to blur dividing boundaries among women, and even to incorporate lesbian components within the heterosexual identity.

DISRUPTING THE SITUATIONAL DEFINITION: THE ELEMENT OF DISCOURSE OF POWER

In contrast to the smooth manner in which shifts between the focus on gender elements and the focus on sexual preferences are carried out without disrupting common elements of identity, in certain cases the lesbian identity is construed as having closed boundaries, thus casting a shadow on the “female” category. This often occurs when young women experience events or utterances that constitute reminders of society’s rejection of alternative sexual preferences. In most cases,

the young lesbians will provide vague hints as to instances of homophobia experienced by them—for example, at work, and will decline to go into details. Such a cautious attitude creates a divisive element between lesbians and other women who do not experience the same kind of oppression, and at times may cause embarrassment to those willing to display support. The young lesbians' tendency to avoid the subject characterizes cases in which the offense is perceived as a personal one, as opposed to statements and events hurtful to the homosexual population as a whole; as mentioned above, no attempt is made to avoid explicit reference to the latter, and the young lesbians feel free to ask their heterosexual friends to participate in public demonstrations against the same. Another kind of reaction that divides participants in the meetings may occur when heterosexuals express opinions on the essence of the lesbian experience in a style perceived as patronizing. Such behavior may disrupt the definition of identity as revolving around the common gender axis. For example, in one case, a discussion arose concerning the ability of heterosexual women to carry out research on lesbian women. One woman angrily turned to a heterosexual who was maintaining that this was a possibility, claiming that a woman can comprehend other women, and said, "Do you think that a woman who has never been with women can understand lesbians?"

The following illustrates a situation in which attempts to bridge different definitions of situation can create misunderstandings. Lina, a woman belonging to a group of students that met to discuss research work, was asked by Sharon, a lesbian with whom she was on very friendly terms, if she ever made love to other women. "I never tried but that doesn't mean that I am not going to do it one day. I thought a lot about it, it sounds very exciting." While Lina explained later that she only meant to show an open mind so as to be liked by Sharon, Sharon was persuaded that Lina was bisexual but was afraid to break social norms. In the course of following meetings, she turned to her quite often, asking questions like, "Didn't you get out of your closet yet?" Communication between the two became tainted with embarrassment and their friendship cooled down.

Any expression perceived as a rejection of lesbian sexual preference can also strengthen dividing lines, as depicted in the following event:

A lesbian woman told a heterosexual that she found her attractive. When she replied that she considered that a compliment, but she liked men, the lesbian aggressively replied, "You are a dick slave."

The heterosexual preference of the other woman was well known, and still, in this case, her reaction was perceived as a personally offensive rejection. As discussed above, there is a meaningful difference in lesbian reactions, according to the extent to which an event or a statement is grasped as personally directed to them, as opposed to events and statements perceived as aiming at the homosexual population as a whole.

Thus, a peaceful, relaxed conversation may be instantly colored by power-like strains, at times with the aid of feminist discourse that underlines heterosexual dependence on men. In other words, a delegitimization of the heterosexual identity is at times employed to strengthen the legitimization of the lesbian identity. To summarize, while the discourse on female oppression may reinforce the common definition of feminine identity, it is apparent that in contexts that imply a threat to lesbian identity, the same discourse can be exploited in an opposite fashion, to create a separation between lesbians and other women.

THE INDIVIDUAL DIMENSION OF IDENTITY:
A DISCOURSE REVOLVING AROUND THE
ISRAELI ELEMENT AND THE POLITICALLY CORRECT

At times, the women researched chose to enhance the individual elements of their identity, while emphasizing the heterogeneity within the lesbian community. For example, one woman claimed that no similarity exists among lesbian women, apart from their sexual preference. "Each one is something different," she explained, "There are kibbutz women and Tel Aviv women." She explained that kibbutz women are provincial and lacking "polish" in comparison to the more sophisticated and free Tel Aviv lesbians, an opinion common also among young Tel Aviv straights in relation to other straights. It is interesting to point out that by enhancing heterogeneity within the community, she also underlined the similarities among women who have different sexual preferences but share the same cultural background and activities. One can see, therefore, that classifications that apply to Israeli society are reproduced and strengthened by the lesbian has community. This can be explained by the fact that being a lesbian has won a growing acceptance in Israeli youth subculture, which allows the lesbian community to express the diversity of its beliefs and origins rather than presenting a united front to the outside world. The growing acceptance of different modes of sexuality allows for greater heterogeneity within the lesbian community as it interacts with straights on particular matters.

In their attempt to stress individual differences, young lesbians strive to disprove common stereotypes, for example, that "lesbians are masculine." They explain that there is an internal categorization that differentiates between butch (masculine), fem (feminine), and tomboy (youthful). Still, some of the young lesbians claim the relevance of these categories is subject to debate and that there is an increasing tendency to blur the boundaries between them, while a parallel weakening of visual and behavioral symbols connected to each category (such as leather jackets and masculine walk, as opposed to dresses and makeup) is taking place. For example, a young woman stated, "Not always they call things with their real name and contrasting messages are sent; for example a lesbian wearing feminine clothes but sending masculine messages by means of vulgar behavior. So what if she is wearing a dress?"⁸ A common claim is that the weakening of traditional categories is accompanied by the development of

individual styles. A woman explained: "Butch and fem is 'passé.' Once you went to women parties and all the participants looked the same, like they came out from the same industry. Now you can choose from lots of different styles." However, some women agreed that a very short haircut still constitutes a recognizable sign of lesbian identity, which is not related to a feminine or masculine self-perception. Yet, even the reliance on hair style is losing its relevance. For example, one of the members of a group of women that used to meet rather frequently had a short haircut, was always dressed in pants and large shirts, and displayed assertive behavior and radical feminist opinions; so that the other participants—straight and lesbian—were convinced she was a lesbian. After a few months, they found out she had been living with a male partner for a number of years. It seems that the weakening of identifying signs among lesbian women is taking place with the simultaneous weakening of traditional gender symbols among young heterosexuals. Thus, relying on stereotyped identification signs may give birth to misunderstanding.

However, at the same time that individual styles are being developed, one can also recognize a tendency to search for unifying symbols: while many of the women interviewed reject the feminine-masculine dichotomy, quite a few of them categorize themselves as belonging to the tomboy category, which allows them to combine sportive and "naughty" clothes and behavior with care about their exterior appearance (for example, earrings, different haircuts, colored stripes or gel on the hair). "This is the youthful look," they explain.⁹

The discussion about division into categories indicates the existence of changing processes and the attempt to devise a new organization around new symbols and concepts. However, the traditional categories have not been completely rejected: for example, during Spring 1999, more than one lecture on the butch-fem subject took place under the auspices of a feminist lesbian organization and academy. Moreover, it seems that the tomboy and butch styles obtain more legitimization within the community, as they are explicitly connected to a commitment to the lesbian identity,¹⁰ as exemplified in the following event.

A young heterosexual was talking about a bisexual friend who broke up with her partner. Among other things, said partner insisted that she would wear pants, while she also liked to wear dresses. "I told her to wear a dress," said the heterosexual friend. "It suits her so much, but her girlfriend didn't want her to, and that is also one of the reasons they broke up." It is reasonable to assume that in this case, clothing symbolized the extent to which the bisexual woman was willing to abandon the heterosexual element of her identity to fully adopt a lesbian identity.¹¹

Discourse revolving around categorization is also related to the connection of young lesbians to the Israeli element of their identity, which bonds them to the surrounding wider society. Thus, for example, it is claimed that there is a growing preference in favor of the use of Hebrew terms, as pointed out by one of the participants: "Today they prefer 'feminine-masculine.' . . . only

'tomboy' has still remained in use." The Israeli element is also displayed by the manifested preference of many youngsters for lesbian Israeli groups and singers over foreign ones.

Another aspect of the Israeli element is constituted by a tendency to adopt labeling criteria peculiar to the wider society, for example, on the ethnic level. As mentioned, most of the members of the research group were of Ashkenazi origin (mostly from Eastern Europe). In a number of cases, references to terms such as *arsiot* (female pimps) or *frechet* (bimbos) were made. Lesbians explain that most of them are lower-middle-class Sephardic women who tend to be less educated than the Ashkenazi population. By applying the common distinctions in Israeli society between the Mizrahi (women whose family origins are from Arab countries) and the Ashkenazi, the lesbians reproduce and enhance social distinctions that have been largely moderated in the social circles of the straights. Some Ashkenazi lesbians claim that most Mizrahi lesbians rarely frequent the same clubs or associate with the educated lesbians for political purposes. However, once educated, ethnic distinctions seem to matter less or are no longer taken into consideration.

It may be that the Israeli aspect of identity, in all its dimensions, is gaining importance due to a feeling of growing social acceptance. First of all, younger members of the population, especially when urban and acculturated, are perceived as not engaging, for principled reason, in labeling. In this context, it is interesting to notice that certain young women state their preference for "mixed" public social spaces, such as coffee shops or pubs regularly visited both by heterosexuals and homosexuals. In fact, there is a feeling of stronger acceptance among broader segments of the population. For example, the staff of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem engages in a close relationship with the homosexual and lesbian student organization called *ha asiron ha acher* (the other ten percent), by means of cooperating in the organization of conferences and lectures on gender and sexuality issues. Similarly, meetings dealing with queer studies are held at Tel Aviv's university. While it is not surprising that educated groups and left-wing parties are in favor of equal rights for homosexuals and lesbians, there is also a sense of improvement on a wider social level. As expressed by one of the members of the researched group, "Our situation in Israel is one of the best in the world, right after Scandinavian countries, better than in the States. Even religious parties cannot stop the improvement." This statement presents contradictions peculiar to the Israeli society: on one hand, religious parties view homosexuals and lesbians as an abomination. Also, celebrities who are not usually identified as conservative sometimes choose to utter extremely homophobic expressions. For example, Israel president Weizman, in the course of a meeting with high school students, characterized homosexuals and lesbians with statements such as, "*I like women to be women and men to be men.*" The sculptor Uri Lipschitz has described homosexuals as a social category having no right to exist, along with other groups, such as disabled people. Two well-known male singers, Meir Ariel and Arie Silber, have expressed

negative opinions on homosexuals that received extensive critical coverage in the media. On the other hand, the transsexual singer Dana International was sent to represent Israel in the Eurovision contest, which she won. Following this event, she was treated with respect at all different levels of the population, including public bodies and the president who had formerly made those homophobic statements. In addition, in the last few years, the Supreme Court has issued a number of progressive decisions, for example, in connection with the rights of homosexual partners to enjoy economic advantages equal to those of heterosexuals. Also, in the army, discrimination against homosexuals based on their sexual preference is forbidden.

It is apparent that despite forces in Israeli society opposed to equal rights for gay and lesbian Israelis, the general impression among the women interviewed is that there is increased social legitimization, which makes it easier for them to question attitudes once considered "obligatory" within the lesbian community. For example, young women holding right-wing political views perceive that such views lack legitimization within their community, which regards them as antithetical to "correct" lesbian identity.¹² Therefore, they are loath to reveal their opinions in their community, as right-wing parties are considered to be minorities' oppressors, in particular those minorities having nonconventional sexual preferences. But not all women linked right-wing opinions with negative views of their lesbian identity, as they favored some aspects of the right-wing ideology, for example its conception of foreign policy. Although most of the lesbian participants supported left-wing parties, in the course of their meeting with heterosexuals they felt free from the pressure to conform exerted by the lesbian community. Still, the lesbian community and its organizations—clubs and voluntary movements—fulfills a vital function in the struggle against discrimination, which has been lessened but not eliminated, by standing up for lesbian women's rights, and by providing a cultural and social context. To summarize, the enhancement of individual styles is visible in the course of meetings where a relatively close acquaintance among the participants contributes to a sense of security and lessens the need to represent the lesbian community as united and homogeneous.

SUMMARY

The presentation of different and even contrasting elements of existential identity and experience¹³ occurring simultaneously, or in proximity, marked at times by a sharp shift from one to the other, has been analyzed in anthropological literature as characterizing liminal states, in which social groups in the process of changing spend periods of time borderline between different worlds, and experience social attitudes and status charged with twofold meanings. In these situations, a substantial measure of anomies is present (Turner 1967, 93–111; 1969, 94–189; 1985, 159–61; Van Gennep 1960). And in fact, lesbian

identity, as it is expressed by displaying elements that revolve around varying and at times contrasting axes, is characterized by its being multidimensional, complex, heterogeneous, and somewhat unstable. It is possible to associate these characteristics with the changing processes experienced by the women who participated in this study. First, as lesbians, they shuttle between acceptance and rejection, between their being a marginal group and their turning into a legitimate social group, while they experience simultaneously sympathetic and stigmatizing social reactions. This process draws lesbian feminists closer to other feminists, who also find themselves in a liminal state between oppression and liberation. The anomies inherent in this state can be perceived, for example, in sharp shifts from unifying definitions of situations to definitions of situations that divide lesbians from other women.

Another expression of a liminal and anomic state is constituted by the weakening of traditional signs, which within the lesbian community symbolize division into gender categories. These symbols continue to exist with a certain lack of clarity and consensus alongside alternative symbols, which have not yet been completely devised. These tendencies co-exist in liminal states: on the one hand, an attempt is made to preserve contrasts (for example, polar identity elements such as fem and butch), and on the other hand, to unify them, for example by enhancing the tomboy category. It is interesting to note that this category is liminal in itself, as it is defined as "youthful," that is, belonging to a stage of life, between childhood and adulthood, that characterizes liminal states studied in the anthropological literature mentioned above. Esterberg (1996, 259–79), who has studied "the games of masculine and feminine identity" in the American lesbian community, has found that many women shuttle between the two elements of identity, that is, preserve contrasts. Contrastingly, young Israelis exhibit the second tendency, that is, to strive to unify the two contrasting elements. This is similar to the tendency of many young heterosexuals, and in particular of feminists, to free themselves from traditional gender signs and also adopt an adolescent style.

In fact, a liminal state does not characterize young lesbians alone (or other young feminists), but youngsters in general, in their passage between adolescence and adulthood (Jacobson and Luzzatto 1998). In Israel, the liminal stage lasts even longer, due to the extension of an anomic state, devoid of clear status, even beyond school age—into the compulsory army service. Moreover, it has been found that the Israeli society as a whole exists in a liminal and anomic state, divided between polar extremes, such as: religious versus secular, leftists versus rightists, Ashkenazi versus Mizrahi (Luzzatto and Jacobson 2001). The anomic state of the lesbians in this study is expressed also by their willingness to take part both in the wider society's culture and in their community's subculture. Thus, elements perceived as antithetical appear, as identification with criteria peculiar to the wider society (for example, on the basis of origin or political ideas) reveals lack of unity within the lesbian

community, while identification with dominant ideological elements peculiar to the community requires acceptance of a certain amount of homogeneity. Therefore, the lesbian community, which is perceived as a source of solidarity and *nomos* regarding all issues connected to social oppression, at times cannot supply an answer to individual needs, and in particular to those needs that are considered unsuitable in the context of a “right” lesbian identity. Therefore, meetings between lesbian and heterosexual women constitute a convenient ground for discourse that entails, on one hand, a degree of threat to the lesbian element of identity, and, on the other hand, makes it possible to experience the representation of a variety of aspects of the participants’ identity, including those elements that are granted only scant legitimization within the lesbian community. In this context, one must point out the importance of these meetings for bisexual women who constitute a liminal group within an additional dimension, as they hold sexual preferences perceived by both lesbians and heterosexuals as polar and impossible to combine.

As far as heterosexual women are concerned, the encounter with alternative sexualities constitutes a challenge to the boundaries of their sexual identity, leading, possibly, to its broadening, by incorporating elements of lesbian eroticism into a heterosexual identity. It is possible that the capability to move among elements of identity during the course of conversation is also connected to the multiple communication options developed by women in the course of history, precisely because of their being a minority having a low status (Tolmach Lakoff 1990, 198–214).¹⁴

To summarize, in these meetings, carried out outside the frame of their community’s social control, lesbians in this study employed heterosexual women as alternative significant others (to the same extent that heterosexual women employed the lesbians) in whose proximity it was possible to display alternating facets of their split identity.¹⁵

NOTES

1. For instance, Faraday (1981, 112–29) stresses the insufficiency of research on lesbian women in comparison to research on homosexual men, which reflects, according to her, a greater general interest in research on men as opposed to women. Blackwood, who maintains there is scant research on female homosexual behavior in comparison to male homosexual behavior, shares this opinion. In addition, research on men tends to relate to homosexual identity as being monolithic, due to the labeling theory influence, according to which members of labeled groups adopt the labeled dimension as the dominant component of their identity (see, for example, McIntosh 1996, 33–40; Plummer 1981, 53–75; Weeks 1993, 68).

2. For example, the influence of ethnic discrimination on intimate relations between African American lesbians and white or black women has been studied (Mays et al. 1993, 1–14). Shokeid’s research (1995) should also be pointed out, as it deals with the issue of split identity as expressed by members of a gay synagogue in the United

States: membership in the synagogue constitutes for some a way to recuperate and mend their cracked self-image and identity.

3. The tendency to research homosexual and lesbian communities as if they were detached from the wider context is connected, among other things, to the tendency to view homosexuality as a social deviation, according to the labeling attitude in Goffman's tradition (Goffman 1983). For a discussion on the issue, see, for example, Plummer 1981, 17–29; Seidman 1996, 1–39.

4. For instance: Takagi (1996, 243–58), who deals with the issue of split identity among Asian American lesbians, describes incidents in which tension between ethnic and sexual identity is expressed in the context of unclear situations. For instance, when ethnic stereotypes arise during encounters between lesbians.

5. For example, in a survey carried out by Albrow and Tully (1979, 331–44), it was found that lesbian women experience loneliness in the heterosexual cultural context, and turn to the lesbian community's internal subculture even though they function productively in society at large. Additional research (Whitam et al. 1998, 31–56) focuses on the comparison between heterosexuals' sexual behavior and lesbians' sexual behavior in different cultures.

6. On preliminary stages in face-to-face encounters see Goffman 1990, 13–27.

7. On honorary membership in labeled groups see Goffman 1983, 26–29.

8. These data (see also Luzzatto and Gvion 2003) differ from American data, which show that in the United States the division between "fem" and "butch," including visual symbols, is still very important (Esterberg 1996, 259–79; Harris and Crocker 1997).

9. According to Dunne (1997), the preference for the tomboy style stems from childhood experiences, which influence some women to take a position somewhere in the middle of the line between gender poles.

10. In this context, the data of American research (Esterberg 1996, 259–79) showing that masculine style is granted more legitimization among lesbians should be mentioned.

11. Pressure exerted by radical lesbians on bisexual women, labeled as unable to take a stand, has been analyzed by Ault (1996, 311–30) and Rust (1995).

12. I have heard a similar statement by homosexuals. For example, "At times, it is easier to come out of the closet as a homosexual rather than as a right-wing person."

13. It is reasonable that the relative weight of identity components, and the way they are presented, reflect specific characteristics of the researched population, such as socioeconomic status, education, age, and urban social surrounding. A limited capability to generalize is common to social anthropological research, which must mark the boundaries of the researched field to encompass a group sharing cultural features. At the same time, the behavior of the researched women, being educated and active in the field of human rights in general and women's rights in particular, indicates the presence of contemporary tendencies relevant to female identity in the Israeli society.

14. Among the rest, sociolinguistic research (Lakoff 1990) shows a clear feminine ability to perform a code-switch, that is, to shift from "feminine language" to "masculine language."

15. In addition to hetero-homo-bisexual, it also refers to the split between different identity dimensions that are perceived as incompatible in some contexts in the lesbian community: right-wing versus feminist-lesbian, Mizrahi versus influential within the lesbian community.

REFERENCES

- Albro, J. C., and C. Tully. "A Study of Lesbian Lifestyles in the Homosexual Micro-culture and the Heterosexual Macro-culture." *Journal of Homosexuality* 4(1979): 331–44.
- Ault, A. "The Dilemma of Identity: Bi Women's Negotiations." *Queer Theory/Sociology*. Ed. S. Seidman. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996. 311–30.
- Blackwood, E. "Breaking the Mirror: The Construction of Lesbianism and the Anthropological Discourse on Homosexuality." *Journal of Homosexuality* 11:3–4 (1985): 1–17.
- Brant, B. "Writing Life." *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 4:4 (2000): 21–34.
- Dunne, J. *Lesbian Lifestyles. Women's Work and the Politics of Sexuality*. Houndmills: McMillan, 1997.
- Esterberg, K. "A Certain Swagger When I Walk: Performing Lesbian Identity." *Queer Theory/Sociology*. Ed. S. Seidman. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996. 259–79.
- Faraday, A. "Liberating Lesbian Research." *The Making of the Modern Homosexual*. Ed. K. Plummer. London: Hutchinson, 1981. 112–29.
- Foucault, M. *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*. New York: Vintage Books, 1980.
- . *The Use of Pleasure. The History of Sexuality*, 2. London: Penguin Books, 1985.
- Goffman, E. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Tel Aviv: Dvir Publishing House, 1983.
- . *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. London: Penguin Books, 1990.
- Gurevitz, D. *Postmodernism*. Tel Aviv: Dvir Publishing House, 1997.
- Harris, L., and E. Crocker, eds. *Femme: Feminists, Lesbians, and Bad Girls*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Jacobson, Y., and D. Luzzatto. *Postmodern Youth Culture: The Language of Body Adornment*. Paper presented at the 1998 Israeli Sociological Congress, Haifa, Israel, 1998.
- Kennedy, E. Lapovsky, and M. Davis. *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Luzzatto, D. *The Character of a Voluntary Organization: Homosexuals in Israel*. MA Diss. Tel Aviv U, 1984.
- Luzzatto, D., and L. Gvion. "Feminine but not Femme: The Dual Lesbian Body." *Journal of Homosexuality* (2003).
- Luzzatto, D., and Y. Jacobson. "Youth Graffiti as Coping Existential Apparatus: The Case of Rabin's assassination." *Journal of Youth Studies* 4:3 (2001).
- McIntosh, M. "The Homosexual Role." *Queer Theory/Sociology*. Ed. S. Seidman. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996. 33–40.
- Mays, V. M., S. D. Cochran, and S. Ruhe. "The Impact of Perceived Discrimination on the Intimate Relationships of Black Lesbians." *Journal of Homosexuality* 25:4 (1993): 1–14.
- Pitman, G. "The Influence of Race, Ethnicity, Class, and Sexual Politics on Lesbians' Body Image." *Journal of Homosexuality* 40:2 (2000): 49–64.
- Plummer, K. "Building Sociology of Homosexuality." *The Making of the Modern Homosexual*. Ed. K. Plummer. London: Hutchinson, 1981: 17–29.
- Rust, P. C. *Bisexuality and the Challenge to Lesbian Politics*. New York: New York UP, 1995.

- Seidman, S. "Introduction." *Queer Theory/Sociology*. Ed. S. Seidman. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996. 1–29.
- Sheperd, G. "Rank, Gender and Homosexuality: Mombasa as a Key to Understanding Sexual Options." *The Cultural Construction of Sexuality*. Ed. P. Caplan. London: Tavistock, 1987, 240–70.
- Shokeid, M. *A Gay Synagogue in New York*. New York: Columbia UP, 1995.
- Simon, W. *Postmodern Sexualities*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Takagi, D. "Maiden Voyage: Excursion into Sexuality and Identity Politics in Asian America." *Queer Theory/Sociology*. Ed. S. Seidman. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996. 243–58.
- Tolmach Lakoff, R. *Talking Power. The Politics of Language*. New York: Basic Books, 1990. 198–214.
- Trembles, B., M. Schneider, and C. Appathurai. "Growing up Gay or Lesbian in a Multicultural Context." *Journal of Homosexuality* 17:3–4 (1989): 253–67.
- Turner, V. *The Forest of Symbols*. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1967. 93–111.
- Turner, V. *The Ritual Process*. Chicago: Aldine, 1969. 94–189.
- . *On the Edge of the Bud*. Tucson: U of Arizona P, 1985. 159–61.
- Van Gennep, A. *The Rites of Passage*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960.
- Weeks, J. *Against Nature: Essays on History, Sexuality, and Identity*. London: Rivers Oram, 1991.
- Weitz, R. "What Price Independence? Social Reactions to Lesbians, Spinsters, Widows, and Nuns." *The Gender Reader*. Ed. E. Ashton-Jones, G.A. Olson, and M. G. Perry. 2nd ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2000. 115–27.
- Whitam, F.L., C. Daskalos, C. G. Sobolevsky, and P. Padillis. "The Emergence of Lesbian Sexuality and Identity Cross-culturally: Brazil, Peru, the Philippines, and the United States." *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 27:1 (1998): 31–56.

This page intentionally left blank.

NINE

Crafting Multilayered Identities in Israel

Prina Motzafi-Haller

What should I wear? I stood in front of the mirror and tried on several outfits. I was going to a gay party in Tel Aviv. I am a Mizrahi heterosexual woman. A mother of two children and a university lecturer. I am in my early forties. What was I trying to communicate with my clothes on this particular evening? It was Friday night and I had made arrangements to go to Tel Aviv to meet and interview two Mizrahi lesbian women. I had never met the women before. One of the editors of this volume, a lesbian academic called and asked me to do this project. She provided the phone number for the women I was to interview. When one of the women invited me to come to the party she organized that Friday before the scheduled interview set for Saturday, I accepted her offer thinking that this would give me at least a brief glimpse into her and her partner's lives in ways that might enrich our planned interview. As an anthropologist, I am not used to "doing interviews" that have not emerged out of a long process of what we call "fieldwork," after knowing people in their daily lives and developing a sense of trust and context.

Dressed in a black miniskirt and an orange-brown shirt, black sheer stockings and black high-heeled shoes, I parked my old Fiat Uno in front of the fashionable Tel Aviv club, feeling apprehensive and vulnerable. I had arrived early. The party wouldn't start until midnight. I introduced myself to Esther,¹ a woman in her early thirties dressed in jeans and a black leather jacket. Despite the fact that she had invited me to her party, Esther did not try to make me feel at ease. Most of the evening she paid little attention to me although she seemed to draw some prestige from my presence there, introducing me to one woman as a writer who had come to interview her for a book. But otherwise she was too busy with the last details of the show she was putting on and I was left alone to wander the club. Outside the club, at the

side entry that seemed to be the place where mostly young women clustered, stood Sigi, Esther's partner. Sigi was more welcoming and politely answered a few of my questions, my feeble attempts to carry out some "ethnographic research." Sigi told me that many of the young women who came to this and other parties organized by her and Esther are Mizrahi, but that there are also others who are not Mizrahi. Sigi insisted that what is common to the women who frequent their parties is their youth, rather than ethnic origin. I went back into the club. I discovered that while both men (both gay and straight) and women share the main open space, where the dance floor and the stage are located, a small bar at the lower level of the huge club is where the young women cluster. I sat at the bar. My sense of unease increased as young women with spiked jellied hair and tight outfits eyed me curiously and continued to engage in an explicit public display of kissing and necking.

What was I doing there? My attempt at "blending in" with my black miniskirt seemed more ridiculous than I had originally projected. After nursing my drink for almost an hour, I went back upstairs to the main floor, where gay men and a few women couples danced to loud techno music. I wandered the large dance floor for hours. After midnight, I decided to seek refuge in my parked car. I sat in the car and dictated some notes and observations into my small recorder. I then took a deep breath and decided to go back in. But at that point I found myself in front of the entry to the club, a part of a large crowd of young people dressed in fashionable, daring outfits who were all trying to convince the two selectors controlling the entrance to the club to allow them in. Pushed and shoved by others, I was allowed back in only after I pleaded with the selector that I knew Esther and was her personal guest. At three A.M., I left the club feeling older and more square and boring-straight than I had ever felt in my life. The next afternoon, when I finally made it to Esther and Sigi's rooftop apartment for the scheduled interview, I was eager to learn as much as I could about what it meant to be a Mizrahi lesbian in Israel. I have since produced an academic article based on that Saturday afternoon interview held almost four years ago.² In that academic essay, I addressed several critical questions posed by contemporary feminist theory, questions that explored the possibility of developing a sense of self by these two women in the context of their multiply marginalized position in society.

"Some abstract theoretical writing," writes Donna Hightower Langston, one of the contributors to the exciting new volume *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*, edited by Gloria Anzaldúa and Analouise Keating, "is like designer clothing, nice to look at, or sometimes just plain silly, but who wears it in real life?" (2002, 79). In this chapter I would like to put aside the *scholarly* theoretical concerns I raised in that essay and clear the space for the views and words of the two women who stand at the center of this narrative. Esther and Sigi articulated in this interview a strong and clear critique of the politics and practices advocated by the organized Israeli lesbian community. They also rejected the ethnic politics that I, as a Mizrahi activist,

had presented during our conversation. They spoke about the meaning of being lesbian and Mizrahi in their own terms, from their own perspectives. Their views and their language are seldom found in public and written records. One of the goals of this chapter is to enable their voices and their understanding of their world to be heard.

But it would be naïve and, in my view, downright distorting, to present their voices without the context within which they were produced. For the transcribed interview with Esther and Sigi also included my words, my challenges, and their direct response to who I was at that encounter. It was, as some feminist writers had put it, an inter-view, a setting where we viewed each other. The text produced by the transcribed recording of that interview is therefore an outcome of that process of mutual viewing and negotiation. It is thus critical that I not only present, as I begun to do above, who I am within that context, within that encounter, but also that my questions during the interview as well as my added interpretation of what was said be presented as part of this process of production of the text you are about to read. It is also important to remember that I am the author of this chapter and as much as I strive to present their views and their voices, their voices are brought to the readers mediated through my authorial choices. I am well aware of practices that call for returning the text to the subjects as an act of making the text more authentic, more authoritative because the “native” had “approved” it. This is not the case here. The text produced below should be read for what it is: a record produced by a Mizrahi heterosexual academic of professed social and political views in dialogue with two Mizrahi lesbian women. The very encounter teaches us about the varied manner in which these three Mizrahi women, divided along other axes of social difference such as class and sexual preference, construct their ethnic identities, their sexual politics. None of us is more “authentic” than the others and I do not speak for them. I quote as much of the direct exchange that transpired between us as is necessary to enable the readers to juxtapose my interpretive frames with these direct quotes. The question of power differentials between author and subject of research are not resolved in this encounter but it is, I hope, made more complicated.

“I DEFINE MYSELF AS A NOT-EXTREME FEMINIST”

So what was it exactly that I wanted to know? Esther asked me again after she agreed to have our conversation recorded. Did I read what she said in the interview published by *CLaF Hazak*, the journal published by the Israeli organized lesbian community? She pulls the glossy copy of the journal and hands it to me as she says:

I defined myself there [in the *CLaF Hazak* interview] as a Jewish lesbian women, Tel Avivit [a resident of Tel Aviv], night-person, and a not-extreme feminist [*feministit lo kitzonit*], and I can explain to you

what I meant by not an extreme feminist. [I nod my head in encouragement for her to continue.] You see, I can define myself as a liberal and I believe in equality and human rights and I just woke up. Well, I don't know how to explain things.

Pnina: Look, take your time, I am not going to be like a journalist or something. I am speaking plainly. Talk to me in your words.

I proceed to answer her opening question by explaining once more about the book that seeks to document the lives of lesbian women in Israel, and I tell her why I think I was invited, as a Mizrahi feminist academic, to write about them—the Mizrahi lesbians. Esther wastes no time. She tells me:

I must tell you that those who raise the subject of Mizrahi lesbian, Ashkenazi lesbian . . . that creates fragmentation [*pilug*] and in my view it is rather disgusting to even raise that subject. This is particularly so in this community. We are a minority, and we should have been more liberal and more egalitarian . . . and [we must] accept anyone as she is, regardless of if she is ugly or beautiful, Ashkenazi or Mizrahi, white or dark, with teeth or without . . . there is a feeling [that there is] a kind of women who look down at other women and that's not right.

Esther's powerful rejection of the very attempt to raise the issue of her Mizrahi ethnic affiliation stands in direct contrast with the growing awareness among Israeli feminist academics and lesbian feminists in particular, that diversity along national, ethnic, and class lines within our communities must be acknowledged and addressed in feminist organizing and in theory. For almost a decade, and largely due to the pressure by Mizrahi feminist activists and scholars, the Israeli feminist association have adopted a policy of equal representation whereby Mizrahi, Ashkenazi, Palestinian, and lesbian communities are part of what came to be known as the "quarter system." This recent acknowledgment of social difference has presented a real challenge to the unquestioned hegemony of heterosexual, Jewish, middle-class Ashkenazi women in the feminist organization. When I agreed to take on the project of interviewing and writing about Mizrahi lesbians I was responding to the need to include their voice in this book. In my academic work I have challenged Israeli feminist scholarship, arguing that it ignored Mizrahi women or studied the lives of Mizrahi women from an orientalist, paternalist standpoint (Motzafi-Haller 2001). When I showed up for the interview, I was part of a small but vocal group of women who define themselves as "Mizrahi Feminists." We define ourselves as Mizrahi as an act of empowerment, as a basis for our political claims for inclusion, and out of Mizrahi pride.

Still, Esther's vehement and emotional rejection of the very effort to examine the meaning of social diversity within the community of Israeli lesbians did not surprise me. Esther, as one can see from her opening statement quoted above, rejected the very attempt to define her along ethnic lines, calling it an insult and a discriminatory act that stood in her way of becoming like everyone else in the Lesbian community. Bringing the subject up meant betraying this ideal and was thus "ugly" and "disgusting." Esther's reaction was not unique, nor is it surprising. In Israeli public discourse and among my students, friends, and family I encounter similar reactions when I raise the question of Mizrahi identity. In the rest of this chapter, I argue that one cannot understand Esther and Sigi's views (or mine) without linking them to the other layers of our respective complex social identities. I wish to show that an exploration of our respective class and sexuality is necessary in order to grasp our diverse views about our shared ethnic affiliation; and that both class and ethnic positioning is at the core of Esther and Sigi's unique definition of what it means to be lesbian in Israel.

In what follows, I will divide relevant parts of the interview into more focused discussions pertaining to each of the axes that make up our multilayered identities. I will begin with the discussion of their lesbian identity. Here I pose questions expected of a heterosexual sympathetic listener.

FIRST AXIS "I AM A LESBIAN WOMAN"

Pnina: Do you want to tell me your life story? What do you choose to tell? I will not ask you any questions. You will raise the facts you deem important in such a story.

Esther: Okay. [takes a deep breath] At the age of seventeen I was in a dilemma with myself if I am lesbian. I am talking to you about twenty years ago. And it was very hard to come out of the closet then in our country. I was very introvert then and I did not talk about it. I had a boyfriend and I was going to get married. I had a permanent boyfriend since the age of sixteen. A certain guy. I admit I loved the guy. We joined the army together; we lived together during our army service. And it was during this love and the straight life that I fell in love with a woman.

Pnina: In the army?

Esther: Yes. It was during my service in the Nachal, in the kibbutz, I met her and we became best friends and our love grew. I had a boyfriend and so did she. And we, the four of us, were in the most straight life possible and at one point . . . we went out together and then we had an affair. And I did not know what I am and who I am, I was very

confused, angry with myself, ashamed of myself. It was very hard for me to even say the word lesbian because it seems as very ugly . . .

Pnina: What is the word that is used today?

Esther: A woman.

Pnina: Today, when one says "lesbian," is it annoying you?

Esther: Not really. Today I think that the key to your happiness with yourself is to accept it. But I went through a very hard process twenty years ago. Initially, you still think of yourself as bisexual. You accept it that you have a sexual thing with a woman but until you deeply believe it . . . at the time I defined myself as bisexual . . . that's why I understand it today when women call themselves bisexual but I laugh about it because I don't really believe it. At one point one reaches a point of having to make a decision. One cannot be bisexual for long. You might be [bisexual] for a short while, very short while, but eventually one has to decide what one prefers. I think that a lesbian is not merely a woman that has experienced . . . or who had an experience with a woman . . . or such thing . . . In my view a lesbian is a woman that chooses to live with another woman; someone who knows she is going to share a life with a woman, not to screw a woman, not a one-night stand here and there. A lesbian is a woman who decides eventually to live with a woman and not a man. I had really hard time with it . . . for half a year I lived between her [the first lover; she names the person] and him. It was very hard to reach a decision that I am going to do what I want.

Pnina: Why?

Esther: In the family . . . in society . . . the man himself . . . how to tell him . . .

Pnina: How did you tell him?

Esther: A month or two before the end of my army service I made the decision to leave the country [Israel]. I could not do it abruptly. I sat with him and let him grasp the fact. He did not know [that I was lesbian] but he really felt it. He thought, like all men . . . there are a lot of people who think that loving a woman is a passing phase and it can't be . . . I sat with him for a conversation and I explained the situation . . . and he took it real hard and said "take your time before you make such a decision . . ."

Esther then described how she left Israel with her Dutch lover and lived in Holland for four years, between the ages of twenty-one and twenty-four. They were very happy, she emphasized. But she missed Israel terribly. The relationships ended, she explained, because she could not live in Holland and

her lover refused to live in Israel. When she returned to Israel, she made an effort to return to what she called “normal and regular life.” She tried to go the “straight way” but whenever she dated a man she felt she was forcing herself to participate in such relationships. She had been so confused and lost that she needed to seek a therapist. After many sessions with the (male, straight) therapist she was able to “flow with it” and accept what she really was. The psychologist, she says, helped her a lot when he told her: “Listen to me sweetie, you are a very healthy person, you simply like what I like—women.”

Esther responded to my invitation to tell her life story with a structured, single, evolving tale of her emergence, despite social and inner constraints, as an open lesbian. The process of overcoming shame and self-denial was the process of coming to terms with who she “really” is. A lesbian, according to Esther, must make that clear choice. She cannot, not for long, view herself and act within the ambiguous identity of a bisexual. It is an either-or binary decision. Yet Esther was very explicit that a lesbian lifestyle, a lifestyle she has to adopt because of who “she is,” is not what she defines as a “normal, regular” life. Esther never challenged the mainstream, male-centered definition of what is “normal.” She tried to adopt that “normal and regular” life but she failed. In fact, she adopted the legitimacy for her choice to live as a lesbian and for her “healthy” state of mind from a male, middle-class, and straight psychologist.

Sigi’s construction of her lesbianism was more complex than Esther’s. Like Esther, Sigi recalled that her first lesbian relationships unfolded during her regular army service. Here too, the lover was an Ashkenazi woman from a well-established social background. Sigi’s officer, a kibbutznik Ashkenazi woman was her first lover. “But, looking back on my life,” Sigi reflected, “I always knew I am gay. I did not know what is it but I would often be turned on by my female schoolteachers or by the girlfriends of my older sisters. It was not a sexual attraction necessarily, but this connection to women was so powerful with me.”

Sigi’s manner of telling her life story was different from Esther’s in several ways. Sigi began by reporting her age (twenty-seven) and her ethnic origin (Persian Jew). She was born in Israel, in a small town in the north, one of six children. Her father owns a restaurant and her mother is a housewife. She went to school and at the age of twelve was streamlined to a vocational direction and begun to study secretarial work. She found no interest in her studies. She dropped out of school and tried to continue her high school education in evening classes but dropped that too. Sigi reported being very excited and fulfilled during her military service where she worked with Ethiopian children. After her army service she left home and worked as an au pair in Rehovot (a large town south of Tel Aviv). While living in Rehovot, in the home of the family she worked for, she begun taking evening classes in alternative medicine. That’s how she discovered the lesbian community of Tel Aviv and soon found her way to some of the large gay parties organized by Esther. Sigi had moved in with Esther soon after she began to frequent Esther’s

parties. At the time of the interview, they had been living together for almost two years.

Like Esther, Sigi had visited her share of psychologists who, as she put it, “tried to move me away from my lesbian ideas.” But the way she constructed her encounter with those psychologists (whom she defines as the authoritative half-Gods) was different from Esther’s.

One psychologist told me that I am simply not “like that” and that I should try to meet the right man, the man who will fit me. Another said that I am afraid of men and so forth . . . It is what I call, psychology not worth a penny [*psichologia be grush*], ’cause my lesbianism continued, and my attraction to women persisted no matter what they told me. And you know, these psychologists are supposedly above you, they have authority . . . he [the psychologist] is half God. But today I tell you I am sure there is no one who is God and no matter what position he holds and how much he knows. I still hold on to my views. I could have felt guilt. I could have said: “Whoa, they are right and maybe I am wrong.” But I did not. And it really proved that it [my lesbianism] was strong, maybe even stronger than me.

Although she seemed to question the authority of the male psychologist and other members of the mainstream society who “have authority,” Sigi came full circle to her lesbianism as a biological, inevitable fact.

Look, I personally think, I don’t know about others . . . but I believe that I was born like that. See, I grew up in a wonderful home with five siblings and they are all straight. I am the only one who is not.

Sigi said at one point: “If a girl is lesbian and she does not live as one, she is half a human being, she is not a whole person.”

SECOND AXIS: “WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A “MIZRAHI?”

Sigi prompted Esther to tell me about a schoolteacher who, years ago, treated Esther badly and called her “black” and made her life miserable. Sigi told me:

Look I can see it. I think that this tale [*haketa hazeh*] about Mizrahim and Ashkenazim is true, I believe it one hundred percent. But again. I have not experienced it. But from the stories of Esther about this crazy teacher, and from the stories of my parents . . . well, okay . . . it had existed . . . and it still exists—not as it had been in the past. Once it was a nightmare. I think they simply were miserable . . . all this scene with the “Black Panthers” [Mizrahi lower-class political resistance of the late 1970s] is not for nothing . . .”

- Pnina: What does it mean to be Mizrahi? Really . . . to you?
- Sigi: Well, my roots are Mizrahi; the home I grew up in is Mizrahi . . . beyond that . . . I don't even know how to explain it . . . I love my family . . . I was never in my life ashamed about my family . . . my mom, my dad . . .
- Pnina: But you see, this society makes you ashamed . . . it is not as if you came from a Polish background . . . the whole culture tells you somehow to be ashamed . . . and you need to invest so much in order not to be . . .
- Sigi: Yes. This is justified . . . because they [the Ashkenazim] built this country . . . but . . . now, suddenly, to make me . . . as if to turn myself into something that . . . I don't know how to explain . . . 'cause I am not saying . . . I don't want to transform myself from being a Mizrahi . . . 'cause I deeply believe in my Mizrahiyut . . . but. What is Mizrahi? It's as if . . . I am not Israeli . . .

Sigi here articulated views quite common in Israel, especially among lower-class Mizrahim. Identifying as a Mizrahi contradicts with your aspired "all-Israeli" identity. To acknowledge your Mizrahiyut means to admit having had hurtful experiences, of being treated as an inferior; it means acknowledging there is social discrimination—*Aflaya*. And admitting to having encountered "it" (*Aflaya*) invokes negative feelings, a sense of failure, and a deep feeling of internal contradiction. It goes against the national Zionist ideology inculcated in Mizrahi and Ashkenazi children in Israel of *Mizug galuyot*, of "Mixing of exiles." Although all Jews are expected to be equal, the dominant ideology portrays the Mizrahim and their "Oriental cultures" as something that need to be eradicated, overcome, if they are to become part of the Zionist, Eurocentric imagined national self. To hold on to your Mizrahi identity that is defined only in terms of *aflaya* is thus to underscore your failure is becoming Israeli.

Although Sigi did not question this hegemonic formulation, she seemed to express some discomfort with the inherent contradictions embedded in the way such an ideology of identification had worked itself out in Israeli reality. She said:

Look even the Mizrahim of the older generation [*shel pa'am*], let's say, our parents who had arrived from a different country, with different concepts . . . they have been living here fifty years already . . . but they [the Ashkenazim] still call them "miserable Mizrahim" [*Mizrahim mikenim*] . . . and they were merely born there . . . and some of them had arrived here at a very early age . . . but they will still remain Moroccans, and still Iraqi . . . and still Parsi, despite of the fact that they lived most of their lives here.

In Sigi's formulation, fifty years of "living here," of being part of Israeli society, had not succeeded in eradicating the *external* designation of groups of people as Moroccans, Iraqi, or Parsi. Note that Sigi accepted the hegemonic construction of Mizrahiyut not only as different but also as inferior. She never challenged the very idea that a Mizrahi background is something that should be lived down, overcome. Her displeasure was not with the system that categorizes people and cultures as high and low but with the refusal to accept those Mizrahim who had worked so hard to undergo that hopeful transformation. In Sigi's formulation *miserable* Mizrahim are those who failed the process of transforming themselves into "real Israelis." Mizrahiyut in this construction is attributed, never a claimed, identification, and as such, it is always a negative label. There seems to be a strong urge to construct that failure as temporary, and therefore to maintain the hope that the unifying, homogenizing process of "becoming Israeli" goes on, despite setbacks. The parents' generation might have experienced discrimination, they must have been miserable—but not now, not us, not in the present. At one point Sigi seemed to claim that the homogenizing process might have failed but she charts spatial boundaries for such failure. She said:

Look, maybe we are blind, maybe . . . but we are here and we have it good [*tov lanu*] and we have everything, so we have no problem. But as I told you earlier, in the South [of Tel Aviv] it is indeed a problem because they are all Mizrahim [there].

Mizrahi identification, in this formulation is directly associated with poverty, with lower social standing, and with being with other Mizrahim. Those who "have it good," who perceive themselves as people who have made it economically and socially, like Sigi and Esther, have no "problem."

THIRD AXIS "CLASS—THE MEANING OF "MISTAKNEZET"

In terms of their economic and cultural capital, Esther and Sigi might be classified as lower middle class. But this is not how Esther and Sigi think about their social positioning. Consider the following exchange where I tried to understand Sigi's ideas about her and her family's social position.

Pnina: You told me you dropped out of school . . .

Sigi: Yes, I simply did not want to [go on with my education].

Pnina: But that ruled out getting into university . . . right?

Sigi: Come, I'll tell you something. My parents did have the money, my dad owned a restaurant and things . . . it's me who was not interested in further studies.

- Pnina: What do your brothers and sisters do?
- Sigi: They are all doing well. They are all independent [not employees of someone else]. One brother has a falafel stand, the other had a clothing shop, but he sold it and went abroad.
- Pnina: Any of them continued in the direction of higher education?
- Sigi: One sister was trained to be a special education teacher . . . but now she is home with her child. She does not work. All the others did not study. But, I am telling you; it is because they did not want to. The schools were there. They could have done what they wanted.

Esther, too, as we saw above, rejected external definition of her social position. She characterized her career as a career of an “independent woman.” In both instances, the women represented themselves as successful. They seemed to value their achievements and those of their close families of origin vis-à-vis the poverty and lack of cultural capital they identify as the lot of “poor Mizrahim.” In their eyes, they were doing well. Yet, when they compared themselves to solidly middle-class Mizrahi women, especially lesbian Mizrahi women, their perceived class position and its subjective meaning became more complex.

The position of another Mizrahi lesbian, a dentist, who was also featured in the *CLaF Hazak* issue on Mizrahi lesbians, brought out interesting reactions by both Esther and Sigi. This other Mizrahi lesbian, Esther explained, was a mere “*mishtaknezet*.”

“What is ‘*mishtaknezet*?’” I asked.

Sigi offered this explanation of the term: “I think . . . look . . . it is like someone who thinks that Ashkenazim are more enlightened . . . but that does not make her into one . . . and it does not say it is true.”

- Pnina: What do you mean “doesn’t make her into one?”
- Sigi: It says that if she will *tishtaknez* [go through the process of becoming an *ashkenazi*], which means putting down, degrading Mizrahiyut, like about Mizrahi music . . . and it does not say that I, myself, must listen to it [Mizrahi music]. I love Mizrahi music, if there is a good music . . . but she . . . she will devalue such music . . . it is not music in her eyes, because it does not keep her standards.
- Pnina: So what are you telling me? What distinguishes you from a *mistaknezet*?
- Sigi: Nothing distinguishes between us . . . what sets her apart . . . is that she tries to be . . . like something that she is not . . . I don’t feel like . . . it’s as if . . . how can I explain it . . . it’s a bit complex ’cause in the moment someone is *mishtaknezet*, I think she’ll have a problem.

A critical factor that sets Sigi and Esther apart from the Mizrahi lesbian women they were in so much pain to define as *mishtaknezot* is class background. Sigi and Esther, as noted above, made their living running large gay parties. In telling me about her occupational career, Esther volunteered only fragments about her various ways of making a living. She opened a bar, worked as a private investigator, owned a clothing shop. Sigi had taken adult education classes in alternative medicine and healing, but had never practiced. She had worked as an au pair after her army service, and since she had met Esther, she'd helped in the management of the parties. The one-bedroom roof apartment they had begun renovating was part of Esther's mother's fourth-floor apartment. Neither woman had completed their high school education. The Mizrahi women they defined as *mishtaknezot* are solidly middle class: one is a dentist, the other is a lawyer. In the *CLaF Hazak* interview³ and on the cover page of the lesbian feminist journal, Esther, Sigi, and the lesbian lawyer were lumped together as "Mizrahi lesbians." Esther and Sigi, as we saw above, have openly rejected that simple, single-factor social categorization that prioritized their ethnicity over other elements of their identity. They insisted that they were different from those other Mizrahiyot whom they described as *mishtaknezot*. Yet in portraying these other Mizrahi lesbian women as *mishtaknezot*, Esther and Sigi face the inner contradictions of their own internally contradictory web of ethnic and class affiliations. For "Mizrahiyut" (Mizrahi identity), in the hegemonic Israeli discourse, is something that can only be associated with the lower class, with a failure to "become Israeli," with people who, like the "poor Mizrahim" in Esther and Sigi's narrative still cluster in the south of Tel Aviv or in remote development towns. In this logic, a Mizrahi person who adopts standards and tastes that are viewed as elitist is by definition a person who pretends to be "who she is not."⁴ Mizrahiyut, it turns out in this logic, cannot be middle class.⁵ The cultural turmoil of their own contradictory effort to become "all-Israeli," to join those who have "made it," in a social and political setting that refuses to let them forget their unbecoming "Mizrahi origin" (even within the small lesbian community that is supposed to be protective of its members from a hostile heterosexual environment) is dramatized in their reaction to the middle-class Mizrahi lesbians. Esther and Sigi's narrative conveys their experienced uneasiness with the labels *Mizrahi*, *lesbian*, and *middle class* while recognizing that their lives are shaped by these hegemonic labels. They are caught, like so many Israelis of Mizrahi origin, in the central Israeli paradox of identity whereby one cannot be a "real Israeli" and hold on to one's Mizrahiyut because Mizrahiyut is excluded from the very definition of Israeli subjectivity. Class position, in other words, is not only deeply entangled with ethnic affiliation; it also crafts the very definitions of their lesbian identity.

The association of Mizrahi lesbianism with lower-class women was apparent in the *CLaF Hazak* interview. Was she aware of the rumor, Esther was asked, that only women known as "*Neve Tirtza*" (the infamous women's prison)

frequent the gay parties she organizes. The central question that motivated the special issue devoted to Mizrahi lesbians in this key publication of CLaF made this point explicit. It asked: "Do CLaF activities speak to the whole Israeli lesbian community or only to the 'elitist Ashkenazi' lesbians?" (Maroni-Paner 1998, 6) When speaking to me, Esther and Sigi expressed open rage and bitter criticism against CLaF and its limited agenda. In the next segment of this chapter, Esther and Sigi pose a critical challenge to the current Israeli lesbian feminist rhetoric articulated by CLaF.

A CHALLENGE TO HEGEMONIC DISCOURSES OF SEXUAL POLITICS?

The organized Israeli lesbian community defines itself as a *feminist* lesbian community (*Kehila Lesbit Feministit*). Both Esther and Sigi articulated a strong sense of alienation from, and a direct objection to, the feminist politics advocated by CLaF. Sigi said it forcefully:

They have asked me in the *CLaF Hazak* interview why don't the younger girls come to CLaF, and I told them that it is impossible. There are these women there who call themselves feminists or whatever, and they all the time talk and talk about feminism and lesbianism and show films only on these topics, and that simply does not interest the young girls. I am against getting into a bubble and not coming out of it.

Phina: But instead . . .

Sigi: But instead . . . live your life! No one needs to know outside what you do inside your home; what I like and what I don't. I learn about things in the real life. I don't need CLaF to tell me all the time what lesbianism is . . . it is most ridiculous that while they are so concerned with feminism and the greatest equality in the world, all they actually deal with is nonsense like who is Ashkenazi and who is a Mizrahi . . . in my opinion they only hold on to a phrase and nothing more, they do nothing at all [about equality].

Esther shared Sigi's rejection of the feminist politics advocated by CLaF. Esther showed me that she had defined herself in the *CLaF Hazak* interview as a "non-extreme feminist":

I'll tell you why I say I am not an extreme feminist . . . there is this new generation of lesbians who know nothing about CLaF and it does not interest them. What they need is support, a place to feel secure, a place that offers them help, emotional support, not only talk. I think there is too much talking there, a big pretentious act . . . and

that's useless. These young women, if they come at all [to CLaF], say "Oh . . . not again . . . we are going to speak about feminism again?"

Esther went further to reject the very definition of the struggle for greater equality of lesbians in the larger society as articulated by CLaF. She said:

Let's not feel we must be above men. Let's be equal with men. If a woman has been fired from her job today, it is ninety percent 'cause she is not good [in her job performance]; maybe two women in a hundred have been fired because they are lesbians. And clearly we should fight for these women. But really, today I don't see, as it has been in the past, that a woman is fired because she is lesbian. Today, if you are not good in your job, then they'll fire you.

Esther also rejected the politics of pride advocated by CLaF:

What is this word *proud*? It is something that annoys me a lot. I am not proud to be lesbian. I am a fact. What does it mean to be proud to be a lesbian. What is it? I am like everyone else. I am a fact.

Sigi added:

Well, I never encountered it [discrimination] but I will not tell in my work that I am a lesbian. If it creates a problem, one does not need to speak about it publicly.

This apolitical articulation of their gay identity and their desperate effort to be left alone, not stir the water, be "like everyone else" without changing social norms that have excluded them is very different from the loud, open, political activism advocated by other members of CLaF. Sigi and Esther want CLaF to be a place where lesbian women come to feel safe, to enjoy themselves. They reject the definition of the community as a political arena for "raising consciousness." "I am not for searching for one's difference [*kharigut*] and making it more explicit" concluded Esther.

Esther and Sigi find that CLaF is an organization full of "talk" with little substance. CLaF rhetoric is pretentious and empty (*harbeh posa*). The pretentiousness and lack of sincerity of CLaF women extend, according to Esther and Sigi, to the way CLaF has been, in fact, ignoring Mizrahi lesbian women. Said Sigi: "That part about the Mizrahi women . . . there is a problem here. And that's a fact. They will not turn to the Mizrahi women and speak to them. It's clear they simply will not do it." When I asked Sigi why she herself did not initiate that move and encourage the CLaF women to turn to Mizrahi lesbian women who are left out of CLaF, she replied cryptically: "Because I don't want to represent the Mizrahi women."

I see the refusal of Esther and Sigi to “represent the Mizrahi women” as an act of resistance to imposed definitions of their identity and a sign of their struggle to gain some control over their lives and their subjectivity.

By rejecting the feminist politics of CLaF as so much “empty talk” that focuses on one axis of their identity (sexual preference), the two women exposed the hidden mechanism that maintains and reaffirms boundaries and practices of exclusion along ethnic and class lines. In defining their lesbianism outside and against the discourse offered by CLaF dominant lesbian frames, the two women exposed the class and ethnic-based notions of this mainstream Israeli gay identity. The new “liberal” discourse of inclusion of Mizrahi lesbians without any serious effort to revise the narrow middle-class discourse of “feminism” is phony and by rejecting it, Esther and Sigi have exposed the politics of exclusion hidden behind it. For Esther and Sigi, as we have seen above, Mizrahi identity is always associated with failure to make it into the middle class. Their narrative articulated their experience of inherent tension that links one’s ethnic identity with class aspirations. In speaking about their complex, at times contradictory efforts to deal with these experienced tensions their narratives offer a glimpse into the multiple, simultaneous, and mutually constitutive axis of their identity and therefore a challenge to all claims to “authentic” categories of identity. Reading their narrative in this way points to the potential for a critical, border-crossing, shifting identity position.

CLOSING REMARKS: BEYOND EMPIRICISM

Three issues close my interpretive conclusive remarks at this point: First, there is the question of representation. What can we learn from this single interview with only two women about the lives of Mizrahi lesbians in Israel? About the internal politics within the small Israeli lesbian community? About Israeli women? I would like to argue here that this limited ethnography can tell us a lot about all the above. I wish to push my argument even further and claim that this kind of reflexive exploration of a single narrative goes beyond a mere study of marginality, relevant at best to audiences interested in understanding Israeli lesbians, but is presented here as a deep contemplation into Israeli society that is ridden by conflict along class, nationality, and ethnic divisions.

Read from a vulgar empiricist perspective that searches for realist data, this chapter has yielded very little “concrete knowledge,” given its narrow focus on the narratives of only two women, and of the very particular representation of these narratives by a third, heterosexual Mizrahi woman. Rejecting such limited empiricist perspective, I wish to present this interview and my analysis of it, as an example of an alternative, non-empiricist feminist model of writing and scholarship. Following postcolonial feminist theorists such as Gloria Anzaldúa, bell-hooks, and Chandra Mohanty, I propose that the focus on such experience-based texts can yield significant insights into an alternative, liberatory knowledge. I offer this reading of Esther and Sigi’s experience of multiple oppression as an

example for the potential of creativity and agency it reveals about its subjects. The recorded narratives, I argue, are best interpreted as stories that complicate dominant ideas about identities, subjects, and social difference.

I sought to explore the subversive potential of Esther and Sigi's narratives as nuanced records of their experience of simultaneous oppression along several lines of social divisions, and *not* for their empiricist value as representatives of other women's lives in Israel. Esther and Sigi's narratives are critical because they offer insights of hybrid, contradictory and inchoate consciousness. They also challenge readers who are comfortable in the dominant heterosexual, middle class (both Mizrahi and Ashkenazi) culture to rethink their identities in light of these stories. I suggest that the Israeli experience of class, ethnicity and gender is complex and contradictory and that it can best be conceptualized and understood through narrative work. The narrative of these two Mizrahi lesbians is particularly revealing for it opens a way for seeing the familiar Israeli reality in its full complexity, a complexity not often intelligible within hegemonic centrist texts.

And here lies my second interpretive conclusion. Throughout the interview, Esther and Sigi reject all attempts to define them, to classify them. They openly and forcefully challenge the mainstream, mainly Ashkenazi definition of lesbianism. They also reject my own questions that force them to contemplate their Mizrahi identity and their class position. Where is, one can ask, their "alternative, subversive" voice? Where, if I might be allowed a fashionable sociological term, is their "agency," their ability to craft their own lives and selves and actively shape their lives? I argue here (and further elaboration of this and my other interpretive claims can be found in my other writing on this issue) that Esther and Sigi's agency is to be found precisely in what can be seen as the "empty" space that they have created for themselves after rejecting all external attempts to define them. In that space of rejection they are authors for their experience, their identities, their lives.

Finally, and this is my third point, my insistence on bringing to the center of the analysis the context within which the interview was conducted, of exploring the interaction among us is analytically critical, not a window dressing. For the very actual event, the very kind of inter-viewing that went on during our brief encounter brought out their (any my own) reflexive narrative. By explaining themselves to me, and not to an Ashkenazi lesbian interviewer (or any other position embodied by another interviewer) they were able to "tell themselves" a particular story of who they are. And as Mohanti put it eloquently (quoted in Moya 1997, 138): "Identities are ways of making sense of our experiences."

NOTES

1. I have changed the names of the two women.
2. The essay, titled "Agency within Multiple Oppressions: Narrating Mizrahi Lesbian Experience in Israel," was submitted for publication to a major professional journal and is currently under review.

3. The interview by Or Maroni-Paner appeared in the winter 1998 *CLaF Hazak* issue number 25. It includes two other interviews with Mizrahi lesbian women. The interview with Esther and Sigi appears on pages 10–11.

4. In this context, it may be illuminating to hear Mizrahi philosopher Yossi Yona tells a journalist that his tastes in music include Yair Dallal (a second-generation Iraqi Jew who plays the Oud) and Egyptian singer Oum Cul Thum as well as classical music and jazz.

5. The challenge posed by the activism of Mizrahi middle-class intellectuals who organized in the HaKeshet HaDemocratit HaMizrahit (The Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow) underscores this point. A case in point is the Haaretz essay by professor of sociology, Iraqi-born Yehouda Shenhav who wrote a provocative essay published in *Haaretz* (1996), a leading left-of center Israeli daily where he set out to “break the silence” on the hegemonic discourse of Mizrahiyut. Among the many reactions to the essay was the claim that there must be something self-serving and evidently inauthentic about the claims to Mizrahiyut by a successful person such as Shenhav. In my own contribution to this debate (Motzafi-Haller 1996), I argued that the critics never imagined a legitimate position of Mizrahi intellectualism. The two positions (of Mizrahi identity and solid middle class), from this hegemonic perspective, could not be held simultaneously.

REFERENCES

- Hightower Langston, Donna. “The Spirit of This Bridge” *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*. Ed. Anzalua, Gloria and Alouise Keating. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Maroni-Pener, Or. “Klaf and the Mizrahi Lesbians” *CLAF HAZAK* 21 (1998): 6–11 (Hebrew).
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. “Feminist Encounters: Locating the Politics of Experience.” *Copyright* 1 (1982): 30–44.
- Motzafi-Haller, Pnina. “Scholarship, Identity and Power: Mizrahi Women in Israel.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. 26, 3 (2001): 697–734.

This page intentionally left blank.

TEN

From “Sexless in Russia”
to “Proud Israeli Lesbian”:
Immigration Stories of Coming Out

Adi Kuntsman

FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE

When I look back, I remember the girl from St. Petersburg, raised in a family of the Jewish *intelligentsia*.¹ Those seeing me today would hardly recognize me from the St. Petersburg photos: a delicate longhaired girl with a dreamy gaze. I, too, can hardly believe that girl and I am the same person. When I look back, I realize the transformation that I have undergone—a transformation that brings together cross-cultural transition, coming of age, and change of sexuality.

When I was sixteen, still in St. Petersburg, I fell in love with a classmate. Shared intellectual and spiritual experience mixed with sexual desire. I could hardly tell where one ended and the other began. I knew very little about sex in those days. Like many girls from families of the *intelligentsia*, I preferred to read books. Agitated and frightened by my intense emotions and erotic desire, I asked myself: Am I a lesbian? My answer was adamant: Of course not! Lesbians are scary women who rape other women in jail. They are alcoholics, perverts, and criminals.² I, a nice Jewish girl from a good family, cannot be a lesbian.

The relationship with that classmate was the only relationship among many unrequited crushes that I had dared to realize in a sexual way. Most of the crushes I knew to define as love, but I was yet unaware of their sexual aspect. I still did not define myself as a lesbian. It seemed ridiculous and unimaginable. I knew I was different from others, but sexuality was not a distinct part of my identity. A year and a half later I came to Israel with my

parents. Upon arrival I did not seek a GLBT³ community or meeting places. In the Soviet Union of my childhood homosexuality was referred to as a disease of the “Bourgeois West.” In the West these immoral sex perverts hang out in nightclubs and have wild orgies, I was told. Why would I want to have anything to do with *lesbians*?⁴

My first encounter with the Israeli GLBT community, therefore, was a total surprise, a real shock. Shortly after arriving in Israel I had entered the Hebrew University. It was self-evident that I would attend university. In this I was no different from many other Russian immigrants to Israel; in Russia, higher education was an expected part of the life-script of Jewish children of the *intelligentsia* (Lerner 1999). In addition to education, the university also served as a meeting place with Israeli society; I could both study it and experience it firsthand. As it did for many other “Russians,”⁵ the university became for me a home, a community, and a world in itself. My first encounter with Israeli gays also took place at the university. During my initial years in Israel, I had been exposed to some positive information about gays and lesbians, but was still scared to see myself as a lesbian. When I finally got the gumption to explore the issue of my sexual identity, I chose to attend a meeting of *Ha-Asiron Ha-Aher* (The Other Ten Percent) a GLBT student organization, which has been active on the Jerusalem campus for the past eleven years.

At that first meeting I took part in a friendly discussion among a group of people who had—I thought—little in common other than their sexual orientation. They were not monsters after all. I felt that I too had something in common with these women and men other than our being students. I saw people who had chosen a lifestyle based on their desire for their own sex, but for whom their sexuality was not associated with social degradation. Their otherness was an important factor in their identity, but it did not determine all aspects of their lives, which is what I had tended to believe in Russia. These people had lives, families, friends, work, and studies—just as I had.

At that point I dared to say to myself: I am a lesbian. And then, having created this new self,⁶ I also took it out of the closet: I told my parents, colleagues, and friends about the identity I wished to adopt. I wanted to become a proud lesbian who does not hide her love for women. My coming out aroused strong objections and resistance. *You are such a nice girl, why are you dressing like a man? Do you want to be a man?* No, I don’t. *You can be with anyone you want, but why do you have to tell everyone about it?* It was then that I began realizing the connection between patriarchy, the oppression of women, and the silencing of non-normative sexuality. I became a feminist. My feminism brought me to recognize other kinds of oppression—based on class, nationality, and ethnic background—against which I knew I would fight. Coming out of the closet grew to be more than a personal confession: it became a political project.

Seven years have passed since then. I have undergone many changes and upheavals personally, professionally, and especially in terms of gender and sexu-

ality. I have turned into a feminist. I have become a lesbian. I consciously changed my appearance from a normative feminine look to a masculine-lesbian one.⁷ This look has become a sort of political, antipatriarchal banner that I carry in and on my body. After so many years I have come to take it for granted, and I am always surprised when I am told I do it on purpose.⁸ I feel at home in my butch lesbian body, which led me to find another home—that of the Israeli GLBT community. Through my sexuality I began to create a sense of belonging. I ceased being an immigrant and became an Israeli. As an Israeli, I find myself on the social and political margins of society. For me this is a conscious place of subversion and struggle. I am feminist, a lesbian, and I also define myself as a radical anti-occupation leftist. None of this makes me very popular among the general Israeli public. Still, I conduct my struggle as a local participant, not as an outsider.

WANDERING WITH THE BODY: IMMIGRATION, SEXUALITY, IDENTITY

The many changes I have undergone—growing up, immigrating, and changing my sexuality—are inherent in my body and inseparable from it. Today I examine these changes through the eyes of a researcher. An in-depth look at these many transitions, which have taken place simultaneously, can teach a lot about sexuality and culture, identity and location, wandering and belonging. This chapter focuses on these multiple transitions through descriptions of immigration experiences of young women from the former Soviet Union, who today define themselves as lesbians.

The chapter deals with the identity experience of Israeli lesbians who, like me, emigrated from the former Soviet Union. We grew up in a totalitarian society that was restrictive with respect to sexuality, policing and violently silencing any expressions of queer desires (Essig 1993; Kon and Riordan 1999; Popovsky 1987; Zuk 1998). In Israel of the 1990s we found more tolerance for various expressions of sexuality and a growing and developing GLBT community (Har'el 2000; Kadish 2000). However, the immediate connection between sexual and emotional attraction to women, on the one hand, and the social identity of lesbian, on the other, was not immediately evident to most of us.

This study is based on extensive fieldwork⁹ within the GLBT communities of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, including participants' observations and in-depth interviews with fourteen young immigrants. The women interviewed were young, twenty to thirty years old. All of them came to Israel during the past twelve years from the European part of the former Soviet Union. Among the women I interviewed,¹⁰ most were either university students or had graduated and worked in their professions. There were, however, a few who worked as technicians of different sorts. I asked the women to tell me the story of their migration. From their stories I learned about their past in Russia, their encounter with Israeli society, and their experience of sexuality there and here.

Through the case of Russian lesbians I wish to discuss the way various identities are constituted in a context of immigration and marginalization, while my focus will be on the role sexuality plays in this process.

This article combines the queer theory of gender and sexuality with the transnational perspective on location and belonging. According to scholars of queer theory (Butler 1990, 1993a, 1993b; Sedgwick-Kosofsky 1990), sexuality is not natural or essential, but a discursive construction constituted in a particular cultural-historical context of institutions, discourses, and corporeality. "Gay" or "lesbian" identities are, thus, not ontological entities, but discursive constructs that are part of the medicalization of the body in modern Western society (Foucault 1980). These constructs are also related to the special role of the gendered and sexual body in capitalist consumption culture (Bordo 1993; Frank 1991; Hennessy 2000).

While queer theory suggests that relationships between gender, sexuality, and sexual identity are not natural or self-evident, the transnational perspective challenges the alignment of and clear distinction between territory, culture, nationality, and belonging (Kearney 1991; Appadurai 1996), while addressing the "asymmetries of a globalization process" (Grewal and Kaplan 2001, 664), in which some are free to move and others are forced to stay put within the boundaries of color, class, or geopolitical location. Transnational perspective places the marginal and mobile subject at the center of their analysis. Its focus on displacement, multiple movements, and shifting belongings is also the weakness of this perspective, as its many scholars tend to undermine the attempt to seek permanence and rootedness—an attempt that, as I shall show, is central for Russian lesbians' immigration coming-out stories.¹¹

I suggest that the combination of queer and transnational perspective provides a fruitful theoretical framework for the discussion of immigrant identities through the prism of sexuality. Critical use of these two approaches enables me to examine the role of sexual identity in constituting immigrant belongings, while examining sexuality as changing in time and space.

IMMIGRATION AS A VOYAGE OF LESBIAN DISCOVERY

All of the women I spoke with described their experience as a transformation—in body, sexuality, and identity. Many spoke of a change in appearance—from a normative, feminine look to a more androgynous look, male dress, or short haircuts. But the main transformation they describe was in self-definition: most of them did not define themselves as lesbians in Russia, nor had they ever considered their identity in terms of sexuality.

The women expressed their experience of transformation in the narrative practices through which they constructed the story of their immigration. In that story, the narrator wanders from the present moment toward whatever she had left behind. From the way she introduces herself as a lesbian today, she turns her gaze toward her past in Russia and back to her years in Israel. A story

of transformation is constructed through this circular journey in time. From the numerous conversations I held with Russian lesbians in my fieldwork, and especially from the fourteen interviews, three main models of presenting the past emerged, all of which examined the past in relation to sexuality and present identity.

The first model, which I shall call "Rebirth," presents the past as totally unrelated to the woman's being a lesbian now. It is a past that is not, at least seemingly, connected to the lesbian present. The second model, "Finding the light," presents a certain continuity from past to present in which a key event happens in Israel that transforms the narrator's self-conception and sexual experience. This is usually an encounter with a significant person or some other transformative experience. The third model, "Self-realization," represent "the other voice" and is a model in which sexuality is described as a continuous development from past to present. Though sexuality in the present is expressed in many more ways and degrees of freedom, its essence is unchanged. The three models are described here through several representative narratives.

REBIRTH

Masha,¹² who came to Israel in 1990 at the age of eighteen, says that until then she had not thought about her sexuality. Her lesbian identity she obtained in Israel. Masha explains the change in her identity as a result of coming into contact with new places and people. She pictures her Russian past as insignificant, for her, having left no mark. When, during our conversation, the subject of homophobia in Soviet-Russian society came up, Masha spoke at length about the crucial influence that Russian culture has on creating homophobic views and ideas. She mentioned the great difficulty that immigrants from the Soviet Union have letting go of such views. But when asked about that culture's influence on her, Masha presented it as insignificant:

When I arrived, I was eighteen years old; I had no culture, no culture at all.

—What do you mean no culture?

No cultural heritage that I had to give up.

—What had you been doing for eighteen years?

Nothing! Nothing. I don't feel like my parents, who have a real cultural heritage to give up. Perhaps I did, but it was not important to me. I don't know. But I didn't have anything I had adopted that was hard for me to give up.

Within a brief period, Masha repeated the term *cultural heritage* several times. Cultural heritage as she used it may be understood in two ways. One refers to accepted models of immigration, whereby an immigrant brings with her the past and clings to the culture in which she was raised. Unlike these models, Masha easily shakes off her past and detaches herself from her former culture. The second interpretation relates to the idea of culture as used by the Russian Jewish immigrants of the *intelligentsia*, whereby it may mean higher education, familiarity with books and the arts (mainly classics), visits to museums and theaters, and other aspects of “cultural capital”¹³ (Bourdieu 1977). Here Masha’s imagined audience would be that of *intelligentsia* immigrants, Russians who live in Israel and cling to an old model of high culture that they brought with them. Masha sets herself in opposition to them when she perceives culture as a limitation rather than a possession. In her eyes, it is a double limitation, not only because Russian culture appears as homophobic, but also because it is generally narrow-minded, an illusion of enlightenment. Therefore, enlightened are those who disconnect from Russian culture and open themselves to a new world. In rejecting both models of culture, Masha presents her own immigration as an empty vessel that is “filled” with new content in Israel. She places her lesbian identity in her Israeli present and describes it as detached from her Russian past.

Tal, like Masha, describes her Russian past as entirely separate from her present lesbian identity. When Tal told me about her youth in Russia, she first presented her world as a sexless one:

Okay, I don’t know about others, I can only speak for myself . . . I was kept within limits . . . Well, we never discussed sex. Not because it’s *changelstvo*, but because there were really other topics. We talked. I don’t know. About trivial things, books, theater . . . I don’t know, I was sixteen, almost seventeen, quite a big girl. In Israel at this age people already have plenty of sexual experience, and . . . somehow I was raised to be modest.

Tal describes her Russian past as a world within limits: limits of the modest sexless body, and limits of her immediate surroundings of the *intelligentsia*. Tal creates a model of *intelligentsia* based on culture instead of sexuality, but unlike Masha, who voices her criticism of this kind of culture, Tal believes that it was a proper way to act in Russia.

A central concept to which Tal returns time and again is *changelstvo*—an untranslatable Russian word that combines sexual ignorance and moral righteousness. This righteousness connotes a kind of class distinction (Bourdieu 1984) that separates the *intelligentsia* from low class people—those who supposedly do not speak of sex out of ignorance. Those who belong to the *intelligentsia* also do not talk about sex, but for different, better-bred reasons of morality and a good taste. Tal stresses that her own reason for not speaking of sex was the

existence of other cultural subjects, more important ones—books and theater. These are the pastimes of the “cultured person” (*kulturnyj chelovek*) of the *intelligentsia*. By describing the absence of sexuality in her everyday life as self-evident, Tal constructs a double distinction—that of class (*intelligentsia* versus low-class people) and that of culture. By reimagining her past as lacking any reference to sexuality, Tal thus asserts her identity as belonging to the *intelligentsia*.

Tal’s sexless adolescence in Russia is different from her Israeli experience. When she felt attraction toward an Israeli woman she realized she was a lesbian. “How did you know you were a lesbian?” I asked her. “Well, when someone appeals to you, you feel like dragging her off to some dark corner, and doing all sorts of things with her . . .” was her reply. Tal describes her attraction to women that she discovered in Israel somewhat blatantly; very different from the way she spoke of her Russian-*intelligentsia* past. The sharp shift between the two styles (modest, sexless, “not speaking,” on the one hand, and blatant, demonstrative and “doing,” on the other hand) serves as a narrative separation between her two worlds. Unlike Masha, who is emptied of the past, Tal does not belittle hers; but through different narrative practices she creates the distinction between “then” and “now,” distinction that frame her transformation.

FINDING THE LIGHT

I met Olga through friends in Tel Aviv. Olga is twenty-six and immigrated to Israel seven years ago, in 1993. On the phone her voice sounded soft. I thought I’d meet a feminine and delicate woman, like the one we all—Russian Jewish girls—were educated to be. I worried that I might startle her with my butch appearance. But there was a surprise in store for me. As I entered the cafe where we had arranged to meet I saw a boyish woman with short-cropped hair and resolute body language. What a change she must have undergone! I asked Olga to tell me about her immigration, and this was how she began:

[In Russia] you grow up somewhere, in some framework . . . and suddenly I realized that I wasn’t just like the others, that I was somehow different. At first I thought . . . Well, I don’t even know what I was thinking. Then I understood I was feeling love . . . for a woman. But I understood that only later. At first I thought this was not normal, all sorts of . . . I just picked up and left at twenty, all alone, by myself. I understood I should start over. Get away . . . from that system . . . I wanted something different and new, and realized that immigration was the way, somehow.

So I came here alone, was accepted in the university, and actually . . . Well, I had women here but . . . straights. And Russian too. And . . . something was wrong again. Something didn’t suit me. Well, of course, I started thinking, developing in this direction. Not

that I went anywhere, I didn't even know what there was or wasn't. I didn't know anything.

Well, then I met an Israeli lesbian at work, and she started taking me out. She took me to different meetings with Israelis. At first I was shocked. I didn't imagine it could be like this . . . I never had anything like this in Russia, or anywhere. Of course, I started to have all kinds of feelings for her, etc. . . . we're still on very good terms. I'm grateful to her for showing me that this was normal, that there's no need to run off to a shrink etc.

This was long ago, five or six years, that's how I got to know the Minerva club¹⁴ etc., all kinds of meetings, and started reading [community] newspapers, going to our celebrations. Pride Day and such.

Olga's immigration story is also her story of becoming a lesbian. From a narrative point of view, her coming out as a lesbian and transition to Israel is interwoven. Olga constructs her story as a drama that develops up to a climactic moment: she leaves Russia as a young girl in order to start a new life; then she matures and searches for understanding of her feelings but doesn't find it until that dramatic moment when she meets an Israeli lesbian. The encounter with her is described as a kind of initiation rite that drastically transforms her life.

Olga describes a process of gradual release from a closed system toward a wide-open world. In the first part of her story, where she describes her life in St. Petersburg, two characteristics are prominent. The first is an amorphous reference to sexuality and self-identity. Her speech is fragmented, she resorts to words such as "some place," "something," "I guess." Olga characterizes her feelings as an undefined difference from others around her. The second characteristic is a lack of freedom, almost suffocation. The metaphors Olga repeatedly uses are a "system," a "framework"—metaphors of closure and control.

In the second part of her story, Olga describes her "outing" after immigration using metaphors of spatial openness: the encounter with the Israeli lesbian is described as "being taken out." Olga's getting out to a lesbian community eventually becomes her coming out. Her feelings get/come out too: Olga falls in love with the Israeli lesbian who brought her out. The narration of this falling in love differs from the alienated and fickle images of sex that Olga described before. In this part of the story the style also changes: from hesitant and cautious it becomes clear and resolute.

Olga's story is a story of transition between two different worlds. It begins with a description of a closed, amorphous place, empty of people as well as events. At the end of the story Olga describes a large world with friends, newspapers, hangouts, and holidays. Unlike the alienation and rejection she felt toward her world in Russia until she decided to leave, her lesbian world in Israel is described not only as taken for granted, but also as a happy place, a place in which Olga feels she belongs. Most importantly, her undefined

feelings of otherness and attraction to women turn into a defined identity that she joyously accepts. This experience is different from the ostracized and lonely feeling of otherness in Russia.

In Olga's story sexuality is transformed—from vague and suffocated to clear and liberated. Like Olga's, my own immigration story is characterized by a transformation in terms of sexuality. When I started this study, I asked one of my friends, an anthropologist, to interview me, so that my own interview would be part of the research. Her first question was: "How did this [your being a lesbian] start?" I answered:

It started very early. I was always falling in love with my teachers . . . At the age of twelve I was terribly in love with my Spanish teacher, crazily in love, like in the movies . . . Only I didn't . . . I didn't realize it. I didn't define it in sexual terms.

In the part of the interview that relates to my Russian past, I didn't talk about sexuality at all. Instead of sexuality, I spoke of love. I fell in love with women, but didn't regard myself as a lesbian. When I finally began a serious relationship with another woman, I didn't believe such relationships were at all possible and therefore knew that my affair with a woman would end. I was sure I would marry a man. When I tell my immigration story now, it is not just the story of the end of my adolescence; it is also my coming-out story: in Israel I discovered sexual freedom, and learned that one can be lesbian and lead a normal life. Even though I had already fallen in love with women in Russia, I did not know how to act upon my feelings. I now tell my story as a lesbian feminist, and I look back in anger and irony, amazed at the depth of the gap between my understanding then and now and astonished by the changes I have undergone.

SELF-REALIZATION

Among the Russian immigrants who describe their discovery of lesbian identity as a result of immigration, Dana and Natalie sound a different voice. They both say that they had already known they were lesbians in Russia, but they also realized that they couldn't maintain relationships with women there. Both say that being a lesbian was one of the main reasons they left Russia. Natalie said she was aware of her attraction to women, but she saw no way of realizing it in practice in Russia. One day, she met an Israeli woman who was visiting in Russia. "And what is it like there for sexual minorities?"¹⁵ she asked. The guest, Natalie emphasizes, lived in Tel Aviv,¹⁶ and she answered that there were many clubs and a great deal of openness toward gays and lesbians. That very day, Natalie told me, she decided to immigrate. She applied for a visa, packed, and left.

Unlike Natalie, Dana had had sexual experience with women in Russia, and she even chose to speak about them openly with her friends at the

university. However, a lesbian lifestyle was not possible for her there. Describing her life in Russia and her exposure to lesbianism, she refers to three protagonists. She speaks of all three with painful disdain and depicts stereotypical, almost grotesque images. Two of them were a couple: one was a truck driver, a very masculine woman; simple and rough, she was working-class and an alcoholic. She lived with her female partner—after the latter was released from jail—and her partner's child from a previous marriage. The two women got drunk often and disappeared for days from work and social life. The third was a young girl who had experienced violence and unhappy relationships and committed suicide because she was lesbian.

Through the depiction of these characters, Dana constructs what she believes were the only possible scenarios for lesbian women in Russia. She rejected all of them. Dana says she was always aware of her sexuality and wanted to realize it in a "normal life." Such a life, she knew, would be possible only if she emigrated:

I knew I'd start meeting women, normal women. Not ever-drunk lesbians. Two whom I knew and another who killed herself. I knew that . . . when I'd come to an open society, I'd be able to live a perfectly normal life, and be who I am, more or less . . . It was clear to me that I was going to realize myself in this regard as well, besides other things, perhaps in this way more than in any other.

As they did for Olga, immigration and the encounter with Israeli lesbians brought a shift in Dana's life. But unlike Olga, Masha, or Tal, Dana did not experience a transformation in her identity, but rather changed her place of residence in order to realize herself. She describes the possibility of living openly and securely as a lesbian as a normal life, life in an open society in which self-expression and women's conviviality is possible. Dana, like Olga, describes life in Russia as life in a closed society, which necessarily warps anyone who chooses to live as a lesbian. This society forces lesbian women into a life of drink, violence, and misery, she believes. Dana introduces herself as anti-Russian, explaining that in Russia she was in a constant struggle with a totalitarian society that tried to take from her what she defines as her own—her sexuality.

The three models presented here reflect different ways sexuality between women is understood by lesbian immigrants with relation to their past. The first, "absent" model, depicts sexuality as nonexistent; the second, "alienated" model, describes a variety of feelings that create an overall sense of being marginalized; while the third model of self-awareness relates to being aware of one's sexual identity but with no way to realize it in practice.

Both of the first two models—the "absent" and the "alienated"—appear in most of the stories I have collected. In both, sexual attraction to other women has no language and no legitimation. This lack of language to express

lesbian desires is a common experience of many Western lesbians struggling to come out. However, it should be also understood in the context of Russian cultural perceptions of sexuality, and women's desires in particular. Svetlana Boym, who studied Russian concepts of the body, suggests that sexuality as a cultural concept developed in Russia differently than in the West (Boym 1993). Unlike the West's, Russian cultural representations do not distinguish essentially between love, passion, and sexuality. Furthermore, there is fear of sexuality as an autonomous sphere, independent of social, religious, or metaphysical concerns. One of the ways this fear is expressed is in the Russian concept of *poshlost*,¹⁷ meaning both sexually indecent, lacking in a spiritual dimension, banal, and artistically trivial. Thus, one who chooses to represent or express sexuality risks being regarded not only as morally lacking, but also as tasteless and gross—a very great risk for anyone regarding herself as one of the *intelligentsia*.¹⁷ Therefore, the *intelligentsia* relates to sexuality with silence. In popular, "lowbrow" Russian culture, on the contrary, sexual expression is not only possible but is prominent, and characterized by extreme homophobia and misogyny (Draitser 1999). Under these conditions, Russian women's sexual desire in general, especially when directed toward other women, is all but paralyzed; on the level of cultural representation, it is almost erased. Immigration to Israel thus becomes a voyage of lesbian discovery, in which Russia emerges as a sexless and/or homophobic place that should be left behind, while Israel appears as a land of endless freedoms.

FROM DETACHMENT TO CONNECTION: LONG AND SHORT ROOTS

While the Russian past is often described through images of detachment and alienation, the Israeli present is narrated as an experience of connection and belonging. First and foremost, it is a connection to "myself" and "my body"—an understanding that *it's alright, no need to run to a shrink* (Olga), *no need to lie* (Geny), *I can be who I am* (Ira), *[I can] feel at ease with my body* (Anat).

Along with the connection to the body, lesbian identity as narrated in immigration stories mediates a feeling of locality and belonging. For many women, the GLBT community plays the role of intermediary in the process of finding their place in Israeli society. Often, as in my case, the GLBT community is the first or main point of encounter with Israelis. It is also through the community that many immigrant lesbians define and create their sense of home.

Fieldwork observations and interviews reveal numerous ways of connecting lesbian identity and a sense of belonging. As I have argued elsewhere (Kuntsman 2002), these connections also change in time, revealing an ongoing juggling of ethnicity, class, culture, and space. In this chapter, however, I will only focus on two principal patterns of connection between sexuality and place: the "rooted" and the "cosmopolitan." These two patterns constitute the end points of a continuum of practices that bring together the experience of "finding oneself" with the experience of "finding a home."

GAYS AND LESBIANS IN ISRAEL HAVE A SHARED HISTORY

The “rooted” pattern connects sexuality to a particular place, where the lesbian identity sets down roots in a new society. When Masha speaks about herself now, she makes the distinction between the “straight” (heterosexual) and the queer worlds. She speaks of the alienation and even hostility she used to feel toward straight people after having become a lesbian. In her narrative, this hostility is compared and contrasted to the sense of closeness, joy and belonging she felt toward the GLBT community.

I would feel happy when I came . . . someplace where there were other gays and lesbians. Normal. Because . . . I just didn't have that before.

—Could you explain this a bit?

Oh, it seems so trivial . . . So simple . . . Because all of a sudden my eyes were opened. To see there was a world there with gays and lesbians, not neurotic. That feel good about themselves . . . And I really envied these people, the common history they shared. So suddenly I felt I had missed out on so much! These people had a shared history, they talked about all kinds of things, how they met Dana [International]¹⁸ at clubs when she was still a guy, and shared all sorts of stuff from the . . . from the end of the eighties, when I was still inside my own closet and my complexes.

The Israeli gays whom she envied for their common history soon turned into her close friends, and Masha herself became a prominent activist. The description of the Israeli queer community constituted Masha's belonging in Israel through time. In her narrative Masha erases the cultural and geographical distance between herself and the Israeli gays and lesbians, by reimagining her possible belonging to the community during the 1980s, as though she had spent her whole life in Israel.

Masha replaces her Russian past, which she earlier narrated as “empty” time/space with the history of Israeli gays and lesbians. Thus, she also imagines herself belonging to a place—Tel Aviv—as long lasting and taken for granted. Belonging to Tel Aviv's past and present constitutes Masha's lesbian identity, at the same time it makes Tel Aviv (and Israel) into a queer rather than heterosexual space.

ANYWHERE I GO, I'D LIVE IN A GAY GHETTO

The second, “cosmopolitan” model also links sexual identity and place. But unlike the first, here the connection to place is temporary, mobile and shifting. When Tal, who presented her past as sexless, speaks about her life in Israel today, she too, like Masha, stresses the difference between gays and straights.¹⁹ This distinction is central for Tal's experience of comfort and belonging:

I think one doesn't feel comfortable in the straight world. And one doesn't want to explain anything [to straight people] . . . That's why I think about the gay ghetto abroad. And if I go abroad, I'd live in the ghetto.

—Why?

It's easier. That's it. Easier.

—And here?

Here we also live in a ghetto. In Tel Aviv, every seventh person is gay. Most of my friends are gays and lesbians. It's easier that way. Why act silly, you're not going to prove anything to anyone anyway.

Tal constitutes her belonging to place through her sexuality: she feels comfortable where there are other gays and lesbians beside her, so she prefers Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. All through our acquaintance and during the interview as well, Tal tries to convince me that from the point of view of gay activity, Tel Aviv is better than Jerusalem. In our conversation she stresses her satisfaction at being a Tel Aviv resident—the city that she inhabits because of its gay-lesbian ghetto. In this way, she feels at home.

But the roots she has put down in Tel Aviv are not deep. Tal feels she could belong just as well to any place that has a "gay ghetto." Her sense of the word *ghetto* contrasts the dominant Israeli perception of *ghetto* as negative and even traumatic. For most Israelis it symbolizes the collective memory of Jewish ghettos in Nazi Germany. *Ghetto* is also used to signify a group of Jewish immigrants that "failed" to integrate into the melting pot of the Israeli collective (e.g., "Russian ghetto" of the '90s). For Tal, however, *ghetto* is a desirable place, which means a voluntary belonging to a closed and differentiated group. This belonging is based neither on a traumatic collective memory nor on the ideology of ethnic integration, but rather on a gay or lesbian sexuality.

Scholars of queer theory (Bell and Valentine 1995; Grosz 1992, Hirsch 2000) have recently begun examining the interconnections of place, identity, and non-normative sexuality. Their central claim is that the relationship between space and sexual subjectivity is mutually constitutive; one cannot be examined without the other. The sexual subject is always constituted with relation to a place, and transition over time and space constitutes different subjects. Indeed, in the case of the Russian immigrants their lesbian sexuality is constructed in space and time of their immigration and arrival in Israel. Their sexual identity is described as located and rooted, while Israel as a place undergoes a process of queering; it is narrated as a queer space.

One especially prominent element in the stories of immigrant lesbians is the desire for location, a longing for belonging. This longing challenges claims often heard in postmodern literature that characterizes the transnational age as a time of displacement and nomadism (Appadurai 1996; Braidotti 1994).

It also weakens the claim that the marginal subject is always and necessarily displaced. For me and for other lesbians I interviewed—women marginalized for being both lesbians and immigrants—non-normative sexuality became an avenue of admittance into Israeli society. Our becoming “proud Israeli lesbians” is in fact a path from one marginal elite—that of Soviet Jewry who constituted a big part of the Soviet cultural elite—to another—that of Israeli gays and lesbians, marginal by their life style yet usually belonging to an educated Jewish middle class.

The different models of location that have been presented here are not exclusively lesbian or Russian and do not describe only the Israeli case. The unique nature of the case described in this study is a matter of the centrality of sexuality in creating located identities. Both classical studies of immigration and identity and the postmodern treatment of the nomad subject do not tend to address non-normative sexuality when discussing the connection of person to place. Feminist critical approaches to immigration, in their turn, often focus on “migrant women” as a united category, which may differ in terms of race, ethnicity, or class, but is heterosexual by default. Thus, most studies of immigration and belonging assume heteronormativity, and do not problematize sexuality.

DOUBLE HOMECOMING

The women I spoke with regard being lesbian as an integral part of their being Israeli. Furthermore, their narratives of sexual identity are usually stories of discovery and homecoming—in terms of a continuum of events and developments leading eventually to a body-mind wholeness and connectedness of sexuality, identity, and place of belonging. This self-discovery model is very different from the way in which immigration is examined in the psychological literature, which sees cross-cultural transition first and foremost in terms of trauma and loss (Espin 1999; Mirsky 1990). On the face of it, this narrative of discovery and self-realization could be explained by the fact that these are still young women, and adolescence is a time of self-searching and finding identities. It is a time of trial and error, daring and risk taking. Even if this explanation is not entirely refutable, I believe it is not sufficient.

Their association with place should be understood in the context of Israel's special nature as an immigration state. In Israel, unlike other immigration states, every Jewish immigrant is seen as coming home, returning to Zion. Every immigration narrative we have encountered in this study must be understood in the context of immigration-as-homecoming; the experience of becoming Israeli is a “natural” process of coming home. In this process as defined by Israeli-Zionist ideology, the Jewish immigrant who was a member of a minority in his/her land of origin becomes part of a majority.

This ideology does not have (and never had) absolute power to determine immigrants' identity. Moreover, it shifts in different periods and changes

according to different immigrant groups, defining some as "natural" Israelis (Jews of European origin), labeling others as primitive (Ethiopians or Jews from Muslim countries), and excluding others altogether (for example non-Jewish immigrants and guest workers). During the past ten years, this ideology has been assailed by critics of the Zionist narrative as well as by proponents of multicultural ideology (Ram 1993; Shalom Shitrit 1999). Lately, various groups of immigrants have been challenging the very idea of adjusting or feeling at home. Instead, they have suggested a variety of ways for individuals to place themselves and make the connection between their country of origin, Israel, and other places (Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport 2002).²⁰ In view of the development of different kinds of placement, stories of the "Israelization" of Russian immigrant lesbians are more surprising than self-evident. The findings of this study are better understood when we look into the dominant discourse of the Israeli GLBT community. Ruti Kadish, in her work on the GLBT community in Israel, notes its Jewish-Zionist character (Kadish 2000). In the activity and discourse of the community in Israel, one can see numerous expressions of a willingness to take in (literally, to "absorb") immigrants and help them become Israelis; in this it is similar to the general Zionist ethos.

Their experience of bonding to place, however, is not to be examined apart from the experience of connecting to sexuality and the body. One should keep in mind that the immigration narrative told in terms of discovery and liberation of sexuality and the body is often echoed in many Western coming-out stories of gays and lesbians (Bacon 1998; Schimmel 1997). The coming-out story has a significant place both in academic and in popular literature. It is a sort of metanarrative in the queer communities in the West, especially in the United States, and is very popular in Israel as well.

Furthermore, one of the developments in the Western queer community—which has reached Israel and influenced the local queer subculture—is the proliferation and splitting of identities within the community,²¹ according to gender and sexual practices ("leather dykes," "tranny boys," "butch" or "fem," "S&M's," "bears," etc.). This proliferation creates many subgroups within the queer community, where the fragmentation focuses on the body itself, both in appearance and practice. This process produces not only new social identities based primarily on the body, but also places the body at the center of queer discourse. Thus, often the queer identity is narrated as a process of homecoming in terms of body, and the body itself becomes a metaphor for immigration, migration, and placement. (Prosser 1995, 1998).

The connection of the two central discourses—that of Jewish immigration to Israel as a homecoming, and that of coming out as coming home—constitutes the story of Russian lesbians' immigration experience as a double transition from detachment to connectedness, a sort of double homecoming.

NOTES

This research was made possible by grants from The Lafer Center for Women and Gender Studies and the Scheine Center for Sociological Research, both located at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Furthermore, the research could not have been completed without the intellectual support and guidance of my advisor Tamar Rappoport and the insightful advice of the graduate student group hosted by her and Edna Lomsky Feder. I also thank Tal Haran and Marcia Freedman for their help with translating this article from its original Hebrew manuscript. I am grateful to my partner, Yehudit Keshet, for her editing assistance and continuous support and patience.

I would also like to thank all these women who shared with me their stories, and gave much of their time and patience describing their journey across continents and identity terrains. Without them this research would not have been possible.

1. The term *Intelligentsia* refers to a social class of educated Soviet citizens, academics, artists, and members of the free professions.

2. In the Soviet Union, lesbianism was regarded as a phenomenon particular to women prisoners—and this for two main reasons. One relates to the symbolic place of lesbians in Soviet culture: lesbianism was perceived as part of the perversion of humanity and femininity that took place in Soviet prisons. The second reason is that historically, prisons and detention camps were the only places that enabled the existence of an overt lesbian subculture during the Soviet era (Zuk 1998).

3. Gay Lesbian Bisexual and Transgender.

4. With regard to Russian and Soviet sexuality see Costlow, Sandler, and Vowles 1993. Their book, *Sexuality and the Body in Russian Culture*, deals with sexuality in Russian culture from the eighteenth to twentieth century, and shows not only that it was different from Western models of sexuality, but it was also always constituted in opposition to these models.

5. In Israel Jewish immigrants from Russia and other parts of the former Soviet Union are often called “Russians.” Many of the immigrants also defined themselves in that way. Therefore, I have chosen this term when I refer to immigrants from the former Soviet Union.

6. On the performative nature of identity and the critique of “lesbianism” as an ontological entity see Butler 1993b.

7. A “masculine” lesbian appearance is popular among queer communities in the West. It is associated with the “butch” concept—the masculine lesbian. On the image of the butch as an “ultimate lesbian” see Munt 1998.

8. On the body as a cultural text see Bordo 1993; Bourdieu 1977; Butler 1990. These theoreticians indicate, from different perspectives, that bodily acts (that are perceived as “natural” and “taken for granted”) are acts of a cultural, and not of an essentialist nature. However, these acts can be changed by conscious effort although often the change is unconscious as part of larger cultural changes.

9. This chapter is based on a study undertaken toward a master’s degree at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology of the Hebrew University, entitled “Double Homecoming: Sexuality, Identity, and Place in Immigration Stories of Russian Lesbians.”

10. The interviews were assembled at one or two meetings, lasting between one and three hours. We would meet at their homes or mine, at their work places when

circumstances permitted, or at cafes. All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed. Some of the interviews were held in Russian, others in Hebrew, according to the interviewee's wish.

11. For an expanded critique of the postmodernist concept of identity and a discussion of the practices of localization of Russian immigrants see Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport 2002.

12. All names were changed.

13. On the place of culture in the identity of Soviet Jewry see Rapoport and Lomsky-Feder 2002.

14. A well-known lesbian bar in Tel Aviv.

15. During the course of the interview with Natalie, which took place in Russian, she used the common Russian term *sexual minorities* in relation to gays and lesbians. The taboo relating to the subject of sexuality in Russia has given rise, among other things, to a language rich in euphemisms, while explicit terms are not mentioned in conversation.

16. Many consider Tel Aviv a capital of gay and lesbian life in Israel.

17. Belonging to the *intelligentsia* was especially important to Jews in the USSR, for many of whom this was the essence of self-definition (Rapoport and Lomsky-Feder 2002).

18. A popular Israeli MTF singer.

19. This does not refer of course to essentialist categories, but rather to the modern Western dichotomy of homo-hetero-sexuality which Tal and Masha adopt (Sedgwick, Kosofsky 1990; Foucault 1996).

20. Nevertheless, we are referring to Russian Jews who are desired immigrants and whose civil status is equal to that of veteran Israeli citizens, as distinct from Palestinians from the Occupied territories, non-Jewish immigrants, or foreign workers.

21. This multiplicity is one of the reasons for the change from a "Gay-Lesbian" to a "Queer" community. The latter enables the variety of sexual identities under one subversive umbrella, while the former definition excludes the many non-normative identities that are not contained in the homo-hetero dichotomy. Some activists and scholars, however, warn of the danger in using the term *queer*, as it might erase and silence the particular gay or lesbian experience.

REFERENCES

- Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996.
- Bacon, James. "Getting the Story Straight: Coming Out Narratives and the Possibility of the Cultural Rhetorics." *World Englishness* 17(1995): 249–58.
- Bell, David, and Gill Valentine. "Introduction: Orientations." *Mapping Desire: Geographic of Sexuality*. Ed. David Bell and Gill Valentine. London: Routledge, 1995. 1–27.
- Bordo, Susan. *Unbearable Weight*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1993.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1977.
- . *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984.

- Boym, Svetlana. "Loving in Bad Taste: Eroticism and Excess in Marina Tsvetaeva's 'The Tale of Sonechka.'" *Sexuality and the Body in Russian Culture*. Ed. Jane T. Costlow, Stephanie Sandler, and Judith Vowles. Stanford: Stanford UP 1993. 156–76.
- Braidotti, Rosi. *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*. West Sussex: Columbia UP, 1994.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. New York and London: Routledge, 1990.
- . *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York and London: Routledge, 1993a.
- . "Imitation and Gender Insubordination." *Gay and Lesbian Studies*. Ed. Henry Abelore, Michele Aina Barale, and David Halperin. New York: Routledge, 1993b. 307–20.
- Costlow, Jane T., Stephanie Sandler, and Judith Vowles, eds. *Sexuality and the Body in Russian Culture*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993. 1–40.
- Draitser, Emil A. *Making War, Not Love: Gender and Sexuality in Russian Humor*. New York: St. Martin's, 1999.
- Espin, Olivia M. *Women Crossing Boundaries: A Psychology of Immigration and Transformations of Sexuality*. New York and London: Routledge, 1999.
- Essig, Laurie. *Queer in Russia: A Story of Self, Sex, and the Other*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 1999.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality*. New York: Vintage Books, 1980.
- Frank, Arthur W. "For Sociology of the Body: An Analytical Review." *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory*. Ed. Micke Featherstone, Mike Hepworth, and Bryan S. Turner. London: Sage, 1991: 36–102.
- Grewal, Inderpal, and Caren Kaplan. "Global Identities: Theorizing Transnational Studies of Sexuality." *GLO—A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 7:4 (2001): 663–79.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. "Bodies–Cities." *Sexuality and Space*. Ed. Beatriz Colomina. Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992. 241–53.
- Har'el, Alon. "The Rise and Fall of the Israeli Gay Legal Revolution." *Columbia Human Rights Law Review* 31(2000): 443–51.
- Hennessy, Rosemary. *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism*. New York and London: Routledge, 2000.
- Hirsh, Dafna. "Homotopia": *Independence Park in Tel Aviv as Queer Space*. Unpublished manuscript, 2000.
- Kadish, Ruthie. *My Zionism is Bigger than Your Zionism: Israeli Lesbians, Gay Men, Gay Rights, and National Identity*. Unpublished manuscript, 2000.
- Kearney, Michael. "Borders and Boundaries of State and Self at the End of Empire." *Journal of Historical Sociology* 4(1991): 52–74.
- Kon, Igor. "Sexuality and Culture." *Sex and Russian Society*. Ed. Igor Kon and James Riordan. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1993. 15–44.
- Kuntsman, Adi. *Double Homecoming: Sexuality, Identity, and Place in Immigration Stories of Russian Lesbians*. Dissertation Hebrew U, 2003.
- Lerner, Julia. "By Way of Knowledge: Russian Migrants at the University." *Shaine Working Papers* No. 5, Hebrew U, 1999.
- Lomsky-Feder, Edna, and Tamar Rapoport. "Constant Movement between Places is but One Option: Representation of Bounded Movement among Russian-Jewish Immigrants." *Ethos* 30 (2002): 3.
- Mirsky, Julia. "Individuation through Immigration to Israel: Psychotherapy with Immigrant Adolescent." *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy* 20 (1990): 47–61.

- Munt, Sally.R. *Heroic Desire: Lesbian Identity and Cultural Space*. New York: New York UP, 1998.
- Popovsky, Mark. *Hu Vê-Hi Vê-Hamishtar Ha-Sovieti: Sex Be-Vrit Ha-Muatzot* [*He And She and the Soviet Regime: Sex in the Soviet Union*]. Jerusalem: Yediot Aharonot, 1987.
- Prosser, Jay. "No Place Like Home: The Transgendered Narrative of Leslie Feinberg's 'Stone Butch Blues.'" *Modern Fiction Studies* 43 (1995): 483–514.
- . *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality*, New York: Columbia UP, 1998.
- Ram, Uri. *Ha-Hevra Ve-Madaei Ha-Hevra: Sociologia Memsadit Ve-Sociologia Vikortit Be-Israel* [*Society and Social Science: Established and Critical Sociology in Israel*]. *Ha-Hevra Ha-Israelit: Hebetim Bikorti 'im*. [The Israeli Society-Critical Perspective]. Ed. Uri Ram. Tel Aviv: Brivot, 1993.
- Rappoport, Tamar, and Edna Lomsky-Feder. "'Intelligentsia' as an Ethnic Habitus: The Inculcation and Restructuring of Intelligentsia among Russian Jews." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 23:2 (2002): 233–49.
- Riordan, James. "Introduction." *Sex and Russian Society*. Ed. Igor Kon and James Riordan. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1993.
- Sedgwick Kosofsky, Eve. *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley: The U of California P, 1990.
- Shalom-Shitrit, Sami. *Ha-Mahapecta Ha-Ashkenazit Meta* [*The Ashkenazi Revolution is Dead*]. Tel Aviv: Bimat Kedem Le-Chinuh, 1999.
- Schimmel, Lawrence. "Diaspora, Sweet Diaspora: Queer Culture to Post-Zionist Jewish Identity." *PoMoSexuals: Challenging Assumptions about Gender and Sexuality*. Ed. Carol Queen and Lawrence Schimmel. San Francisco: Cleiss Press, 1997.
- Zuk, Olga. *Russkije Amazonki: Istorija Lesbijskoj Sub-Kultury V Rossii, 20 Vek* [*The Russian Amazons: History of Lesbian Sub-Culture in Russia, 20th century*]. Moscow: Glagol, 1998.

This page intentionally left blank.

Part III

Politics

This page intentionally left blank.

Lesbians in the Women's Peace Movement

Su Schachter

This article was born, supported, and in its beginning stages constructively criticized by Lil Moed, of blessed memory. It is dedicated to her and to the Women in Black of Tzomet Nachshon.

Jewish-ethical pacifism has shadowed state-supported violence from the first moment Jews achieved realization of the state of Israel. Surely there were lesbians among the pioneers and among the armed militants. However, lesbians only became visible politically (visible if you looked very closely) within the nascent women's movement at the end of the seventies. At the same time, lesbians in Israel began to self-identify as a community and form the networks that allowed us to find each other and to work together politically even when we were not "out." During this era, the creation of Shalom Achshav¹ in 1977 marked the widening of the traditionally small, far-Left peace camp into a broader-based and more vocal protest movement.

Throughout the early years of the Lebanon War² Peace Now gained support from more and more Israelis who found themselves increasingly opposed to government policies regarding Israel's position as an occupier and as a state constantly at war with its neighbors. Shalom Achshav, though unaffiliated with any political party, adopted accepted Israeli institutional behavior: bureaucratization, favoring of talk over action, accepting one token female in a leadership role, using of rank and file women to do low-status work. With the outbreak of the Intifada in December 1987, women's frustration with this sorry state of organization and activism boiled over, and resulted in the creation of specifically women's peace groups.

Where were the lesbians in this scenario of women's peace activism? And what's happened since? Our story in brief: the Intifada began, and many

women thought the violent Israeli response to Palestinians frustrated and disillusioned about their lack of freedom and statehood was outrageous and shocking; numerous closeted lesbians with political and feminist awareness but no outlet for public expression and political growth had the energy to organize dissent, and joined forces with brave and angry straight women; and suddenly Nashim B'Shachor³ were standing all over the country. Hundreds of women thought this was a great idea, especially since it involved no public articulation of a political stance except "Down with the Occupation." In an anarchistic non-movement of dramatic autonomous vigils, lesbians could be active without being noticed, so we were free to fill leadership roles without endangering our closeted identities. Lesbians also joined in the creation of women's peace groups of a more traditional grassroots character; groups that held meetings, did outreach, had leaders, and issued media statements.

For four years all those women showed up every Friday, until the Gulf War. During that war many people stayed home or very close to home for six weeks, even though at several locations, Women in Black returned in small numbers two or three weeks into the war. At the end of the war in February 1991, the popular momentum had died, and only a few die-hard peacenik ladies kept standing, principally at Nachshon⁴ and in Tel Aviv; the big crowds in Jerusalem disappeared. Among the survivors was a scattering of mostly middle-aged lesbians, long-term activists since before the Intifada. The occupation dragged on, and most lesbians, just like most of the country, didn't notice it. At the same time, Israeli society continued to westernize rapidly, especially under Peres's (Israel's former prime minister) economic program, and along with entrepreneurship and venture capital we acquired the Western trait of going easier on our lesbian population. CLaF⁵ became a more institutionalized nonprofit organization, and increased its membership to include many new young women who weren't particularly searching for a political or even feminist organization.

When the Oslo accords were signed in 1994, thinking about peace came back into fashion. What was left of the women's peace movement seemed even more moribund than it had been since the Gulf War; most women assumed that the Rabin government was doing our work for us. Only a few far-Left organizations, which generally did not include lesbians, reminded us that the Oslo vision was significantly different from our vision of a peaceful and just Middle East. That hopeful and heady euphoria lasted until the moment Rabin was murdered. Once again it became clear that peace activists had plenty of work to do to save even the tenuous possibility for peace that Oslo offered. Netanyahu's election victory clarified the polarization of Israel. Secular Israelis were in the majority in favor of an agreement with the Palestinians, religious Israelis were vocal and active against. The ultra-Orthodox became politically more activist, the secular more silent. The Tel Aviv metropolitan area was open and tolerant of gays and lesbians, Jerusalem began to be compared to Iran. CLaF was mainstream, and other particularist lesbian groups formed.⁶ Femi-

nism became a word that described affirmative action for women rather than a vision of a different world order, and even Likud women could be pro-woman and anti-peace.

The next outrage to unify women around a peace issue was the increasing and increasingly meaningless carnage in Lebanon. And who died in Lebanon? Sons. Straight women from previously nonpolitical segments of society got angrier and angrier about losing their beautiful and irreplaceable sons in a non-war that they couldn't see progressing to a solution. Peace activism revived, this time in a maternalist direction. The Four Mothers, Women for an Immediate Withdrawal from Lebanon, Women and Peace, all focused on keeping the children safe. None of these organizations, and few articulate women in them, drew attention to the fact that if sons were going to serve in the army but not go to Lebanon, they were going to be policing the borders of the "Palestinian Autonomy" or guarding settlers in the West Bank. Lesbians, a population that at that time was not producing a lot of sons, found no place in these groups of mothers. Indeed since the maternalist groups have no vision of the future, they have no ideology that speaks to the place of peace and justice for all or the general demilitarization of our society—the factors that drew lesbians to the women's peace movement a decade ago. Lesbians today are an activist faction in civil rights groups, organize specifically around issues that effect lesbian-gay rights, and are primarily reformist/political-party-oriented in our demands on Israel as a whole.

The revolutionary excitement, which drew us to the women's peace movement as a way of imagining an Israel with different values, has faded to the thrill of a middle-class lesbian baby boom. I shudder to consider the failure of vision that will lead lesbians back to peace activism only when the sons being born today are still on their way to Lebanon eighteen years from now.

The major period in Israeli history during which lesbians were a notable and significant force in the women's peace movement was between the outbreak of the first Intifada and the Gulf War. At this time, 1989, the Israeli lesbian community was informally organized socially and culturally, but was not politically active as a community and had no public voice. The birth of the women's peace movement would provide us with our opportunity to speak out on an issue that we believed was crucial to us as lesbians, and to afford us a place to test and mature our skills in dissent.

At the beginning of the movement's response to the Intifada, lesbians were of course already present and active, though not out, in numerous small organizations such as Women for Women Political Prisoners and Mothers Against Silence, which in December 1987 turned the focus of their protest activity to the Israeli military actions in the occupied territories. Larger groups of lesbians joined the larger protest group that formed as a spontaneous response to the Intifada, Women in Black and Shani,⁷ both organizations that were not affiliated with long-standing left-wing mixed-sex organizations. The

lesbian population of Women in Black and Shani is estimated by activists to be 30 percent of the total women involved. At the founding stages of these organizations, it is believed that the proportion of lesbians was between 50 and 90 percent, depending on whose estimate is applied. As the movement developed impetus, more straight women joined, and the involved lesbians stayed.

During this period I interviewed eighteen lesbians who were active in Women in Black and in Shani, discussing their reasons for peace activism in specifically women's peace groups, the contributions of lesbians to peace activism, and the relation between women's peace activism and the lesbian community. The interviews provide a window onto this period of intense lesbian peace activism.

The activists I interviewed explored with me the motives, background, and consequences (social, political, activist, and organizational) of the massive lesbian involvement in the women's peace movement. Let's listen to some of the comments made by the lesbian activists. I present only the questions, which I asked everyone, and my interpretation of their answers.

Q: Why did you as a lesbian get involved in the women's peace movement?

I'm a feminist since 1973, so it's natural to move against the Intifada. Any other organization connected to the Left is an organization with men. I'm not active in mixed organizations, where women bring men's opinion to bear. The organization of Women in Black is closest to optimal—no bureaucracy, decision making by consensus.

I was in (another organization) and had a lot of trouble with men—they were unaware sexists, and there was no confrontation of the issue.

I'm more comfortable among women. Palestinian men expect leftists and women to fight for them while they oppress women. Therefore, I only fight with women together.

Leadership is important to me. Within mixed organizations, there's a parallel process to struggle for leadership—joining the Left, looking at preconceived notions of occupation just look at where the women are, thinking of Palestinian oppression/women's oppression.

No matter which historical path brought these lesbians to the women's peace movement at the beginning of the first Intifada (if not before), all but one claimed that lesbian feminism illuminated and clarified their involvement. In particular, most of the women interviewed emphasized the advantage of working in a women-only organization.

Q: Does lesbian imply feminist? Lesbian imply dissident?

Lesbianism is more than who I sleep with; it's who I am, because of feminism.

Support of the peace movement comes from feminism. Worrying only about lesbian issues is a sign of undeveloped philosophy. Some women have grown in their feminism by getting yelled at the vigil.

Lesbians are more alert to oppression, we feel lesbian oppression personally.

How many lesbians are leftists? It's not incidental that lesbians lean left. After discussing it once in CLaF, the tension around this question lessened. Some women feel that CLaF should only deal with lesbian issues and not with general political issues, and that's not leftist.

Women in Black have immediate goals. Lesbian goals are far off. We need to fight racism (like our attitude toward the Arabs) first, achieve some changes, and then it'll be easier to fight for lesbian goals.

A feeling common to the interviewees was that feminism is a day-to-day burden, requiring us to struggle and raise consciousness in every interaction. In that way, it's easier to be involved with the one issue of ending the occupation. At the same time, there was a need to be critical of the typically feminine political trap of fighting for the rights of others rather than for our own.

Q: When do we as lesbians identify as a group within the women's peace movement? What needs are served by identifying as a group? Are lesbian issues on the agenda?

In the past, before the women's movement, there was only sporadic lesbian action. After feminist organizations formed, lesbians kept taking care of each other based on personal ties. Then the lesbian population changed, we had real lesbian organizations, more institutions, and that's good, but it's all internal. Now we've moved to a more general commitment [in the women's peace movement] and that shows the progress of lesbian ideas.

We aren't lesbian, we're lesbian feminists, and that openness to feminism will bring other women to at least bisexuality if not to lesbianism. We're raising consciousness by being there, legitimizing lesbianism as normal. More lesbians are becoming active, relating even in general [peace movement] activities always to the lesbian presence.

It's hard to understand the attitude that the oppression of Palestinians is what we're exclusively working on today, more so than on our oppression. We give up and stay in the closet more than we should. Do we need to feel guilty over everyone's oppression? We can't disappear ourselves in this situation. We need to make our priorities [in the women's peace movement] close to our personal priorities. We do need peace, but not at any price.

This is our first chance for a women's coalition. Even with homophobia around, we have the opportunity to see who thinks like us.

It's useful to come out as a group, but Israeli society has made homosexuality a nonissue. There's avoidance of homosexuality so with that context lesbians must be prepared for a real struggle. Coming out in the women's peace movement would raise straight women's consciousness, be an indication of trust. Now is the time to discuss women's and gay oppression together with Palestinian oppression.

The idea is it should be easier to come out to a group of "progressive" thinking women. But it's not always time to fight. We need to improve our visibility like we've improved our situation in the feminist movement.

It's not time to come out. We need to wait for a more radical wave [in Israeli society].

If we all came out, there'd be a lot of power—and it would give us the strength to struggle.

Every woman needs to decide what to do first. The Intifada does not [necessarily] make Palestinian oppression more important than lesbian oppression. We are just dealing with Palestinian oppression because the public is more ready to hear about it.

The overwhelming participation of lesbians in the women's peace movement helped solidify lesbian identity. Lesbians became more visible and that helped legitimize lesbianism within the movement. Developing a strong lesbian identity also encouraged many women to come out. Yet, lesbians who were drawn to the women's peace movement because of feminism soon found out that their activism didn't lead lesbians or straight women to develop any kind of lesbian agenda.

Q: Do we contribute anything particularly lesbian to the women's peace movement?

Our contribution to the peace movement is intensity in time and energy, because we don't have to concentrate on men. Once lesbians

get involved they go gung-ho. That why lesbians are prime activists of the peace movement. We're critical within the movement, bulwarks of our organizations. Others who do it like us are old-time lefties.

We feel oppression more; we ourselves are a minority group so we have understanding, a need to struggle. We are fighters—once we come out to ourselves we are stronger.

Lesbians who are feminists are involved in the peace movement. The principles of feminism—consensus, fighting hierarchy, developing alternatives—lead one to fight hierarchy.

This is the first time that feminists are involved in non-[specifically] women's issues, the first time we put so much energy into something not ours. It's positive; we remind ourselves that all oppression is the same and give ourselves a framework to express ourselves. An all-women's group gives the usual stuff to the women involved, all those skills we need in all our work.

In groups, lesbians use their leadership qualities. We're committed to change, so we introduce feminist process. We still have power struggles. We contribute by being freer to be with all-women's groups, so we open things up, we "design" and exemplify behaviors.

Initiative does not necessarily come from lesbians, but our presence is vital. Democracy in the running of peace movement organizations is a lesbian contribution—also our numbers are! The best, most effective, long-lasting activities come from the women's organizations. Lesbians sit in those organizations in vital places, where work needs to be done. Lesbians are devoted to struggle.

We bring a confidence of being women, being who we are, we bring independence. Some heterosexual women [also] so have it. We're confident in decision making; we're comfortable in the women's peace movement.

The lesbian contribution to the women's peace movement most often mentioned was to group process, and a strong commitment to what they characterized as feminist process. Lesbians had learned through their history of activism the value of applying feminist principles to effective organization. The interviewees defined feminist process as democracy in organization, an equalizing process. They believe the means of change cannot be separated from the ends, and include a de-emphasis of reliance on a small leadership, decision making through consensus, recognition of each woman's worth, and

encouragement of each woman's vocal participation in discussion. They feel this insistence on "correct" process can best be fostered by woman-only groups, and the skills they report learning there form the most valuable part of their activist education. Women claim empowerment through developing these skills, learning to express them politically and gaining control of the mechanics of dissent in a woman's way.

Q: How do the lesbians in your group relate to the lesbian community at large? Is being involved in the peace movement good for the lesbian community?

Activists in the peace movement are also activists in CLaF. It's very frustrating now to be active in CLaF, it's closed and quiet. In the peace movement there's more public support, it's more out, more strength, more happening.

First we achieve peace, and then we can get back to fixing society. It's more radical to be out in the streets for peace, and not yet time to do that with CLaF.

It's a long educational process towards accepting feminist goals [in both communities]. Women don't see an overt connection of lesbian and feminist. At the end of the occupation it'll be time to fight for the rights of women. Committed feminists will come out. There's no place now for a lesbian agenda.

The occupation woke women up to the need for their own protest movement. Our involvement in independent women's [peace] organizations advances the idea of lesbian choice. The act of standing alone is what we need to be doing as lesbians.

We are lacking a second generation. Where are the lesbians of the eighties? With the conservative backlash there's been a full stop on community development.

Right now, we're learning a lot, discovering strength, and it's hard to give it up. We know the importance of lesbian struggle and won't give up on it forever. When we're closer to peace we'll do it. We'll have no choice, but now we're not strong enough to go out to the streets. It will be positive to take care of us, not only in CLaF but also in general. It's not bad for us to be quiet now, but we're evolving.

It's problematic to have to choose between putting energy into women's issues and into peace issues. We need an integrated approach, outreach to Palestinian women, learning Arabic. When peace comes there'll be plenty for both communities to do.

Though it seems easier to think of coming out to women already identified with a progressive cause, most activists expected an intense homophobic response. (We of course didn't know in 1990 that the progressive community would come to accept lesbians fairly painlessly as long as we were reformist and worked within the party structure, and that we would confront the super-homophobes, the religious, in alliance with gay men, Reform Jews, and many straight secularists.) Though most Israelis could deal with knowing one lesbian personally and see that she was okay even though a lesbian, it's another thing to be confronted with a whole group of them claiming legitimacy as a social and ideological force in the women's peace movement. Though the lesbian activists were apprehensive of the intensity of the probable response they thought that coming out as a group would be necessary as a first step to acceptance, that it would be taken as an expression both of readiness to struggle and of trust. They would need to be prepared to deal with the consternation coming out would inspire, but it would be empowering within the women's peace movement, and above all would advance the lesbian community within society as a whole. (Today it is clear that we did not need to come out in the women's peace movement or as an entire group in order to come out and be empowered by it, though we have not yet used coming out as a challenge to existing perceptions.)

The enforced idleness of the Gulf War broke the momentum of women's peace activity, and perhaps the long monotony of the occupation and the protest against it militated against a mass return to activism at the war's end. Some lesbian women's peace movement activists anticipated a period of macho backlash, but not until the resolution of the Israel-Palestinian conflict, as army-sanctioned violence sought a new path. The frightening wave of wife murders, which began during and after the Gulf War, has been one such manifestation, and was and is vigorously protested by lesbians and by straight feminists, both of whom see the practical and ideological connection.

In the four years between the Gulf War and the Oslo agreements, only a handful of women lesbian or straight persisted in protest and the women's peace movement was basically dead. During this time of inactivity, as well as during the long and halting process of implementing the Oslo accords, Israelis turned their attention from peace to issues lesbian activists had predicted would arise only after an authentic end to the war with the Palestinians. The legacy of the pre-Gulf War period of the women's peace movement, however, as it began to be realized within the lesbian community, accorded with the visions of the lesbian activists. The lesbian community entered a period of unprecedented development, though very little emphasis was placed on feminism or feminist education. Israeli women, lesbian and straight, had apparently unconsciously learned a lot about organizing from the women's peace movement, and women's-only groups organized around an enormous variety of issues, among them organizing disenfranchised poor women, obtaining legal aid for deserted wives, supporting the women's shelters umbrella organization,

and establishing political party lobbies. The one change completely not envisioned by lesbian peace movement activists was that *feminism* would become a pejorative word associated with the dowdy and the anachronistic.

Lesbian peace activists apparently had not imagined a government such as the Rabin-Peres government, which pushed Israel to emulate the United States in new ways. It should have been predictable that Israelis would adopt a more pro-woman stance without opening ourselves to the revolutionary language and ideology of feminism. Indeed, feminism speaks of a world based on different values than those of the free-market consumer society that Israel wishes to become. Officially, Israel has also westernized to the extent of decriminalizing lesbianism, and as opposed to the lesbian peace activist perception of the need for a mass coming out, it has become easier and less threatening to live openly as a lesbian.

The culmination of the West-looking Rabin-Peres period was the signing of the Oslo accords. At least half of Israel went delirious with hope and joy that the long war with our Palestinian neighbors was at an end, but the negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, which pre-Gulf War lesbian peace activists envisioned as an end to our protest against Israeli military involvement in the occupied territories, did not resemble the Oslo agreements. We anticipated the creation of a Palestinian state as the substance of a treaty. We dreamed of links and networks, of Palestinian feminists and even of Palestinian and Israeli lesbians struggling together with the patriarchy of the Middle East. We lesbian peace activists who pointed out that the accords did little but buy off Palestinian hopes for a state and did not end Israel's humanism-threatening role as occupiers, were encouraged not to be pessimistic and picayune. Most lesbian activists, though not peace activists, were looking at the bright side of the social reforms for lesbians possible under a Labor-Meretz government.

Complacency turned to shock the night Rabin was assassinated, and Israel hadn't recovered by the time Bibi⁸ was elected by a narrow margin. All of a sudden lesbians realized that under the liberal Rabin government we had begun to believe that there was a place for us in Israel, and that we could now anticipate a concerted attack on our newly achieved almost-human status. We had grown comfortable and proud of being considered just like everyone else, or at least like any other minority that didn't seek to reformulate the basic postulates of the state. The unity once perceived as the state of Israel, as the Jewish people's national project, a project with which Israeli lesbians on the whole identified, has splintered and we have become a state of "populations," sometimes warring factions of secular and religious, white and dark, gay-friendly and gay-inimical, social democrats and fundamentalists.

Under Bibi's reign, lesbians were active in protesting attacks on our "new" rights, new visibility and acceptance, and new legitimacy to exist. Lesbian activists chose alliance with the ever-multiplying gay groups rather than with peace groups or other women's groups, focusing on same-sex orientation rather than on ideological alliance. With the decline and decease of the kind of dialogue we had encouraged in the women's peace movement, we

had forgotten that we had fostered an idea of Israeli society different from that which can be generated by political parties.

Also under Bibi the proponents of an active war in Lebanon were back in power, and the continued rise of fundamentalists outside of Israel guaranteed that they'd have someone to fight. The army, however, was not the same army that went to war in '67, and the aura surrounding the army disintegrated under attack by populist media. We have heard not only of every combat death but also of every accident and every mistake in judgment that results in the death of another of our precious sons.

Mothers who absorbed the activism of the pre-Gulf War women's peace movement are unwilling to shut up and mourn, and have become more vocal and more aggressive in expressing their very low opinion of the government's handling of our occupation of southern Lebanon. The Four Mothers group, the Women for an Immediate Withdrawal from Lebanon (and what a struggle it was to name this group "women" rather than "mothers"), and the groups, which have survived from 1991 till now, are today's women's peace movement. Very few lesbians are active in these groups, which deliberately emphasize their position as mothers of soldiers, rather than as women who independently concluded that peace is better for us than war and other forms of state-initiated violence. Lesbians have little with which to identify in today's maternalist peace movement; feminist ideology, which inspired us in the past, is absent; we have in any event largely abandoned feminism for reform.

After Rabin's assassination and Bibi's election peace became a party issue—Labor for Oslo, Bibi for vastly watered-down and delayed Oslo, and the farther Right parties for no agreement at all with the Palestinians. Women in Black and Bat Shalom⁹ continue as all-women's groups to protest Israel's role in Mideast violence.

In both groups lesbian activists are entrenched and accepted as lesbians, though in neither group is a specifically lesbian ideology of peace or demilitarization vocalized. Lesbians in other pro-peace leftist organizations such as Gush Shalom¹⁰ are also more visible. Organizational networking on the two issues of gay rights and promoting a negotiated peace is common and accepted.

Today, in March 1999, in Israel the atmosphere of openness that has made it possible for lesbians to struggle for civil rights and the fulfillment of personal needs contributes to a decline in the need to use the women's peace movement for developing political awareness. I hope that as lesbians redevelop lesbian feminist consciousness, we will again understand that the struggle for peace and the struggle to live free as ourselves are inseparable, and we will rejoin and reenvision the peace movement as intrinsic to our personal and political needs.

EPILOGUE/PROLOGUE

July 2002. This chapter of the lesbian peace movement is at an end. The current war (known by some as the second Intifada, but truly much more a

protracted war than an “uprising”), long, brutal, and completely different from any previous sociomilitary disaster, has indelibly changed the character of peace organization and protest in Israeli society. We have begun an era of more strident, bold, and daring opposition to all military actions. New women’s peace organizations are proliferating and lesbians are visible and brave leaders of creative, innovative, and hyperactive action groups of types we have never yet seen in Israel. We are finally learning alliance politics, and find ourselves at the forefront of a vibrant and groundbreaking movement. Yet this activist renaissance is no cause for rejoicing; it is the result and product of women horrified by what our country is doing. I fear this is the prologue to a lengthy struggle whose peaceful outcome is not at all assured. It is certainly the prologue to a new period of lesbian activist endeavor.

The new women’s peace movement of course includes organizations and groups, which have remained active since the Intifada, such as Women in Black. Many lesbians who were regulars at Women in Black vigils throughout the “Oslo years,” when other women found peace work not relevant, continue to believe and practice this dramatic witnessing to the occupation that has now birthed the explosiveness of the current war. They are vilified more and more as Israelis die in bombings and respond with military vindictiveness, but they are less and less frequently called “disgusting lesbians” and “whores.” We are called traitors and terrorists for daring to suggest that the occupation is the root of the war, and often hear “may you die in the next bombing.” This is the first indication from “the street” that the gender-linked aspects of women’s protest are of minimal interest to both sides at this desperate point in the conflict.

The Women’s Coalition for Peace, the umbrella organization of the women’s peace movement, was initiated and formed by lesbian activists, especially, it seems, from Bat Shalom, a women’s peace organization that has spent years developing dialogue, cooperation, and study among Israeli and Palestinian women in Jerusalem. Lesbian activists see to it that all the relevant women’s groups are contacted for, and sponsor, demonstrations and media appeals. The coalition reaches out to the whole spectrum of women’s groups, straight and lesbian, maternalist and socioeconomic, Ashkenazi and Mizrahi, revolutionary and reformist, integrated and nationalistic. Just a casual glance at the list of organizations coming to any one demonstration shows not only how the women’s peace movement has developed, but also indicates the variety of groups in which lesbian activists are found. Lesbian presence, lesbian leadership, and lesbian visibility are accepted without question and validate the centrality of lesbians in the women’s peace movement. Lesbians, along with straight women activists, are emphasizing and choosing to lead women’s-only demonstrations and actions, believing that feminist vision and a feminist voice can make a difference in how and if conflicts will be resolved. Again, it seems that gender identity is less of a factor in a lesbian activist’s choice of affiliation than political, social, and economic identity.

The principles of nonviolent protest used in actions that call for a cessation of violence by both sides of the conflict seem to be the central and unifying concerns of the women's peace groups in which lesbians are active. While this is certainly a traditionally feminist stance, I don't believe it could be classed as specifically lesbian.

One of the biggest changes in lesbian peace activism during this war is that lesbians are out and visible wherever we are. At least on the far Left where most peace groups are found, straight people don't seem to care much if their organization is full of, or led by, or represented by lesbians. Part of this change is attributable to a general change in attitude toward queers in Israeli secular society, but part is also an indication of the degree to which people's minds are fixed on the urgency of the war.

Especially in the north of Israel, many long-time lesbian peace activists are involved with Ta'ayush, an Israeli-Arab peace organization many of whose actions are directed toward supporting and bringing aid (food, medicines, clothing, and water) to West Bank cities under closure and curfew. I have heard no reports of starving Palestinians refusing aid brought to them by dykes, so perhaps it's an issue that simply isn't discussed when life is in danger. In demonstrations within Israel, no organization, including those that in the past have been inimical to queers, has voiced any opposition to joining with us in protest.

One new organization vociferously pushes the connection between gender identity and peace into people's faces. Dirty Laundry, Israel's first queer direct action group, is committed to washing society's dirty laundry in public, and demonstrate with signs that draw a clear and blatant connection between oppressions. They are "fags and dykes against the occupation" who call for "transgender, not transfer." Kvisa Sc'hora renews and stimulates the whole peace movement, not as lesbian members of a wider organization, but for the first time as a queer peace organization. The leadership and most of the activists are lesbian, and they wear pink triangles and headbands, thereby awakening the Jewish public's fears of both the Holocaust and sexual outlaws in one dramatic move. Dirty Laundry makes its point with theatre, appearing at one demonstration with eyes closed (by pink scarves) to both oppression of queers and to what Israel's doing over the green line, "chained prisoners to their ignorance." Dirty Laundry links lesbian identity to oppression in all directions, reaching out to immigrants, sex workers, and Palestinians alike. They emphasize a multilayered approach to peace—tying in economics and violence and sexism, and integrating not theories but activisms. Kishurim, another lesbian-led group, is working toward the development of a theoretical and social understanding and alliance among the variously identified populations of oppressed women.

Most lesbians today are not peace activists. Most are either home raising babies while at the same time agitating for lesbian civil rights, or are young women secure in their lesbianism as a lifestyle, filling women's dance parties

with hundreds of women in dozens of new venues. Some long-term activists have burned out after decades of lesbian and peace activism. Some have “traded up,” going for a pseudo-straight lifestyle in the belief that the important goals are health benefits and pension rights. Within the women’s peace movement it is still true that a high proportion of activists are lesbians, but rarely are feminist or lesbian reasons for activism heard. I believe that older and long-term activists have long ago internalized the feminist foundations of their political philosophy, and now express themselves not only as lesbians but also as individuals with a full range of inclinations and interests in choosing actions and organizations for peace activism.

It’s harder and scarier than ever to be a peace activist of any sort in the middle of this war. We are no longer just standing at intersections decrying the occupation. We are traveling all over, wherever the army is slaughtering people and denying their humanity, and we are getting arrested and tear-gassed and hurt. Women have come to the forefront of some of the most dramatic confrontations of the war, partly using our sex and our nationality to ward off worse violence as we shield Palestinian men, in the best spirit of activism—protesting against what we would never want done to us. We are also sending food and medicines and clothing to the needy—a typical women’s thing—and at the same time going everywhere that a voice of humanity needs to be heard. Women are being courageous and bold, sensitive to suffering and unwilling to see people suffer in the name of a state policy we don’t support. Most of the lesbian activists I see are feminist women who seem to be motivated by the same principles that motivate straight women, though our lifestyle tends to leave us freer to act. We, perhaps, of all the Israeli activists, most easily identify with the Palestinians in terms of oppression and negative mythologizing.

In an atmosphere of polarized sociopolitical views, mortal danger, and previously inconceivable human rights abuses, the women’s peace movement today is comprised of a wider variety than ever of styles and types of groups and organizations. Within the Women’s Coalition for Peace there is no one place where lesbians are found; as always, we are everywhere. Older lesbian activists are doing new things, have continued to develop themselves within their activism, are out as a matter of course and seem willing to do dangerous actions and take controversial stances. Perhaps we are in a position to risk more because of our societal outlaw status, or perhaps we are just completely fed up with our country and will do anything to stop the war.

NOTES

1. Peace Now, a mixed-sex nonpartisan peace movement including disillusioned reserve-duty soldiers as well as other previously apolitical populations.

2. In 1982 Israel invaded Lebanon. Israel tried to retreat in 1985, but the war dragged on as a Vietnam-like quagmire until Ehud Barak ordered a unilateral withdrawal in 2000.

3. Women in Black, loosely organized groups of women who stand dressed in black in silent vigils at set locations for one hour a week on Fridays, holding black hands, which say, "Down with the Occupation."
4. Vigils are generally known by the name of the junction or city where we gather.
5. Community of Lesbian Feminists, the first Israeli lesbian organization, which grew from an informal social network of lesbians into a grassroots organization in major Israeli cities.
6. These years saw the birth of, for example, an organization of religious lesbians and the opening of joint lesbian-gay centers, while CLaF came to represent both old-time feminism and more establishment-type initiatives.
7. Women Against the Occupation
8. Benjamin Netanyahu, a former furniture salesman who is currently serving as finance minister under Ariel Sharon.
9. A nonprofit organization of women who sponsor peace actions and Israeli-Palestinian dialogue.
10. The Israeli Peace Bloc, a leftist mixed-sex activist and witnessing peace group.

This page intentionally left blank.

TWELVE

Alliance and Denial: Lesbian Protest in Women in Black

Hannah Safran

The following analysis is offered as one small cut against that stone of silence and secrecy. It is not intended to be original or all-inclusive. I dedicate this work to all the women hidden from history whose suffering and triumph have made it possible for me to call my name out loud.

—Cheryl Clarke, *Lesbianism: An Act of Resistance*

Writing about lesbians in Women in Black is an attempt to achieve a different reading of this women's peace group. The women's peace movement in Israel has attracted some interest with its durability and visibility; Women in Black inspired more publicity than any other Israeli women's peace group and became the object of interest for researchers in all levels of the academy. Their demonstrations also drew attention in other places around the world, and Women in Black vigils took place in Australia, Canada, Italy, the United States, and Belgrade. Most research has examined Women in Black in the context of war and conflict politics. None has focused on the meaning of the presence of lesbians at the vigils. Since most research has focused mainly on Women in Black in Jerusalem there has been no representation of the diversity among the women who took part in the vigils nationally. Even the fact that at some vigils in Haifa and the north there were Palestinian-Israeli women did not attract the attention of the academic community (Helman and Rapoport 1997; Shadmi 2000; Sasson-Levy and Rapoport 2003).

However, differences existed among us, for although we were all equal as participants we were not identical. Thinking about myself and the possible meaning of lesbian existence in the vigils has been a personal journey into my own alliances and denials. During the six years that I participated in the vigils

of Women in Black I gradually realized the extent of the invisibility of lesbians in the group. During this period we were all interviewed many times as Women in Black and asked to answer research questionnaires, but none of them related to lesbian existence in any shape or form.

I am uneasy about identity categories and am not sure why anyone should assign identity to, or choose to be identified with any one group at all. I follow Judith Butler, who is “permanently troubled by identity categories, consider them to be invariable stumbling blocks, and understand them, even promote them, as sites of necessary trouble” (1991, 14). However, the sites of necessary trouble have to be examined, and identity has to be chosen and not assigned. Thus, in a society such as Israel’s where identity politics is the politics that is killing us, lesbian feminists have to promote our identity not as a stumbling block but in such a way that will lead us through a liberatory process.

Since there is no one “Woman in Black,” but many different women in black, my story here consists of my own reading of the signs and symbols of this protest movement. As pointed out by Sandra Harding, feminist positions, if there can be any, “can only be whatever emerges from the political struggles of ‘oppositional consciousness’—oppositional precisely to the longing for ‘one true story’ ” (1986, 193). Therefore, my story, together with those of others, may help to formulate an oppositional consciousness, thus creating new feminist positions that will not only reform the existing society but expose and promote the possibilities for independent and liberated existence for women.

What is at issue in current representations of Women in Black is not just the question of who is excluded and who is included in the story. It is an examination of the way in which alliances and coalitions are forged while at the same time falling subject to a process of selective erasure, denial, and ignorance. At this moment in time, when we, feminist peace activists, are puzzled about our role in the peace process, perhaps we should pause and ask, “How is our story being written or erased?” Thus, the purpose of this work is to encourage a feminist conversation regarding the possibility of working out alliances without denying differences and examining the potential that a discourse that includes lesbian existence might have.

From the position of a participant in Women in Black, I will trace the history of Women in Black, describe their practice, their [non]structure, and relate them to feminist-lesbian “revolutionary moments.” The ideas, beliefs, and actions of Women in Black are usually explained within the framework of Israeli peace politics. My attempt here will be to place Women in Black in the realm of gender politics by focusing on lesbian existence in the vigils and on the negation of the hegemonic discourse of Israeli society, which is masculine, military, and nationalist.

In February 1988 a small group of Israeli women in Jerusalem organized a vigil demonstrating against the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. The group got together three months after the beginning of the first Intifada, the Palestinian popular uprising against Israel, to protest the occupation of the

West Bank and Gaza Strip.¹ The women stood silent for one hour every Friday in a major square, dressed all in black, carrying banners in Hebrew, English, and Arabic saying "End the Occupation." As women, Arab and Jewish, joined them around the country they soon became known as Women in Black. Little did they know that they would go on demonstrating for six years or more and that their model would be adopted throughout Israel and in other places around the world (Women in Black 1992, 1993; Sharoni 1993; Gabriel 1992).

Women in Black have been a unique phenomenon in the history and politics of Israeli society. Demonstrating against the politics of the government on issues of war and peace has been a relatively new experience for Israelis in general and for women in particular. Reluctance to oppose government policies can be traced to the widespread perception that Israel has been under a stage of siege since its creation in 1948. This mentality has produced a consensual society in which any opposition has been hard to maintain. In addition, the strong influence of Orthodox Jewish sectors and the nature of the state as a Jewish state have made public opposition by women be regarded as unusual (Swirski and Safir 1991). The religious establishment of Israel has always opposed political equality for women.

Through Women in Black and other women's peace groups women have been organizing in ways that challenge both prevailing conceptions of statehood and the traditional, male preserves that have excluded women from the political process. Empowering themselves within women's peace groups, Women in Black used demonstrations as a place to voice their protest not only against the Israeli occupation but also against their own oppression as women. Lesbian women, with neither visibility nor an organized political framework, have felt the demonstrations of Women in Black to be a safe place for themselves.

Creating women-only vigils made possible statements against Israeli militarism and the use of military oppression, and drew attention to the lack of public voice for women. The groups questioned the social order beyond their own slogans and provided a context where women were able to come out against patriarchy and declare their independence. The visibility of women demonstrating weekly was a rejection of the social codes governing women's existence. As French philosopher Julia Kristeva suggests, "It is only in assuming a *negative* function: reject everything finite, definite, structured, loaded with meaning, in the existing state of society. Such an attitude places women on the side of the explosion of social codes: with revolutionary moments" (1981, 166). By performing such a "negative function" Women in Black challenged the traditional place of women in Israeli society, and might have changed the national discourse on both gender and peace.

Participation in the vigils of Women in Black was open to any woman, no matter what her political, social, or personal background, who decided to join in and agreed to the sentiments expressed on the group's banners. Political differences, differences of class, culture, or lifestyle were seldom raised or discussed in the groups. The only obvious difference that could not be ignored

was the Jewish-Palestinian divide that was at the core of the protest itself. This ideological inclusion created an alliance between Zionists, anti-Zionists, old, young, Jews, Palestinians, poor, wealthy, lesbians, and straight women. At the same time, it erased the existence of differences, by the tacit understanding that expressing or emphasizing differences would harm group unity. Thus, the considerable participation of lesbian women in the vigils received no special attention. This ideology of inclusion, in which differences exist but are at the same time ignored, turned out to be both a strength and a weakness of *Women in Black*. To ignore the existence of lesbians in the activities of the peace movement was to erase an important part of the identity of *Women in Black*. The contradiction between the participation of lesbians and their apparent invisibility in the vigil of *Women in Black* demonstrates both the alliances and the denial created within the group.

FROM PRIVATE LIFE TO PUBLIC PROTEST: WOMEN ORGANIZE AS PEACE ACTIVISTS

Israeli society, in a state of constant war since its very inception in 1948, has been a conservative, familial society, one in which most women are expected to play the role of devoted housewives whose major tasks are to rear children and cultivate a private oasis for soldiers returning from the battlefield. This has been a male-oriented society in which only military service and rank give a person high status and the right to talk about policy and defense matters. In such a context, it is no simple matter for women to organize politically against war or about other security issues that are perceived as exclusively male domains (Gillath 1991; Safir and Swirski 1991).

It is surprising therefore that women have been active in such great numbers in the Israeli peace movement. This movement, *Peace Now*, was created in 1977 in support of the Egyptian peace initiative. Its beginning is rooted in a letter sent by a group of military officers to then Prime Minister Menachem Begin, urging him to sign the peace treaty with Egypt and opposing the continuing occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. *Peace Now* has always been a male-centered movement, whose overt sexism started with the refusal of the officers to let a woman officer be one of the signatories on the letter to the prime minister, and continued on different levels, including having only male speakers at their demonstrations. However, many women were doing the hard work of grassroots organizing and demonstrating. Centered on *Peace Now*, the largest and most mainstream organization, other groups also maintained a male leadership, keeping women as the invisible "masses." Up to 1988 most women interested in peace politics were found in the lower ranks of campaign organizations—the envelope stuffers and stamp lickens.

Women first created a women's party in 1977, following six years of feminist activity, and the first women's peace groups emerged at the time of the war in Lebanon, between 1982 and 1985.² This war marked a turning

point for Israeli society and in particular for the emerging peace movement. The war in Lebanon provoked, for the first time in Israel, a political opposition against war. It appeared to be the first war that Israel had planned, in contrast to other wars that Israel had to fight in its own defense. This "unnecessary war" transformed the peace movement and Peace Now into a popular movement with widespread support that it had never enjoyed before (Hall-Cathala 1990). This disruption of the national consensus opened the way, five years later, for an Israeli feminist stand against the occupation (Montell 1991).

Two women's protest groups emerged during that period: Women Against the Invasion of Lebanon and Parents Against Silence. Both groups opposed the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and demanded an immediate withdrawal of Israeli forces. But beyond this common element they differed, not only in their origins and in the positions they articulated against the war, but also in the different strategies they used to achieve their goals. The members of Parents Against Silence, which the media and Israeli public referred to as Mothers Against Silence, publicly disassociated themselves from feminism and were not a peace movement or a universal antiwar movement. They utilized the experience of mothering as a political argument to oppose the war policy of the government (Gillath 1991). The group claimed that they protested out of concern for the safety of their sons in the army; they were mothers, not feminists (Montell 1991). Women Against the Invasion of Lebanon grounded their struggle in their own experience of oppression and expanded this to include other subjugated groups such as the Palestinians. The group, which consisted of women who had been active in the Israeli feminist movement, articulated their opposition to the war in the form of a feminist antimilitarist position, stressing the connections between different forms of oppression and domination (Sharoni 1993). While the women in Parents Against Silence were treated as presenting a legitimate argument as mothers, the more radical Women Against the Invasion of Lebanon, who claimed an analogy between the oppression of women and the oppression of the Palestinians, were much less well known and not considered representative of a legitimate standpoint. Parents Against Silence dispersed soon after the Israeli army pulled out of most of Lebanon in 1985. The women who were active in the group did not join feminist groups or other political organizations. Women Against the Invasion of Lebanon, which after the war in Lebanon changed its name to Women Against the Occupation, expanded its focus to include solidarity campaigns with Palestinian women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

While women were taking part in the growing peace movement they remained behind the scenes until the formation of women's peace groups, with the outbreak of the first Intifada.³ The Palestinian uprising that started late in 1987 marked the beginnings of a new era of the peace movement in Israel, especially for women. It was the Intifada, together with the disillusion of many women with the male-dominated peace movement, that gave impetus to the creation of so many different women's organizations (Sharoni 1993;

Young 1992). Naomi Chazan, a political scientist and peace activist, noted that “[t]he most impressive element of peace work since the beginning of the Intifada is the creation of this women’s political power, and it is constantly expanding” (Rosenwasser, 71).

The Intifada created a new politics of the oppressed. Its message was that when people do not have political power, they may struggle to achieve it using whatever means are available. As the Palestinians were using stones to gain a voice, women were using their own presence in the streets to express their opposition to oppression. Although the women’s peace groups appeared at the outset to be merely in opposition to the oppression of the Palestinians by Israel, they nevertheless had a more far-reaching impact as a voice for women in society. Nabila Espanioli, an Israeli-Palestinian peace activist, put this succinctly, saying:

Especially after the intifada, women in Israel began to be more active than ever. . . . Women went to the streets, to Women in Black, to the Peace Quilt, to the demonstrations, and began to realize the effect of the occupation on their own society. . . . When machismo became the norm in Israel, women could feel the dangerous effect. . . . Women had to make a move in such conditions, and they did. (Rosenwasser, 66)

New projects and protests were organized, and existing organizations changed their emphasis to join women’s peace groups (Pope 1993). The first initiatives were the Peace Quilt and a street show of slides from the occupied territories. The Peace Quilt began with thousands of women in Israel sewing a quilt composed of pieces of material decorated with drawings, writing, and embroidery that expressed the desire for an end to the occupation and for peace. In June 1988 about four hundred Israeli Jewish and Palestinian women marched and demonstrated against the occupation and for peace, carrying the Peace Quilt around the Israeli parliament. The other initiative, organized by members of the feminist magazine *Noga* in Tel Aviv, exposed Israeli atrocities in the occupied territories by screening slides that had been taken by journalists in the occupied territories and never shown to the public (Young 1992). Another group that started at the same time, in January 1988, was *Shani*, a group based in Jerusalem that provided Israeli Jewish women with an opportunity for political education through house meetings, study groups, and lectures by Palestinian women and experts in social and political spheres. It also provided Jewish women with the chance to meet Palestinian women and discuss with them controversial topics while searching for a joint political solution.

Women in Black was the most effective group in the women’s peace movement, while maintaining a public presence for the longest time.⁴ Their vigils created a decentralized network of primarily local, autonomous groups lacking formal organization and using local resources in recruiting, negotiating

with the police, changing slogans, and organizing beyond the weekly demonstrations. The vigils' main message was criticism of the Israeli occupation. The women who started the vigils had already been active in peace groups, together with men, and had some grassroots political experience. Their first vigil, in February 1988, took place on a Friday afternoon between one and two o'clock in a main square in the center of Jerusalem. In a very short time many women joined them, and the vigils spread to other towns and major intersections around Israel. Until the crisis in the Gulf, in 1991, the number of demonstrations grew rapidly and at their peak Women in Black were conducting demonstrations in about thirty places in Israel, as well as in several other countries (Women in Black 1992, 1993).

Women in Black did not advocate any political solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They did not share any common analysis of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and never agreed on a political or social agenda. What Women in Black agreed upon was a rejection of Israel's continuing occupation of Palestinian territories. This occupation has meant ruling over the Palestinians and denying them democratic rights and national liberation. Israeli policy had, for a long time, enjoyed the support of the majority of Israelis. Thus, taking an oppositional stand in public was a brave step for many women. It was a statement both of an independent women's voice in politics and of identification with the oppressed. Women in Black made women visible and at the same time exposed them to vicious attacks from the public. Although they suffered from these attacks, their visibility empowered them and made an impact on Israeli society.

The assumption that women should not have a voice in public affairs, especially not in war politics, has been prevalent in Israeli society for many years (Chazan 1991). With the emergence of a women's peace movement, Israeli women could challenge their traditional roles as mothers and keepers of the home front and take positions on crucial political matters such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Moreover, they were protesting against their own existence as dependent and marginal members of society and against the restrictions that are imposed on women in all patriarchal societies.

STRUCTURE, TEXT, AND SUBTEXT IN THE VIGILS OF WOMEN IN BLACK

Women in Black evolved a new organizing style that created many groups in different places and enabled each group to make its own decisions and keep complete independence. It had, however, a unified national presence since everyone participating adhered to the same basic tactics such as demonstrating for one hour, wearing black, and keeping silent. Only one slogan, "End the Occupation," was used by all vigils. The major vigil in Jerusalem retained this slogan only, while other vigils in different places added slogans such as "Two States for Two People" or "No to Violence."

Women in Black was a grassroots political group. It was community-based and depended on the good will of the participants. They chose to maintain their freedom and independence even at the risk of having no financial resources. The collectivist nature of Women in Black went far beyond the models of the grassroots organizations of the Women's Liberation Movement in the late '60s and early '70s in the United States (Ferree and Hess 1985). Women in Black had almost no structure and no organization. The chief similarity to the early feminist groups was in the way women shared the work that it took to organize a weekly vigil. The occasional meetings were held in a collective style, with consensus as the basis for decision making.

Women in Black was a direct-action group and existed to advance a particular cause only, and not for itself or its participants. Women in the group were not members of an organization but rather participants sharing the same cause. As long as they came to the vigils, they were part of it; the vigils could dissolve only if no women appeared. The group's structure and organization related only to its basic maintenance. Every week a different participant would assume the responsibility to bring the banners to the vigil, to contact the police, and to take care of whatever necessities came up.

The groups, originally with no name and no organizational structure, attracted public attention because they were composed only of women wearing the color black and holding weekly vigils consistently over a long period of time. From their very first vigil, they confronted major taboos relating mainly to gender but also to nationalism in Israeli politics and culture. For women to demand a public voice and at the same time to oppose the occupation was a form of subversion directed against the expectations of Israeli society regarding women, their role and place, which prevent women from being independent and from taking part in public and political life. Thus, Women in Black behaved contrary to the norms and customs of their own society.

The vigil's official banner, which represented the group's formal message, related to the Israeli occupation. Most other banners also dealt with the national conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. Thus, on the surface, the vigil's text was directed at war politics. At the same time, in a few vigils the connection between gender and the struggle against the occupation was made more obvious by banners such as "Listen to Women, Speak Peace" or "Women Demand an End to the Occupation." Moreover, the presence of a large number of women making a political statement added another level of meaning for the vigil, creating its subtext of gender politics. Women not only dared to come out against official war politics but they also challenged their traditional gender role.

Public response addressed mainly the violation of taboos. The Israeli public reacted to the vigils with a mixture of verbal sexual abuse and anger against both the women and their politics. Apparently, their dramatic appearance and blatant visibility, together with underlying gender politics that resulted from the fact that women were making a political statement, caused the public to react forcefully. The abuse directed by passersby against Women in Black revealed the sexual

impact that the vigils had on male observers. As in other places in the world, male recourse to gender stereotypes was typified in statements such as "All she needs is a good fuck" (Ferree and Hess, 105), and raised many women's awareness that their claim for a political participation was being interpreted in sexual terms. Although never explicit on the banners, affirmations of our independence and sexuality were being communicated to the public.

However, the structure of Women in Black and its ideology of inclusion prevented the vigils from using that subtext for our own self-analysis. But the experience of having to face sexual harassment affected all women, and issues that were left unresolved in the vigils were discussed in other forums. The need to elaborate a feminist theory based on the weekly experience was strong, as pointed out by Hagar Rovlev, a founding member of Women in Black in Jerusalem,

It is very important to find local interpretations of feminism in Israel. . . . For example, those who see feminism as a political intervention grounded in the daily lives and struggles of women, may argue that even for women who do not identify as feminists the very choice of going to a women's demonstration conveys a Feminist message, whether women are willing to admit that or not. (Sharoni 1993, 226)

Thus, the move to empower women to become active in creating a place for themselves in society was accomplished, although some women participating in the vigils might have overlooked the meaning and the power created by the experience.

The nonstructured, nonhierarchical dis/order that Women in Black created, the text that appeared on their banners, and the subtext related to gender reflected an oppositional grassroots force that empowered women to make their own politics. Women in Black evolved a new kind of protest style that was action-oriented, suggesting new directions for feminist politics in Israel. The style and message of Women in Black was not a safe, comfortable critique of society; it was actually dangerous and daring and no one could remain indifferent to it. It was also the style most suitable to get lesbians out of their private sphere into the public without forcing them out of the closet.

ALLIANCE AND DENIAL: LESBIAN EXISTENCE IN THE PROTEST

Women in Black had a relatively large percentage of lesbian participants. In some vigils lesbians were about 30 percent of the participants (Montell 1991; Young 1993). However, the public and the private images of Women in Black did not include lesbians, either as individual women or as a potential interpretation of their protest. Moreover, lesbian participation has been almost erased from the research, literature, and video material produced about Women in

Black by students and researchers, who came mostly from the United States. This absence, resulting in invisibility of lesbians, is apparent in many books and articles relating both to the women's peace movement in general (Brock-Utne 1989; Harris and King 1989; Elshtain and Tobias 1987) and to *Women in Black* in particular (Gabriel 1992; Chazan 1994; Sharoni 1993).

Invisibility constitutes the omission of lesbian reality from feminist consciousness and from the public eye. The silencing of lesbians and their absence from the public image of *Women in Black* reveals a major form of women's oppression; it also perpetuates lesbian invisibility throughout society. However, the invisibility of lesbians in the Israeli women's peace movement is not a universal experience shared by all peace movements.

At Greenham Common, the British Women's Organization Against Nuclear Power, the presence of lesbians was not only recognized but also part of the political agenda (Alderson 1983; Blackwood 1984). At Greenham Common women hugged each other in front of the soldiers, police, and the public, and the women themselves held discussions about the relevance of lesbian visibility to the demonstrations. Thus, lesbian presence in Greenham Common became part of the group's public image. Lesbian presence and women's involvement in the antinuclear peace camp opened a forceful debate among feminists in England about the relevance of the peace struggle to the feminist agenda (Alderson 1983; Mohin 1983; Snitow 1985). The connection made by women in Greenham Common between peace activism and lesbian politics has never been made in Israel. In spite of the cultural and political differences between the women at Greenham Common and *Women in Black*, the discourse on the connection, and the implications of lesbian presence in women's peace groups, might have been relevant to the vigils of *Women in Black*.

The existence of lesbians in heterosexual society is restricted in many ways, especially in Israeli society where religious fundamentalist parties play a significant role in politics. Homosexuality has never been openly discussed in Israeli society, and the consequence of being a lesbian has often resulted in a perilous existence. Thus, the discourse among lesbian feminists in Israel has been more often related to the mundane problems of survival than to articulating sexual politics. However, the large numbers of lesbians present in *Women in Black* apparently felt they were creating a safe place for themselves to be politically active. Furthermore, they may have found in the demonstrations of *Women in Black* a place not only to express their opposition to the Israeli occupation, but also a platform on which to take a public stand against women's oppression in general without drawing attention to their existence as lesbians.

One of the first attempts to overcome the invisibility of lesbian women everywhere and especially within feminist thinking was made by Adrienne Rich in 1980. In her piece entitled "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," she maintained that the erasure of lesbian existence from scholarly feminist literature is not only antilebian but also antifeminist. Rich claimed that overcoming lesbian erasure from public view required an interpretive

framework offering a more direct challenge to “compulsory heterosexuality” as a political institution (Rich 1986). Adrienne Rich’s concept of a “lesbian continuum” permits recognition of the affectual and political affinity “through each woman’s life and throughout history—of women-identified experience” (1986, 51) that “has run like a continuous though stifled theme through heterosexual experience,” providing “a history of female resistance” (1986, 67) to the institution of compulsory heterosexuality. Thus, according to Rich, all feminist women including heterosexual women are, to the extent that they desire to identify with other women, lesbians. The “lesbian continuum” constitutes a range, throughout each woman’s life and throughout history, of women-identified experience.

Rich’s attempt to negate lesbian invisibility and to incorporate lesbian existence into the feminist discourse was important and courageous at the time. However, the interpretive framework that she suggested raised the same problem that she challenged. If the lesbian continuum suggests that all women can identify themselves as lesbians, then the lesbian identity is not distinct. Therefore, the lesbian continuum might be used to maintain lesbian invisibility. Although Rich did not succeed in providing a framework to eliminate the denial of lesbians, she made the connection between lesbian existence and feminism. The denial continues to exist, thus raising questions about the importance of acknowledging lesbian women in *Women in Black* and the meaning of their presence in the vigils.

Focusing on lesbian (in)visibility within *Women in Black* raises a dilemma about the use of the term *lesbian* as an identity. As Vera Whisman (1993) claimed, “We haven’t all rallied around a shared identity as lesbians; today we don’t even agree on what the word means” (49). The dilemma not only concerns the shared identity of diverse groups, but also the use of the term *lesbian*, which was coined by a heterosexual homophobic mind. However, in the context of Israeli society questions about lesbian identity and the use of the word *lesbian* are premature. Israeli society has only recently started to acknowledge the existence of lesbians and is still resisting discussion about gender, sexuality, and especially homosexuality. Therefore, insisting on the recognition of lesbian identity is important precisely because it was being threatened with erasure, especially in the political sphere in which *Women in Black* existed.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Most of the women whose political convictions brought them together to take part in *Women in Black* came either as feminists or as peace activists and sometimes as both. Still others joined the vigils without a previous political agenda but with an urgent need to voice opposition to existing policies. Women in Black made their voices heard at a moment in time when taking action was in itself a moral decision. Not all women in *Women in Black* identified themselves as feminists. But for feminist women in the vigil the question of whether

or not peace activism was the best course for feminist action could not be dealt with at that point. In many respects there was no other way for action to occur; the way was paved for women to voice their protest.

After many years in which the feminist movement in Israel had not been able to unite because of the national conflict (Freedman 1989),⁵ *Women in Black* was a breakthrough in getting women from different national and ideological backgrounds to work together. This change was possible because the group was created at a time when women had to confront the inhumanities practiced by their own society against the Palestinians. Women felt that they had to take action immediately and to cooperate with as many other women as possible. The history of the women's peace movement in Israel, as shown by Sharoni, "reveals attempts to overlook differences in political ideology and direction in order to mobilize broad segments of the society" (1993, 23). The loose framework of *Women in Black* enabled women with different political views and women who had not been involved in politics before to participate (Españoli and Sachs 1991). Together with the strategy of inclusion and diversity, the relatively large mobilization of women made the success of the vigils of *Women in Black* possible.

From its outset, *Women in Black* developed the characteristics of an inclusive group allowing considerable ideological variation and flexibility in interpreting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Inclusion allowed the groups to be diverse and, at the same time, to keep differences among participants unacknowledged and not discussed. Moreover, in cases that might have threatened the harmony of the group, there was an unspoken agreement to ignore and deny differences. The only difference acknowledged was related to the politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Other differences of ideology, of class, and of lifestyle were not raised, and the participation of lesbian women was ignored. The commitment to inclusion in which differences existed but were at the same time ignored, turned out to be both a strength and a weakness of *Women in Black*.

Diversity enabled *Women in Black* to grow, by allowing women to join who shared only the minimal platform of opposition to the occupation. As Naomi Chazan explained, the strength of *Women in Black* lay in:

[o]ur diversity, in the differences among us, in the fact that we are here for different reasons, different motives, and we reflect different political opinions. The more diverse we are the more forceful we are, and let me suggest that one of our key challenges is that we expand our base and diversify our base and incorporate new and different elements that respect each other. (Rosenwasser, 71)

This ability to create unity in diversity, on the one hand, and to leave differences unresolved or invisible on the other hand, brought about the invisibility

of lesbians in *Women in Black*. As time went on this invisibility became frustrating to some lesbians in the vigils, thus raising the need to examine it.

The diverse perspectives of different women should have been heard when inclusion became a theoretical framework for action. Full incorporation of diversity might have led to the important recognition that there were not only differences between groups but also differences within each group. As Charlotte Bunch points out, "There is no singular voice of Third World or Black feminism or of lesbians or older women. Thus while we must be sure that as many diverse experiences as possible are heard, we also recognize that the voices of women within any group will not all be the same" (1988, 21). However, in *Women in Black*, inclusion and diversity did not lead to recognition of the different voices.

The diversity of lifestyles and political backgrounds, of age and experience as well as nationality, in *Women in Black* was a source of great strength and richness. Yet, except for national identities, it was also the very place where inclusion became the denial of diversity. Instead of recognizing the strength and richness of diversity and adopting a politics that valued difference, inclusion became only a survival and mobilization strategy. Often what passed for agreement in our political work was the lowest common denominator that allowed women to feel comfortable standing side by side. Moreover, when inclusion was perceived as acceptance of diversity, differences were not acknowledged and identities not allowed to express themselves. As a result, lesbian identity was erased and a hegemonic heterosexual identity prevailed within the vigils and in the public eye.

LESBIANS' INVISIBILITY

The choice made by many lesbians to join *Women in Black* and to use the vigils as a place for protest came from the feeling of sharing a similar cause with other women. In addition to opposing Israeli occupation, women had the need to stand in public against their own oppression. Therefore, understanding the forces that attracted lesbians to the vigils might have revealed the cause shared among all women. Opening up the discussion about the participation of lesbians in the vigils could have compelled all women to face their own oppression as women. Moreover, relating to different arenas of oppression would have led to an understanding of the connections between oppression of Palestinians and oppression of women. Had these connections been made, the potential of the vigils to become explosive might have been materialized.

Nevertheless, *Women in Black* was never able to grasp the meaning of lesbian existence in the group nor its potential to elucidate the source of women's oppression. Women refused to deal with feminist interpretations of the vigils, and in particular with lesbian interpretations. At the same time, lesbians in the vigils were not ready to open this discourse on their own. As

a result, the vigils remained a single-issue protest and did not move beyond the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; lesbians in the vigils remained invisible and their struggle stayed isolated.

In *Women in Black* we were able to work together and avoid conflicts without always having complete agreement, and this is worth recognizing. However, this consensus did not allow us to fully acknowledge and use the unique breakthroughs of the group both on the level of peace and of gender politics. As Audre Lorde claimed, "But it is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences and to examine the distortions which result from our misnaming them and their effects upon human behavior and expectation" (1984, 115). Thus, recognizing and respecting differences in *Women in Black* should not have been a threat to the group unity. On the contrary, naming lesbians could have helped the group to recognize the distortions of homophobia, and to examine how homophobia has been part of oppression against women.

In the reality of *Women in Black*, the group's experience of inclusion, which ignored differences, was not sufficient for an understanding of diversity in which lesbian identity could have been acknowledged and homophobia could have been resisted. An example of lesbian invisibility happened at a workshop about homophobia that took place during the eighth feminist conference, in 1991. In this workshop a woman who was one of the founders of *Women in Black* discovered that some of the women who had stood with her in the Jerusalem vigil for the previous four years were lesbians. This woman described how surprised she was and how important this discovery was for her. She realized that she had ignored a whole group of women, thus collaborating in the oppression of lesbians, and understood that lesbians were her allies in the struggle against woman's oppression. This illustrates what happened to a woman who chose to explore her own homophobia and reflects the loss of opportunity for the other hundreds of women who were part of *Women in Black*.

Inclusion in *Women in Black* was a form of denial because there was no in-depth dialogue between different women, which ultimately would have allowed them to develop a reading of the vigils that would include lesbians. Thus, many women were unable to read the underlying meaning of the protest as related to different oppressions of women. The unrecognized differences weakened *Women in Black's* ability to continue under changing political circumstances such as the Gulf War or the recent peace accord (Cohen 1993) and to take the vigils' protest beyond the focal point that was originally agreed upon. Furthermore, denial of diversity among women allowed this group to maintain lesbian invisibility.

It is male society, Bunch (1987) explained, that defines lesbianism as a personal choice, because men strive to prevent lesbians from acting to end their oppression and from challenging male power. Thus, she claimed, "[f]or the Lesbian-Feminist, it [sex] is not private; it is a political matter of oppression, domination, and power" (1987, 163). For *Women in Black* one way to

include the negation of oppression, domination, and power in their protest could have come from increasing the visibility of lesbians in the vigils.

Bunch recognized the significance of diversity in which differences are acknowledged. She explained that in order to understand oppression, violence, and domination, it is important to understand how these concepts are connected and manifested in different ways. Understanding the relationship between nationality, race, sexual preference, and gender oppression provides an insight into what oppression means. Thus, according to Bunch, "we see that all forms of violence reinforce each other, from racism and homophobia to sexual assault and warfare—all are based in the dynamic of domination of one group by another backed up by physical and economic force" (1992, 178). Therefore, the erasure of lesbian existence in *Women in Black* was in itself a form of oppression and a way of reinforcing hegemonic identity.

CONCLUSION

Although the vigils of *Women in Black* were basically silent, their accumulated silences turned into a scream. These vigils were the strongest and (ironically) most vocal women's voice in Israel for a long time. Since the construction of the group was flexible and open, it turned out to be a place for women's protest, a place for women to be together. This was a protest against oppression, an affirmation of our ability to be independent and an assertion of our freedom to voice public opposition, of our existence as women or as lesbians in a male-orientated, militaristic environment. In spite of our power to scream out loud, we were not able to transform this action into social change. However, lesbian women were able to use their experience and political power, gained at the vigils, and create a strong community of activists for advancing gay rights. It is one of the few grassroots activities that have been able to impact a change in Israeli society in the '90s.

The search into the alliances and denials of *Women in Black* in this chapter has focused on the existence of lesbians in the vigils. The vigils of *Women in Black*, in their nonstructure, in the text they used, and in their subtext, were based on inclusion of diversity among the participants. The denial of lesbians and other groups in the vigils came as the result of the very same idea that enabled the groups to exist in the first place. However, since women's experiences in *Women in Black* have been varied and different, the recognition of diversity was crucial. Recognizing the existence of lesbians in the group required a process of relating to more than one oppression at the same time and recognizing the connections between the oppression of Palestinians and the oppression of women and of lesbians.

To create alliances between different women for a particular and very specific goal was crucial for the creation and existence of *Women in Black*. But to discover and recognize differences and to utilize them as political empowerment required a process of analyzing and theorizing that never took place.

The activity of Women in Black was for many of the participants a manifestation of the need to express publicly both personal and political disagreement with local politics. It was a negative statement, rejecting structure and never offering a positive alternative. To base women's peace action on the most basic element available to any group of people under particular local circumstances was important for unification. This basis, however, left out awareness of the differences between the women and their varied motivations for peace action.

The assertion that lesbians were active participants in Women in Black and in many other peace and women's organizations is not enough. Because inclusion was a strategy for Women in Black rather than an ideological commitment, diverse identities were not acknowledged and the group allowed the hegemonic identity of heterosexuality to prevail. Only the acknowledgement of a lesbian presence might have provided a step forward toward a women's peace movement based on true inclusion and coalition building. A movement that recognizes that difference is "that raw and powerful connection from which our personal power is forged" (Lorde 1984, 226) could have transformed this power into a political force bound to change society.

"If women have a role to play . . ." (Kristeva 1981, 166) then Women in Black played a significant role in Israeli society in recent years and succeeded in capturing revolutionary moments and expressing the potential to be on the explosive side of society. Women in Black became a symbol of grassroots political opposition and of a new image for women in Israel. The ability to create alliances in a way that brought together a diverse group of women was a source of strength, which such moments require. However, by denying the existence of lesbians and other different groups, Women in Black did not use their potential to remain on the explosive side of society. They, thus moved "to the other side—the side of symbolic power" (Kristeva 1981, 166), as women very often tend to do.

EPILOGUE

I wrote this essay when the first Intifada was over and most vigils of Women in Black in Israel had stopped. It seemed then that Women in Black would remain an episode of the past. Since December 2000 the vigils have become a reality again. A sad reality, for it is a place to voice our protest with very little hope left. We have changed a lot. Men are welcomed to our groups and we do not stand in silence any longer. We do answer back and sometime quite loudly. We have gone back to five vigils and joined the two brave ones: in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem which continued throughout the years. We are now in seven different places. Many of us are totally pessimistic about the prospects of peace in our region, but we insist on voicing our protest every Friday. For lesbian women in town this vigil is not a meeting place anymore, nor is it a support group. Those of us who, like myself, are both lesbians and out, have no need anymore to make an issue of the fact. Most people on the vigil know us personally and don't find

homosexuality a topic of relevance or any importance for the vigil. Women's status in Israel has changed dramatically in the last ten years but the daily lives of most of us were not changed for the better. With the collapse of the welfare state and the continuing war in the occupied territories and its deadly effect on Palestinians and on us all we have little hope for change.

However, there is one vigil that is very original in style and in making connections. This is the second vigil in Tel Aviv (the biggest city in Israel) and the first group whose majority consists of gay people, mainly lesbians. Kvisa Sh'chora (black Laundry) is comprised mainly of lesbians and claims that rejection of one oppression, that of gay people, cannot and should not be separated from the struggle to reject other oppression. Thus, the struggle against the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza should be connected to the struggle against the oppression of gay women and men in Israel and for social justice for all. The group has managed to come up with the most innovative ideas for making these connections clear. It has demonstrated consecutively since its inception in the 2001 Gay Pride parade in Tel Aviv, in almost all the peace demonstrations and gay events in Israel. It is visible, proud, and has therefore attracted public attention, so seldom given to the peace movement in Israel. Lesbian women in the peace movement have come a long way, from being invisible to being at the cutting edge of the movement. I and my lesbian friends in Haifa and other places do not need to hide or to come out; there is always, very visible, Kvisa Sh'chora out there, making sure everybody knows that we are out, that we are everywhere, and that we are fighting against all forms of oppression. Maybe there is hope after all.

NOTES

1. Israel had occupied the West Bank and Gaza Strip since the war in 1967. The occupation denied the Palestinians citizen's rights and exploited their labor and their land. Demonstrating against this occupation became a symbol of the opposition against Israel's refusal to recognize the national aspirations of the Palestinians.

2. The war in Lebanon started as an invasion into Lebanon and was planned to be short and limited in its scope. The official reason was given as an attempt to stop terrorist activities on the northern border of Israel.

3. The first Intifada started in December 1987 in the Gaza Strip. It soon spread to the West Bank and became the popular uprising of the Palestinian people. It had been mainly an unarmed revolt against Israeli rule, led by young people. It lasted for six years, until the signing of the peace accord between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization in September 1993.

4. The first vigil started in Jerusalem in February 1988 and grew to thirty-four vigils. In October 1994 there were still two vigils going on (Newsletter, No. 6, Fall 1993).

5. The issue of opposition to the occupation had divided feminist women for many years. After 1982, when the seventh feminist conference split up because of a disagreement on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there was no conference until 1992.

REFERENCES

- Alderson, Lynn. "Greenham Common and All That." *Breaching The Peace*. London: Onlywomen Press, 1983.
- Blackwood, Caroline. *On the Perimeter*. New York: Penguin Books, 1984.
- Brock-Utne, Birgit. *Educating for Peace*. New York: Pergamon Press, 1985.
- Bunch, Charlotte. "A Global Perspective on Feminist Ethics and Diversity." *Explorations in Feminist Ethics*. Ed. Eve Cole Browning and Susan Coulthrap-McQuinn. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1992.
- . "Diversity and Feminism: Some Reflections." Unpublished paper, 1988.
- Butler, Judith. "Imitation and Gender Insubordination." *Inside/Out, Lesbian Theories. Gay Theories*. Ed. Diana Fuss. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Chazan, Naomi. "Israeli Women and Peace Activism." *Calling the Equality Bluff, Women in Israel*. Ed. B. Swirski and M. Safir. New York: Pergamon Press, 1991.
- Cohen, Ruth. "Women in Black Step Down." *Challenge* 22: 11–13.
- De Lauretis, Teresa. "Feminist Studies/Critical Studies: Issues, Terms, and Contexts." *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*. Ed. Teresa De Lauretis. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986.
- Deutsch, Yvonne. "Israeli Wolmen Against the Occupation: Political Growth and Persistence of Ideology." *Women and the Israeli Occupation*. Ed. Tamar Mayer. London, 1994.
- Elshtain, J. B., and S. Tobias. *Women, Militarism, and War*. Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1990.
- Espanioli, Nabila, and Dalia Sachs. "Peace Process: Israeli and Palestinian Women." *Bridges* (1991): 99–111.
- Ferree, M., and B. Hess. *Controversy and Coalition*. Boston: Twayne, 1985.
- Freedman, Marcia. "A Tale of Two Conferences." *Bridge*, 3:2 (1989).
- Gabriel, Ayala. "Grief and Rage: Collective Emotions in the Politics of Peace and the Politics of Gender in Israel." *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry* 16 (1992): 311–35.
- Gillath, Nurit. "Women Against War: 'Parents Against Silence.'" *Calling the Equality Bluff, Women in Israel*. Ed. Barbara Swirski and Marilyn Safir. New York: Pergamon Press, 1991.
- Hall-Cathala, David. *The Peace Movement in Israel, 1967–1987*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990.
- Harding, Sandra. *The Science Question in Feminism*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1986.
- Helman, S., and T. Rapoport. "Women in Black: Challenging Israeli's Gender and Social-Political Orders." *British Journal of Sociology* 48 (1997): 681–700.
- Kristeva, Julia. "Oscillation between Power and Denial." *New French Feminisms*. Ed. Ilaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron. New York: Schocken, 1981.
- Lorde, Audre. "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference." *Sister Outsider*. New York: The Crossing Press, 1984.
- Mohin, Lillian. "Essay." *Breaching the Peace*. London: Onlywomen Press, 1983.
- Montell, Jessie. "Israeli Identities: The Military, the Family, and Feminism." *Bridges* (1991): 99–111.
- Ostrowitz, Rachel. "Dangerous Women: The Israeli Women's Peace Movement." *Jewish Women's Call for Peace*. Ed. Rita Falbel, Irena Klepfisz, Donna Nevel. New York: Firebrand Books, 1990.

- Pope, Juliet. "The Emergence of a Joint Israeli-Palestinian Women's Peace Movement during the Intifada." *Women in the Middle East*. Ed. Haleh Afshar. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993.
- Rich, Adrienne. *Blood, Bread, and Poetry*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1986.
- Rosenwasser, Penny. *Voices from a Promised Land*. Willimantic: Curbstone, 1992.
- Sasson-Levy, Orna and Rapoport, Tamar. "Gender, Body and Knowledge in Protest Movements," *Gender & Society* 17:3 (2003): 379-403.
- Shadmi, Erella. "Between Resistance and Compliance, Feminism and Nationalism: Women in Black in Israel," *Women's Studies International Forum*. 23:1 (2000): 23-34.
- Sharoni, Simona. *Conflict Resolution Through Feminist Lenses: Theorizing the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict from the Perspectives of Women Peace Activists in Israel*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Fairfax: George Mason U, 1993.
- Snitow, Ann. "Holding the Line at Greenham." *Mother Jones*. February-March 1988: 30-34, 39-44, 46-47.
- Swirski, Barbara, and P. Marilyn Safir. "Living in a Jewish State: National, Ethnic, and Religious Implications." *Calling the Equality Bluff, Women in Israel*. Ed. Barbara Swirski and P. Marilyn Safir. New York: Pergamon Press, 1991.
- Whisman, Vera. "Identity Crises: Who is a Lesbian Anyway?" *Sisters, Sexperts, Queers*. New York: Plume, 1993.
- "Women in Black." *National Newsletter* nos. 1-6. Jerusalem: 1992-1993.
- Young, Elise, G. *Keepers of the History*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1992.

This page intentionally left blank.

THIRTEEN

A Rainbow Kufiyya

Mickey M

Mario Rizzi is an Italian artist who was in Israel/Palestine for two months between December 2000 and February 2001 to carry out an art project, The Gift. He made a group of Israelis and Palestinians exchange mundane, everyday objects as presents that might symbolize their identities for themselves and for those on the other side. I met him at the Tel Aviv Cinemateque Plaza. He approached me and asked what present I would like to give to a Palestinian. I was kinda astounded by his hutzpah, particularly since I could not tell the gender of the gift. The English for Palestinian is gender-neutral, and thus assumed to be male.

Mario talked me into the project. He said he randomly met with people. On the street. Just like that. Whether in Israeli Jewish cities, or in mixed Palestinian/Israeli towns such as Jaffa, Nazareth, or in mixed Muslim-Christian cities in the besieged Palestinian Authority. And yes, he had the chutzpah to ask them to exchange gifts. Usually, when they got it, they kindly requested that he'd get the heck out of their faces. Some asked for further info before they'd make up their minds. A few Palestinians, even fewer Israelis, agreed to buy a little knickknack. He then set up a date with them to collect the gift. In that meeting he asked the person to write some words to the incognito/a on the other side, explaining why his or her gift was an object of identity.

I gave a rainbow *kufiyya*. I got back Muslim prayer beads I hung on my car's mirror. Since then, I'm getting the royal rug whenever I drive into Israeli gas stations where Palestinians still do the job despite the Intifada.

Before his departure, Mario herded us all to a potluck dinner at the Ami Steinitz Art Gallery in Neve Tzedek, Tel Aviv, or at the Jerusalem Center for the Visual Arts. We shared our favorite home-cooked foods, whether gefilte fish or kusa mahshi, and chitchatted into the wee hours of the night. It developed into lots of fun, despite the early evening pauses and hesitations. As his goodbye

This letter is also dedicated to Ted Swedenburg who taught me the history of the Kufiyya.

gift, Mario gave us all a book with the little texts we added to our gifts, that also had some of the dinner's recipes.

Smadar Shefi, art critic for Israel's highbrow daily *Ha'aretz*, summarized the project as naive propaganda. But of course. The editors of the haughty Style Section, with its astronomically priced wines and B&Bs, always make such indefatigable attempts to patch up each and every U.S.-European postmodernist trend to our little Klostherl, that Ashkenazi ghetto traversing the cultural terrain spreading along the thirty miles between the mansions of Caesaria and the lofts of North Tel Aviv. Random texts written by randomly picked folk who ruminate a bit about their daily symbols are native and propagandistic. But of course. Just like what I wrote to the woman who got my present.

8 January 2001

To a Palestinian Incognita,

Here is a rainbow kufiyya. In Hebrew we misspell and mispronounce it and say *kafiya*. I bought it this Friday at the doleful bazaar of Jerusalem's old city. It was empty and eerie after the noon prayers were over. So I got a big discount. I actually wanted to give you the rainbow kufiyya I bought in NY's Village from a Caribbean street vendor in the midst of the first intifada. But I couldn't part from it. I like to wear mine with my fake antique bomber jacket in the cold winters of San Francisco's dyke chic.

For me, the kufiyya means access to memories I am not allowed to have. Memories of being colonized. You now are allowed to have them. So I appropriate your symbology since your colonizer is mine, too. But my family hasn't persevered in this fight between the colonizer and the colonized over whose memory is legitimate.

I am an Arab-Jew. A *Mizrahi*. An Eastern. Sharqiyya. My mother's mother-tongue was Arabic. But as she climbed the Israeli class-ladder she dyed her black hair lighter and lighter (it's now dishwater-blonde) and unlearned it. So I had to learn Arabic as a foreign language. When I spoke it to my crumpled grandma, she was so frightened someone would hear us, since we were sitting on her front porch and I was screaming into her ear.

One of the first things Israel's military regime of the 1950s did to the Palestinians who remained in what was defined in 1949 as "Israel" was to search for those who fought in the Great Arab Rebellion of 1936-1939. They were mostly religious peasants who lost their land and went to Haifa to become laborers. Their absentee landlords sold it to the Zionists. My grandma used to clean houses for some of those absentee landlords who lived in Talbiyya (in whose mansions now reside the Israeli ruling elite), so that her many children have something on the table. And those peasants wore kufiyyas. She wore a white headscarf.

As the rebels roamed through Palestinian towns, they forced the bourgeoisie to start wearing kufiyyas instead of the fez hats. So many of these peasants felt they were forced to burn their archives and the mementos of the

rebellion. Then after 1967 Israel went after the old participants of the rebellion who lived in the West Bank. Some of them felt they were forced to do the same. The memories of the rebellion went underground until the 1987 intifada. In the early 1980s, a friend of a WASP-friend of mine wrote a poem about sheikh Izz ad-Din al-Qassam and the rebellion. He had to go thru a SHABAK (Israel's FBI) interrogation.*

Mizrahim still find it very hard to even dare write up their histories of everyday experience of racism, let alone getting a Hebrew publisher for it. It's called here letting *ha-shed ha-'adati* (or "the ethnic jinn") out of the bottle.

But the kufiyya has become a Palestinian national symbol. And it's still an everyday object. Nevertheless, for my pious grandma, sometimes in the early 1950s, she had to trade her shining white headcover for a flowery one. As she went to have her picture taken for an ID card, state officials told her she would be confused with a Palestinian if she would stick to the white scarf. And thus be a security hazard of sorts. These were the days Palestinians "infiltrated" Israel in search for their lost homes. So she bought a flowery headcover instead. She shipped her children to Ashkenazi religious dayschools, because those days, the Sephardim were not considered exactly observant by the State's Ashkenazi religious establishment. Even now, SHAS's women don't wear the plain white headscarves their grandmothers wore for the Shabbat.

The Caribbean kufiyya vendor who sold me my own rainbow-kufiyya told me it was very hard for newly arrived Caribbean blacks to get accepted into African-American society. Israel purposely erected a rift between Arab-Jews and Palestinians. We were made to hate the Arab in ourselves. And you never accepted us here as well. You always prefer talking with the affluent Ashkenazi Left. They are oh so networked to get the grants to send you on those Peace'n'Dialogue guilt-ridden conferences abroad or well-funded co-existence research projects here. Yet as I redeem the cultural Arab in myself, while living in those postcolonial U.S.-European structures of economic and political power, I find myself groping for unifying symbols. Even though most Mizrahim live now in Israel, our identities are so scattered and fractured.

The 1987 Intifada and this ongoing al-Aqsa Intifada has allowed you to reclaim your past. How can I reclaim mine, and unify it with the diasporic pasts of Mizrahim who came here from the 1890s on, to replace you as the laborers of the Ashkenazi Zionist masters? At times I think of this as I wear my kufiyya. The Israeli nation-builders decided on the *kova' tembel* (dunce cap) as the national head-cover. But for me it signifies the newly-arrived kibbutzniks on their tractors tilling your land. Like so much of Israeli culture, it's lacking any historical depth. So when the 1960s arrived in Tel Aviv of the 1970s, it went out of fashion. You can't even get it in the flea market or in secondhand cloth stores.

*Mickey is deeply indebted here to Ted Swedenburg's brilliant analysis of the kufiyya, spelled out in his 1995 *Memoirs of Revolt*.

In Tel Aviv, people don't understand the difference between the rainbow kufiyya and the regular, black'n'white checkered one. If I wear my black and white kufiyya people here find it offensive. I'm told my colorful kufiyya is cute, however. Tel Aviv has become the queer Mecca of the Middle East. Before the last Intifada broke out, at the discount grocery store here I met two Lebanese MTFs who came thru the "Good Fence" and even had Price Club cards. Jordanian and Egyptian gays. Even a group of gays from Qatar.

But never lesbians.

The rainbow colors are our unifying symbol as queers, bridging across genders, nationalities, ethnicities, cultures. Yet not eroding the hierarchies of power existing among us all. Perhaps this is the reason why the Jordanian convoy of Gay men who marched last year on the jubilant Tel Aviv pride parade refused to identify. Or perhaps they were just afraid their identities were to be revealed to their families thru the international media who flocked to Tel-Aviv for the event. Palestinian Lesbians, I fear, might be murdered by their relatives for daring to come out. Or totally ostracized into silence, the Western-educated Arab bourgeois way.

I am giving you this rainbow kufiyya as a Mizrahi lesbian. Only in Frisco did I meet uncloseted Arab lesbians. They were mainly Palestinian. They juggled their struggle for acceptance by their families with their struggle to be heard by the Pro-Israeli GLBT (Gay, Lesbian, Bi & Transgendered) establishment. In a weird way I can understand why the San Francisco GLBT establishment is pro-Israeli. Despite its regional colonialism, Israel now allows some sort of space for queers (as long as they belong to the Ashkenazi liberal Zionist Left). And many legal rights. In Frisco, Mizrahi dykes who don't need the Jewish community there for economic subsistence tend to hang around with Palestinian dykes. We find ourselves in similar intersections of familial and communal survival. Oddly enough, we talk a lot in standard Israeli, i.e., Ashkenazi Hebrew, too lazy to pronounce those deep throat semitic consonants or vowels.

I was here as the demonstrations against Bibi's public speeches raged in the SF Bay Area. The reporter of Channel One of the Israeli TV, you know, the government channel, broadcast a close-up of a leather-clad butch, or what they termed "a radical Muslim Arab woman demonstrator." As I watched this in Tel Aviv I called her up, choked with guffaws. She's one of the founders of the feminist movement in Israel. She left for Frisco because the Ashkenazi feminists here barely gave her any space. They were busy "dialoguing" with Palestinians (or advancing their liberal careers?) while Mizrahi women cleaned their homes and babysat their kids. "Couldn't the reporter get it? I wore a rainbow kufiyya," she chuckled on the other side of the line.

And I truly hope I haven't overburdened you with my Black Skin White Masks multiple schizophrenia. I ain't Fanon and I ain't your sistah. I just want you to understand why I am returning to you an appropriated symbol as a present from the depths of my heart. The Old City vendor asked me if I were

from New York, or any other big-city America. I told him I came from Tel Aviv.

Yours,

Mic.

mickey_md5@hotmail.com

CIRCULATING THE TEXT IN THE WORLD AND CYBERWORLD(S)

This text was originally published in *The Gift: An Art Project* by Marrio Rizzi. The Jerusalem Center for the Visual Arts. 2001. A perpetual do-gooder, I translated it to Hebrew and sent it to *PinkTime*, the Israeli free queer monthly. Its former editor, a mainstream Ashkenazi lesbian, complained in one of her editorials that the majority of Israeli dykes would rather munch pistachios in front of their TVs than contribute essays to *PinkTime*. Given that the majority of Israeli dykes, like the majority of Israeli Jews, are Mizrahim, and given the intimate connection between pistachios and what Ashkenazim imagine the stereotypical Mizrahi or Palestinian living room to be—I thought it would be appropriate to share with her my textual munchies. Both she and the present editor, a Mizrahi gay, claimed they loved the piece. Yet both wanted me to prune out the paragraphs dealing with the kufiyya's history. These had nothing to do with queer identity, they apologized. As pride week approached, off I shipped the piece, uncensored, to www.gogay.co.il, instead. Soon enough my e-mailbox got filled with Rightwing racist-sexist responses written by either homophobes or gay men bearing nicks such as Mu'ammarr Kaddafi, Yasser 'Arafat, and their ilk. One of the few lesbian responses I got was by a West Bank settler belonging to Israel Foreign Lesbians (IFL), a local English-speaking group with an international web site. She just ^C^V-ed me a public domain e-group response she had already written to an English posting of mine from the early days of the Al-Aqsa Intifada. While Leftwing dykes are active within the Israeli Peace Movement, the following text is typical of many immigrant lesbians, either Western or Eastern European, who feel quite alienated from the center-to-left-of-center Israeli GLBT establishment represented by *PinkTime* editors, let alone from aliens such as Mickey M. And so it goes:

RE: ON THE WAY TO CROWNING JERUSALEM WITH PEACE

Hi All,

I can respect anyone who thinks that being a lesbian is political, but it is not for me. Being lesbian for me states my sexuality and that's it. Not more and not less, certainly not more political than being straight. I do refuse to see this list as a political one, and I won't belong to one. I've always seen this list as a support . . . for anyone who does not want to belong to mainstream exactly for the reason that it is very politically oriented (that's why I am not there). And my personal life and sexual preferences are not political at all; they

are just my lifestyle . . . As for constitutional rights, sure, everyone can express anything, especially if it helps somewhat to justify their position of “victims of society,” and gives them a comfortable target to blame in anything and everything (you choose).

As for myself, I don’t feel victim in any way, and don’t feel the need to establish my self-esteem by playing the “victim” or “for the victims” role. I still believe that the most powerful ruling law on this planet is a jungle law. I can still express the very non-popular but very natural view that the weak do not have a right to survive, and any group . . . is not more than strength source in this survival war, because the group is more powerful than the individual. So I let the weak die, because it is the way of nature, I hold my strong position as long as I can, and when I can’t, and it will be my turn to go. As simple as that. It is not politics, it’s life. As primitive as it sounds, there is not more to it. And it includes starving Africa, Arab-Israeli conflict, Nazi Germany, Police States of America, slowly sinking in fat, and everything else altogether.

And I do not mind being called an aggressor living in the West Bank. Sure, I am. This land is mine by the right of power, until somebody can take it from me, according to the same jungle rule. If someone else starves so I can survive, its fine with me too. Another non-popular view: helping the weak is raising your-self esteem, not more. “I am great, I am generous, I help others, and I am wonderful.” I don’t need this kind of ego-trip, but I can respect others who do. I just wish to call things their real names and not hide behind nice words.

Same for sexuality. I just love women, not out of any political view or high ideal, but simply because that’s how my physiology works, my hormones, my chemistry. So what does it make me? If you choose to call it “hanky-dory women-loving-women,” that’s fine with me. Not very elegant, I must say, but true. Nothing, as far as I am concerned, is better (or worse) in the term “lesbian,” “dyke” or whatever else. Words, words, words . . . I still suggest that this group remains non-political support group to serve the purpose it was established for. I do wish that we could avoid the issues that can hurt someone’s feelings and concentrate on issues we agree on and can promote in our own interest.

A PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI LESBIAN RESPONSE

A whole month of hate mail came and went, until one day a nonpoliticized Arabic-sounding nick appeared in my Hotmail Inbox. At first I thought it must be a hoax. Stereotypically I myself imagined most Palestinian-Israeli dykes to live abroad. After several e-mails I suggested that we meet in Tel Aviv, so that I see if the woman is for real. At first she said she couldn’t. She wouldn’t even give a phone number. So by e-mails I suggested that we meet in one of Tel Aviv’s LGBT cafes, just for the practical reason that it is the only joint in town that has a well-defined nonsmoker section. After lots of hesitation she finally agreed. Just because curiosity won, and that we share a deep intolerance for smokers and their byproducts so we couldn’t meet anywhere else. Not only

did she exist in the flesh—a brimming smiley genius with the obligatory black curls and big brown eyes, in her early twenties. She also permitted me to translate into English her eloquently written Hebrew response to my kufiyya posting on condition that I don't even use her nick:

Sun., 29 Jul 2001 01:47:26.

Shalom to you, Sharqiyya,

I was so moved by your letter. I felt as if you are writing it just for me. As if you know me and are talking to me in person. I got so scared. How does she know that I got a scholarship. And how does she know that I was sent abroad. And how does she know who do I meet with and what do I do. I started sifting through the lists of people I know. But I found no sharqiyya in them.

I bought my own kufiyya in the little market. I didn't inherit it from my grandpa and it doesn't smell of his sweat. My grandpa was not a *fallah*. He was a soldier in the British Army who joined the fight against the Ottomans like everybody else. In 1948 he had a drawer plan. He thought he'd manage to escape to Lebanon until everything calmed down, and then return. He died way before I was born. I know him only through photographs. He wore neither *hatta* (kufiyya) nor *tarbush* on his head. He had a *burnita* (French beret). My cousin still has his green beret. My second grandpa worked with the IPC (Iraq's Petrol Company). He, too, was fired with'em all. In 1958 he left Haifa and never returned there. He never wore a kufiyya. Even not as a kid. I have a vivid childhood memory of him wearing a kova' tembel as he gardened the back yard. He never studied Hebrew. He spoke English and French.

Where I grew up the name Arafat couldn't pass my lips. Once I had to mention him in a sentence, so I spoke about "that crazy one." Nothing was permitted at school. A teacher who dared to speak up was kicked out. Years later, when I entered the university, I heard from friends that in their schools they had to stand still and sing *raḥraf ya 'alam biladi*, oh brandish thyself my homeland's flag. The flag was blue-and-white, of course. My grandpa never told me any stories of heroism. He never spoke about the past. Only several years after I bought my kufiyya did I dare ask. He scantily answered. The first time I heard my dad saying that he's a Palestinian was when I was fifteen. He said this to a German guest. He spoke German and thought I didn't understand it. That day I understood that Arafat was not a curse.

I bought my kufiyya at the flea market and it smells like fresh cloth. I wanted to imagine it to be my grandpa's kufiyya. But its newness didn't allow my imagination any depth. I wore it over and over again, hoping it would get some history. Yet I never dare wear it outside my own home. When I allow myself to dream of a rainbow kufiyya, I see it thrown on the shoulders of a woman who's an Other. I doubt she understands its meaning. The vendor who sold it to you was sure you are not from here. According to his simple logic, kufiyyas and Jews can't go together, particularly these days. Rainbow colors and Arab women can't go together either.

Growing up inside the humongous melting pot. Most importantly, unthinking the past. This is how it used to work for me. The 1987 Intifada allowed me to reclaim this past. The word Palestine did not exist in my lexicon until then. I almost grew into the truth that there is no such a thing as a Palestinian people. There is no such a truth. Palestine is the legend that never was, and the land stood empty for two thousand years, waiting for her sons to return from exile.

Yes, the first Intifada opened my eyes. But I didn't really get everything. A young adolescent, I wrote: "They're over there, and I stand here. They throw stones and know why. I don't throw stones and don't know why!!!"

And so I grew up into the fog. I groped, looking for a path. I never heard a word around me. People learned that silence is the best survival kit. The first time I defined myself as a Palestinian was as I started my freshman's year. An Israeli-Palestinian, though. I was eighteen when I was forced to explain how come I contain such polarities. That year I was also forced to understand that other side of me. The queer side. I hoped it would just disappear. I kinda knew that queer side of me way before I started college. But only in college did I meet a woman that when I stood near her I just couldn't open my mouth and utter a word. This was the first time I consciously experienced my queerness.

The al-Aqsa Intifada is an uprising in thought and cognition. The Israeli-Palestinians are now reclaiming their present, not their past. Their right to be both Palestinian and Israeli. The Occupied Territories Palestinians are claiming their right to exist alongside Israel. Israeli Jews just don't get it.

You want to reclaim your past, your roots, and make peace with the Arab within you. Actually you want to reconcile the Arab in you, that enemy deeply rooted in you, with the Israeli Jewish you. The Mizrahim are those who suffered the most from that humongous melting pot. Because they wanted to erase from themselves what was defined as their enemy. If they want to reclaim it, it's as if they'd like to reclaim hostility. The anger and hatred created in this reclamation process is being displaced onto the other, non-Jewish Arab Other. Therefore the distance between Mizrahim and Palestinians.

Reconciling with the Arab within you. I doubt if enveloping yourself in a rainbow kufiyya and insisting on those deep throat consonants will bring it about. Reconciling with the Arab inside you. This means a whole revolution, where no one dictates to you what to think or read. A revolution where you dig for the roots of your self as your own enemy. Where you understand that what you're allowed to see, to listen to—what you're allowed to be—it just ain't it. A revolution where you open your eyes and look beyond the narrow crack they let you see or think through. But Israel doesn't allow such revolutions. Never did and never will. Issar Har'el, the former head of the Secret Service once said, "We wanted no revolutions here." The media cooperated. But don't lose hope. With perseverance the revolution will materialize!

The Jewish people deserve to live in their own nation-state even without taking into consideration the fact that their state has become the queer stronghold for the whole Middle East. I know you don't believe me, if you care to hear me. But this is your own revolution. Meanwhile I will go back to my own little personal upheaval and hope to succeed in navigating my own fog. I now know it will not disappear.

Yours,

A Palestinian Incognita.

This page intentionally left blank.

Part IV



Social Construction

This page intentionally left blank.

FOURTEEN

Israeli Lesbians, National Identity, and Motherhood

Ruti Kadish

INTRODUCTION

Before launching into their first number at Gay Pride 1995, a member of *Bnot Pesia*,¹ a drag group, apologized that the group was not fully present for the occasion because Eti (an unmistakably female and somewhat old-fashioned name) was on reserve duty—*anahnu beherkev haser ki Eti bemilu'im*. His announcement was received with considerable laughter. On some level there is nothing more Israeli (male) than reserve duty. The picture of Eti, a drag queen of sorts, on reserve duty evokes many associations, some ironic, some less so.

The image of the Israeli man as soldier is one, if not the, predominant representation of Israeli identity in the Israeli cultural imagination. The anecdote of *Eti bemilu'im* is particularly evocative and illuminating. I too find myself imagining the Israeli male soldier as representative of Israeli identity at the same time that I am aware that it is a representation only of Israeli *male* identity.² There is a way in which quintessential Israeli identity is representable (at least in the public sphere) only as male. The recollection of such images is almost automatic: the 1967 photo of the bareheaded, fair-haired young soldier gazing up at the Western Wall secured by the Israeli forces only moments before; Yitzhak Rabin as politician/soldier—the pictures became ubiquitous following his assassination. These masculine images are no coincidence but rather a direct product and production of the particularly gendered and masculinist histories of Zionism against which Israeli lesbians come out and live their lives. Although some form of egalitarianism was a concern to many early Zionist thinkers,³ the concern for egalitarianism was superseded by a

preoccupation with and desire for Jewish pride personified by the “new Jew.” The primary concern, then, of early Zionist ideology was to produce the “new Jew,” who was in fact the “new male Jew.” In other words, despite the mythology of egalitarianism surrounding Zionism, men and women of the Yishuv and later, Israelis, fell into traditional and even hyper-masculine and feminine gender and sex roles.⁴

The aforementioned “Israeli images” fall neatly into political scientist Elizabeth Bethke Elshtain’s paradigm of militaristic societies.⁵ Elshtain draws a distinction between (female) “beautiful souls”—wives and mothers—maintaining the hearth, helpless and in need of protection, and (male and utterly masculine) “just warriors” going to war to protect the home and the hearth. The “just warrior” acquires meaning over and against its counterpart in the binary construction—the “beautiful soul,” that is, women. While historically it is true that women have always been, to varying degrees, on the front lines, the justification of a continuous military mentality—as in Israel—relies on the paradigm of just warriors and beautiful souls. A militaristic mentality necessitates the maintenance of the dichotomy between the masculine and the feminine, and hence, the paradigm is prescriptive in addition to being descriptive.

Importantly, while the paradigm of just warriors and beautiful souls contradicts the myth of Israel, it accurately describes the ethos of Israeli society. Political scientist Nira Yuval-Davis, in her interrogation of Israeli militarism and gender construction, coined the term *womanandchildren*,⁶ a term that further fleshes out the role and context of the beautiful souls in Elshtain’s paradigm.⁷

What is interesting to me here is the extent to which gays and lesbians today, as individuals and as communities, have chosen to position and represent themselves vis-à-vis the framework of just warriors and beautiful souls. As this framework is a product of Zionist ideology that saw as its goal the production of a “new (masculine) Jew,” I will begin this chapter by briefly mapping out the historical rejection of the diasporic “old Jew” in favor of the Eretz Israeli “new Jew.” I will then provide a synopsis of Israeli lesbian history and proceed to examine how Israeli lesbians articulate themselves both within the Israeli nationalist ideology and against it, mapping out the intersections and discontinuities between Israeli national identity and identities produced in and by Israeli lesbian communities.

THE “NEW JEW”

Abundant scholarship exists on the issue of the new Jew.⁸ In much of this work the new Jew is discussed over and against the old Jew, the diasporic Jew, and perhaps also in comparison to the non-Jew. Yet, while feminists have been writing for some years about the patriarchal and sexist paradigms in Israeli culture,⁹ many of the discussions of the new Jew have failed to address the ways in which this image was gendered and sexed. Similarly, most contemporary studies of the notion of the new Jew do not address the role and con-

struction of the Jewish woman at any length. In other words, scholars that approach the topic without gender and sexuality as categories of analysis do not attend to these elements in the construction of the new Jew—the maleness of the new Jew is assumed, it is unmarked, it need not be noted.¹⁰

In a letter to a pregnant acquaintance Freud wrote, “that if the child turned out to be a boy he will develop into a stalwart Zionist, and if a girl, she will speak for herself. He or she must be dark in any case, no more towheads. Let us banish all these will-o-wisps.”¹¹ In response to this line Daniel Boyarin notes that “[t]he ‘racial’ aspects of Freud’s prayer for the child are obvious, but the gender encoding is more mysterious. The Zionist is gendered male for Freud.”¹² Boyarin’s observation is part of a growing body of recent scholarship examining the gendering of Zionist ideology and practice, and exposing Zionism as “male” in significant ways. Zionism, as articulated in fin de siècle Europe was a recuperation project of the image of the feminized, queer, male Jew.¹³

In the turn-of-the-century imagination the Jewish man was perceived as physically and emotionally weak, incapable of loyalty and strong national feelings, emasculated, feminized.¹⁴ Zionist theory reacted against this construction. In their efforts to recuperate the image of the Jewish male, Zionists adopted Jewish nationalism. Jewish nationalism—Zionism—would masculinize Jewish men, and at the same time masculine Jews would embrace nationalism. Nationalism would elevate the Jewish people from its subjugated status as a parasitic outsider to that of a proud and honorable nation. All Zionists and Zionisms—Western and Eastern European alike, religious and secular, political and cultural, shared this desire for Jewish pride and honor.

If the new Jew—the Zionist—was essentially male, what was the image of the Zionist female pioneer? The maleness of Zionism does not mean that women did not, and do not continue to, participate in the Zionist project. This notwithstanding, it is difficult to call forth images that are not male: the new Jew, the *shomer* (the celebrated Jewish guards in Eretz Israel during 1910s), the *palmachnik* (members of the Jewish defense forces in pre-State Israel), and of course, the soldier. The Lacanian model is illustrative—woman is not. In some sense real women were immaterial to the construction and production of the new Jew, while femininity was quite material; real women were irrelevant to the ideology of the new Jew and Zionism. In practice, however, women participated in the evolution of the “new society,” but they were always marginal. Moreover, while the project of the new Jew largely replaced the image of the feminized Jewish man with that of the (male) soldier,¹⁵ the primary models and roles of women in the Yishuv (Jewish settlement in Palestine 1880–1948) remained almost precisely as they had been in the Diaspora: daughters, wives, and mothers.¹⁶ While one could argue that the image of women in the Yishuv was more physical, insofar as some worked in agriculture, women’s gender identity and sexuality, in reciprocity and in contrast to male (excess) masculinity, had to be unassailably feminine. Thus, even the few examples

of mythic women fighters or the few women among the many who attempted to join the working force in traditionally male jobs, are ultimately the exceptions that prove the rule.

A SHORT HISTORY OF ISRAELI LESBIAN AND GAY ACTIVITY

It is often noted that social and cultural trends appear in Israel between ten and fifteen years after they appear in the West. Practically in the same breath one adds that when these trends do appear, they do so in dramatic form and ensuing change (on some levels) often occurs rapidly.¹⁷ The Israeli lesbian and gay community is a case in point.¹⁸ Lesbians and gay men began organizing in the mid-1970s when eleven men and one woman founded the Aguda. When these initial members sought to register their group with the office charged with registering nonprofit associations, they were informed that because homosexuality itself was illegal they could not register a group with the term "homosexual" in its name.¹⁹ Lesbians also began organizing within the feminist movement. In 1986, following two prior short-lived and ultimately unsuccessful attempts to found a separate feminist lesbian organization, a group of lesbian feminists founded CLaF, an acronym for *Kehila Lesbit Feminist*—the Lesbian Feminist Community ("CLaF").

In 1988 homosexuality was decriminalized. How the change in the sodomy law came about is subject to much debate. Numerous previous attempts beginning in the early 1960s had failed. In 1988 the removal of the sodomy statute, a remnant of Mandatory law, was part of a major reform in the sections of law addressing sexual crimes. Importantly, in the bill revising the law there was no explicit mention of the elimination of "the section specifically prohibiting carnal knowledge against the order of nature." The elimination of this section was deliberately effected discreetly.²⁰

Since 1991,²¹ the community has made significant legal strides on the legislative and judicial levels, including equal protection in the work place and the equation (in limited ways) of gay and lesbian relationships with common law marriages. In 1993 the Israeli parliament established a subcommittee on lesbian and gay issues that brought the issue of homophobia in the military to the Knesset floor, and passed nondiscrimination regulations. In the United States similar pro-gay legislation would likely yield a deluge of lesbians and gay men filing suit, looking to benefit from the legislation and at the same time make a political point.

In Israel, in a telling fashion, these precedent-setting legislative decisions and judicial rulings have been followed by little, if any, additional litigation. I can point to two central reasons. The first is the general closetedness of the vast majority of the community,²² a condition that no doubt makes demanding one's rights all the more difficult. Israeli closetedness is understandable.²³ The small size of the country, and its familiar and familial nature makes it inevitable that one will come across one's neighbor, family friend, former classmate,

member of military unit, etc. The second reason is a reflection of the cultural differences between the United States and Israel. In Israel there does not seem to be a sense of entitlement in terms of civil rights. While in the United States the knowledge of one's "inalienable rights" and the ability to demand those is elementary education, Israelis tend to slough off disenfranchisement with a shrug of one's shoulders and the comment of "*Mah la'asot, kakha zeh*" (What can you do, that's the way things are).

Closetedness seems to be factor even in the community's public events. The history of national queer events in Israel points to the arduous process of coming out and gaining visibility in a small and close-knit country, in which an overarching attention to collective identity has largely foreclosed, or at the very least sanctioned, the development of individual identity or individual group identity.²⁴

In June 1993 the gay and lesbian community had its first public gay pride celebration in the local park of a trendy Tel Aviv neighborhood. For gay pride week in 1995 several members of the community organized a parade of vehicles through the streets of Tel Aviv, consciously electing to remain obscured in moving vehicles. That same year the main event of the week was a mock trial on the subject of lesbian second-parent adoption,²⁵ organized by CLaF in concert with the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI). This was CLaF's first public event and was described by many as the organization's coming-out event. In the spring of 1997 the Society for the Protection of Personal Rights officially came out of the closet and appropriately renamed itself The Association of Gay Men, Lesbians, and Bisexuals.²⁶ Around the same time CLaF held the first national lesbian conference, attended by more than five hundred women.

But by all accounts, 1998 constituted a watershed for Israeli queer visibility. In May 1998 Dana International, a MTF (male to female transgender) pop singer, represented Israel in the Annual Eurovision Song Contest and won first place. Dana International's selection to represent Israel generated vociferous debates, pitting the religious community against the secular. Her subsequent victory, had sexuality not been an issue, would have no doubt generated considerable national pride and celebrations. As it was, her victory ignited a celebration of queer pride (in Rabin Square in Tel Aviv) for the obvious reasons, but the celebration also drew numerous secular straight Israelis. In the aftermath of several cultural confrontations between religious Israelis bound by tradition and secular Israelis bound (albeit differently and with different effects) by liberalism, Dana International's victory signified for many secular Israelis a victory for liberalism over religious coercion. The celebration highlighted the points of intersection between the struggle for gay rights and resistance to religious coercion. International's victory also occasioned a reexamination (if limited) of Israeli queer identity and politics, and the relation of the mainstream gay and lesbian community to its own "others."²⁷

Only days later, at Wigstock, a benefit drag show for AIDS organizations, the Israeli queer community put its newly found pride and visibility into action when the crowd refused to accept the police attempts to end the event fifteen to thirty minutes before the organizers had intended because of the approaching Sabbath. According to several people who were present at the spontaneous demonstration, as the events ensued many likened them to an Israeli Stonewall.²⁸ Many secular Israelis deem the religious laws imposing a Sabbath curfew as religious coercion, and for the gay community the police action of enforcing those laws at that particular moment represented both religion as one of the main sources of gay repression and the collusion of the secular state with that repression. A year later one of the participants reflected on the events in emphatic terms: "After two thousand years of oppression, gays felt that they too can hold their head up."²⁹ The allusion to two thousand years of Jewish oppression, frequently invoked in Zionist discourse, and by Jews in general in the context of human rights, should not be ignored.³⁰ The author of these remarks situated the struggle for gay rights in the rubric of the struggle for Jewish autonomy and dignity.

The following gay pride celebrations of June 1998 included a parade through the streets of Tel Aviv in which, according to police estimates, more than three thousand marchers participated. "Diva," International's winning Eurovision entry, was heard repeatedly over the loudspeakers.³¹

NEW LESBIAN JEWS

The synopsis above situates the activities of the lesbian community in a particular time frame. While selectively politically active alongside Israeli gay men, CLaF, as the main organ of the lesbian community boasts a deliberate and self-conscious separatism. In the spring of 1998 CLaF held its first national lesbian conference, attended by more than three hundred women. CLaF organizers assert that political realities have made it politically expedient to work on occasion alongside the gay male community,³² but overall they perceive lesbians as a separate community with separate issues. Moreover, the lack of a feminist awareness and sensitivity to feminist issues among gay men pits lesbians-as-women against gay men-as-men.

As part of the special 1997 issue of *CLaF Hazak* (CLaF's quarterly)³³ celebrating a decade of the organization, the editors thought that a list of lesbian heroes/sex objects, would be both celebratory and lend the often serious and ideological magazine a lighter tone. The editors prefaced the list with a page-long explanation/apology for the seemingly antifeminist endeavor. The responses were voluble and varied.³⁴ Those who welcomed the playful tone of the article understood the ability of the community to "objectify" its own, as it were, as a sign of self-confidence. No longer does the lesbian community act only with concern to how it will be perceived by others. The serious and politically conscious format can finally give way to lesbian desires

and fantasies. Those who found the list offensive did so effectively for the same reasons—the objectification reflected in the article was antifeminist and thus inappropriate for the organization. And furthermore, anyone reading the article could corroborate the stereotype that all lesbians were mainly interested in sex and that lesbianism was only a sexual identity.

The feminist lesbian community as a whole, as represented by CLaF, seems to operate more in line with the latter attitude. There is a strong feeling that CLaF represents, and has an obligation to represent, feminism with all that connotes—political awareness, egalitarianism, nondiscriminating and non-objectifying practices, antiracism, consciousness of class differences, etc. This ideology, coupled with the sense and the reality of being an (oppressed) minority culture where every act is seen as representative of the entire community, does not lend itself to “polymorphous” representations. Subsequently, lesbian (sexual) fantasies and desires, while increasingly articulated by individuals, remains in the wings of the CLaF stage. Having said this, I cannot definitively argue that what is kept backstage remains there for ideological reasons. It would also be accurate to maintain that the political and social platform advanced by CLaF represents the “real” desires and fantasies of many of its members.

There are many aspects to the community and a wide variety of opinions within CLaF.³⁵ Nevertheless, one of the most compelling issues appears to be concern for long-term monogamous relationships and creating families with children. A significant number of lesbian events focus on this topic, as do articles in the lesbian press. For example there are regular discussion groups and workshops on the issues of relationship building and available alternatives for becoming mothers. A considerable amount of the political effort is also directed at related issues. Lesbian activists have spearheaded the efforts to secure equal access to fertility treatments as available to heterosexual women, and to gain legal recognition of lesbian families, and they have sought to require the inclusion of lesbian and gay families in the Ministry of Education’s curriculum on family. Israeli lesbians-as-mothers acquires special meaning when considered in light of the “nature” of Israeli female citizenship. For a full appreciation of this status, it is edifying to consider the meaning of motherhood in Israeli culture. It is arguably the very meaning of Israeli citizenship for Israeli women.

Nitza Berkovitch, in her recent analysis of the language of foundational Israeli laws—“Women’s Equal Rights Law (1951)” and “Security Services Law (1949)” —and her careful reading of the legislative discussions surrounding the acceptance of these laws and the public policy dovetailing the laws, demonstrated the ways in which Israeli citizenship is conferred on women differently than on men. Berkovitch argued, in the words of Nira Yuval Davis, that Israeli women are both literally and figuratively “the bearers of the collective.”³⁶ Upon careful reading of the Knesset protocols, Berkovitch remarks on the sharp disagreement between the religious parties and the secular parties regarding the very enlistment of women into the military. She points out, however, that the focus on this

disagreement has served to overshadow the extent of the overall agreement regarding military service in Israel and its important societal role.

Fifty-four speeches were given on the question of women's military service over the course of five separate sessions. (It should be noted that there are 120 Knesset members.) Berkovitch writes that the tone of the speeches conveyed a sense of being part of an important moment in the history of the Jewish people and the young state. The (Jewish) speakers lauded the significance of legislating a Jewish Armed Forces. It is in this context that the participation and exemption of women should be interpreted. It is significant that there was neither disagreement between religious and secular parties, nor between Jewish and non-Jewish parties regarding the exemption of married women and mothers from military service.³⁷ The most common reason for this exemption given by Jewish legislators was "Israel's problem of all problems—the question of family and propagation." Knesset members argued that "the induction of women [into the military] introduces poison into the family . . . and poses a threat to the fulfillment of a woman's primary role: the role of mother in Israel."³⁸ Berkovitch also mentions that the exemption of married women never generated any significant public discussion or resentment. In addition, the knowledge that some women (albeit in small numbers) married only for the purpose of receiving an exemption³⁹ did not produce a public outcry. At the same time the fact that women declared themselves religious (another cause for exemption) produced tremendous resentment in secular circles. The very different public responses suggest that even while military service carries tremendous national importance, for women it is ultimately only a digression from their true national and *public* role.⁴⁰ Marriage, even if entered into as an opportunistic arrangement, is understandable, acceptable, and in fact even desirable, and finally, what *makes citizens* out of Israeli Jewish women.

Berkovitch's examination of the Women's Equal Rights Law bears this out. She shows how the language of the law, rather than applying to all women, addresses the category of wife and/or mother, and those are effectively the women to whom the law applies. It is these women, albeit always to a lesser degree than men or at least differently than men, who have entered the Israeli collective. Lest we be mistaken, both the letter and the spirit of the law maintain their currency today. Berkovitch provides us with a telling quote from the introductory remarks of then Prime Minister Rabin in honor of International Women's Day:

The idiom with which we can open this festive occasion is this: *Eshet Hayil*—Who will find?" And it [the idiom] in my view is immaterial in our day, because the years and the generations that have passed have provided the answer: We have found [her]. *Eshet Hayil* is with us, at our side and she is like us; and from Deborah the Prophet to Hannah Senesh she accompanies the history of the people of Israel

and the State of Israel; she creates them and she is an integral part of the building of the state.⁴¹

Paradoxically, while the Women's Equal Rights Law was intended to personify the values of the modern state of Israel, it ultimately resembled far more the values reflected in the traditional Jewish prayer *Eshet Hayil* chanted by the husband in honor of his wife every Sabbath Eve, wherein a woman acquires status as mother/wife and as such is valued as *ezer ke-negdo*. This status is further solidified given that the Women's Equal Rights Law by design excluded issues of marriage and divorce—*dine 'ishut*—which remain to this day under the jurisdiction of rabbinic courts. Within this political division between civil courts and rabbinic courts, a Women's Equal Rights Law that can exist alongside the popular perception of, and public support for, women as “bearers of the collective” is not challenged. In a Knesset Committee on the Advancement of Women meeting in December 2000, on the issue of abortions Shas Knesset Member Nisim Ze'ev argued that “the prevention of 20,000 abortions a year would add 20,000 soldiers to the state.”⁴²

Now, given the above construction of Israeli Jewish female citizenship, how do lesbians practice their Israeli identities?

In the Summer 1998 issue of *CLaF Hazak*, the cover page depicts “lesbian pioneers”—a group of women dressed in farming clothing, gathered on a tractor. Bales of hay and a rainbow flag serve as a backdrop. Slightly less visible (although probably not self-consciously), is an Israeli flag. The inside cover explains the picture: “Idioms such as ‘salt of the earth,’ ‘builders of the State,’ refer usually to men and not to the women fighters, to the women who dried the swamps, to the women pioneers and new immigrants that built this country with their blood and sweat.” The editorial board then explains that the cover was designed to coincide with the Israel's fiftieth anniversary and to express gratitude for, and appreciation of, fifty years of women's work in building the state. The cover and caption claim the position of Israeli lesbians, as women, within the Zionist pantheon. The editorial board of *CLaF Hazak*, willy-nilly, asserted a nationalist stance that at the very least conflicts with the feminist ideology of the organization.⁴³ (The policies of the journal state that the editorial board rejects themes that are offensive to members of oppressed groups, and statements that reinforce negative stereotypes.) The statement certainly comes in conflict with feminist activity in the women's peace movement undertaken by many of CLaF's founders and the antinationalist political positions held by many of them.

Feminist lesbians, involved in the larger feminist movement, founded CLaF. Most of these women were also involved in leftist politics and took part in, if not spearheaded, much of the work of the Israeli women's movement in the 1980s and early 1990s.⁴⁴ The point here is that many of the lesbian activists, as lesbian feminists, saw themselves as situated outside the mainstream, working against the system, as it were. As peace activists, nationalist claims were invoked

only insofar as they lent credence to the call for peace, as in, “as Israeli citizens we demand that the government listen to our opinion.” This is far different than priding oneself in one’s role in the Zionist project. Indeed, many of those women involved in the feminist movement and the burgeoning lesbian community saw the relationship between the two as not only “natural,” but also necessary.

It is edifying to consider here the relationship between lesbianism and nationalism. In their introduction to the book *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, the editors write,

In the same way that “man” and “woman” define themselves reciprocally (though never symmetrically), national identity is determined not on the basis of its own intrinsic properties but as a function of what it (presumably) is not. Implying “some element of alterity for its definition,” a nation is ineluctably “shaped by what it opposes.”⁴⁵

Israeli nationalism is the evolution of modern Zionist ideology that emerged alongside European nationalisms of the nineteenth century. As noted earlier, Zionist ideology articulated itself against European perceptions of Jewish feminized (male) identity. As feminized, Jews lacked the necessary traits for national loyalty and were viewed as nation-less. Zionism attempted to eclipse the perception of the feminized Jewish male and its conflation with the queer and constructed the new Jew against the image of the queer and conjointly in reciprocity to a necessarily feminine femininity. The egalitarian elements in Zionism were foreclosed already at the outset, as Anne McClintock has explained: “No nationalism in the world has ever granted women and men the same privileged access to the resources of the nation-state.”⁴⁶

Examining nationalism through a gendered lens is constructive in understanding Israeli lesbian feminist identities. In *Lesbiot*, a volume of oral histories of Israeli lesbians, edited by Tracy Moore, many of the interviewees express an ambivalent relationship with their identity as Israeli nationals.⁴⁷ In a significant number of the interviews the women perceived their work in leftist politics as integral to their identity as lesbians.⁴⁸ Several women note the disproportionately high representation of lesbians in peace activism. It can also be said that several of the interviewees express awareness that being lesbian in Israel is on some level being “other” but, fundamentally, it is not the other—that position is occupied by Palestinians. Being one step removed or not the ultimate other allows lesbians both maneuverability and a certain degree of acceptance.

It should also be noted, however, that acceptance is always contingent and liminal. At Women in Black vigils (late ’80s–early ’90s), for example, some of the common epithets hurled at the participants by passersby were alternately “lesbians!” or “You sleep with Arafat.” The link between the two is that in both cases, the inference is that Women in Black do not sleep in the collective (heterosexual) Zionist bed; by voicing their opinion, they metaphorically do

not sleep with Jewish men and thus they do not fulfill their part in confirming straight heterosexual Jewish/Israeli masculinity. By being politically active, the participants effectively reject their national role as mothers and wives in need of protection, and they dare to voice an opinion as adult citizens. Their opposition to national policy in fact unsettles and calls into question the foundational paradigm of “just warriors and beautiful souls,” and threatens its legitimacy.⁴⁹ Subsequently Women in Black take on a sexualized role. National identity is thereby linked with respectable and acceptable sexual (or desexualized) identity. A challenge to national identity or sovereignty is tantamount to a refusal to participate in the sexual contract. One is left with two options: sleeping with the enemy (Arafat) or being the enemy (lesbians).⁵⁰ Continuing this train of thought, lesbianism constitutes treason.⁵¹

The link, however, between leftist politics and feminist lesbianism is by no means a given. Indeed, with the growth of the lesbian feminist community, and perhaps also with its increased acceptance in the general population, the “official” or stated connection is all but disappearing.⁵² Lesbian feminists are not necessarily leftist activists, although many would probably position themselves in the liberal Left. Lesbians joining the community today are often exploring feminism and lesbianism simultaneously rather than coming to lesbianism through feminism. If we are to take CLaF as a gauge of the issues currently concerning the lesbian community—insofar as CLaF represents an organized and self-defined feminist constituency—feminist politics continue to inform its policies and activities, yet it is not the same form of progressive or radical feminist politics. CLaF’s recent activities express values of a type of “cultural feminism,” the activities and discourse focusing on the centrality of women, the representation of all groups or kinds of women, and the celebration of women’s culture and community. One could argue, as some do, that CLaF’s current agenda is a liberal feminist one, working to guarantee lesbian access to what is available to heterosexual woman. Subsequently there is a shift away from the politics of “radical feminism” that would make national politics central, or rather antinationalist politics.

But there is more at work here. The focus in CLaF’s activities on relationships, on motherhood, on wanting to become mothers, on families, is an expression of the desires of CLaF’s members. These issues reflect the daily reality of many Israeli lesbians. These concerns, however, are socially mediated and nationally constructed. Sylvie Fogiel-Bijaoui, in her thorough analysis of Israeli familism (*mishpakhtiyut*) and the Israeli family, demonstrates how the values represented in the previously discussed Israeli laws, the Women’s Equal Rights and Security Services laws, are reflected or play out very vividly in Israeli society to this day. Fogiel-Bijaoui notes that while marriage rates among Israeli Jews have gone down slightly over the past twenty years, this change is insignificant in light of the fact that Israel’s marriage rates are still among the highest in a comparison of twenty-one postindustrial countries, the divorce rate is among the lowest, and the birthrate is by far the highest.⁵³ “Israel” she writes,

is a familist society. Familism is the centrality of the family in the life of the individual and the general [public]. [Familism] assumes that there is a division of authority and labor that renders the man superior over the woman, and she is dependent on the man. The woman is defined first as a mother and wife, and her first obligation is to bear children, take care of her household, and her family members, and only after the fulfillment of these obligations is her financial contribution to the family “understood.” My main argument is that the centrality of the family institution in the life of the individual strongly correlates with the centrality of the family institution in the life of the general [public], the national-religious collective.⁵⁴

On the connection between the individual and the collective Dafna Izraeli has written,

Motherhood in Israel is more than a family role: it is a national role. Jewish women are expected to give birth not only for the purpose of building a family of their own, but also for the purpose of enlarging the [Jewish] population, in order to raise future soldiers and propagate the people [of Israel].⁵⁵

Thus, whether deliberately or not (and I would suggest that both are true sometimes), as an organization, CLaF has positioned itself within the mainstream, as part of the Zionist pantheon, rather than in opposition to it. CLaF effectively adopted positions women traditionally and prescriptively occupied in the Yishuv and continue to occupy in Israel. CLaF's political efforts toward securing recognition for lesbian relationships and families, and guaranteeing lesbians equal access to reproductive technologies, are effectively guaranteeing lesbians the same rights as heterosexual women to participate, in Lesley Hazelton's telling phrase, in “the cult of fertility,”⁵⁶ or in Yuval-Davis's terms, lesbians too can be “bearers of the collective.”⁵⁷

Lesbian activism has ensured lesbians access to fertility treatments equal to that of heterosexual women.⁵⁸ Until a 1997 ruling lesbians had to hide their sexual orientation and claim that they were single in order to receive treatment at fertility clinics (all of which are nationally funded). More recently, in a preliminary ruling the Tel Aviv family court recognized a lesbian family granting guardianship to each of the women in the couple over her nonbiological children.

In presenting lesbian and gay issues before the public, the Knesset, and the courts, lesbian (and gay) representatives have stressed their “sameness,” as it were; they emphasized that they were as *Israeli* as the next person, that gays and lesbians paid taxes and served in the military. The concerns the community has chosen to advance are precisely those that enable and support prescribed and presumably socially desirable roles—men are soldiers; women are mothers

(eventually of soldiers). All strive to create and maintain a family unit. “[I]n Israel,” writes Bat-Ami Bar On, “the Jewish-Israeli family has been among the material and ideological cornerstones of the Zionist nation-building project.”⁵⁹

Dana International notwithstanding, lesbians and gay men, whether self-appointed or chosen by the community, made themselves and the community palatable to the public. As coined in the local gay press, what the community offered the general public was *homoim straitim*—straight homosexuals.⁶⁰

At a recent CLaF event, publicized as a Friday afternoon social event on the issue of relationships, one of the main activities was a panel on the topic of relationships. Four panelists were chosen to present different views. Three presentations assumed the centrality of relationships in lesbian lives. The fourth panelist, a woman in her early twenties, questioned both that assumption and the emphasis placed in the community on the topic in general. She asked the participants to consider why it was assumed that monogamous and long-term relationships were desirable and were being pursued by all. She charged that these assumptions excluded and delegitimized any and all other alternatives, and silenced those who disagreed with the assumptions and lived differently. She argued that lesbian identity was by definition outside the normative construction of gender. Seen as other also by the general population, lesbians had the opportunity to do something different, to live differently. They had the option to refuse to participate in the overdetermined construction and centrality of the family in the national imagination. To take her argument further, lesbians, whether because of how they were perceived or their self-perception, could actually choose to exist outside, to use Hazelton’s coinage, “the cult of fertility.” To fully appreciate this option we need to understand the magnitude of this “cult.”

Israel spends more on fertility treatments than any other Western country, and its birthrate remains highest among postindustrial nations.⁶¹ Its (effectively) national health service provides free of charge extensive and quite costly fertility treatments, including IVE. Israel boasts the only positive Jewish birth rate internationally.⁶² Historically this has been explained as a collective effort to bolster the Jewish people after the devastation of the Holocaust, in addition to the “demographic war” in Israel between Jews and Palestinians. Today, both justifications are still in use. Parents, or rather mothers, continue to receive a monthly allowance for each child, and that allowance increases exponentially beginning with the fourth child, an increase that I am not suggesting motivates couples to have more children, although it certainly rewards those who do.

I suggest, then, that the current expectation and the enormous pressure to wed and bear children stems from the perception that becoming wives and mothers continues to constitute the role of women, even though national survival is no longer at stake (although many continue to argue that the demographic war between Jews and Palestinians continues). In a recent Hebrew University class on the topic of education, militarism, and peace, a student suggested that the traditional Israeli gender roles are no longer pertinent. The professor retorted: “Try being a woman in this country and not

bearing a child. Try being a woman in this country and not bearing at least two children.”⁶³

Israeli lesbians nevertheless, however, occupy a liminal, and a potentially subversive position vis-à-vis the cult of fertility. Historically, in the United States, gay and lesbian identity was seen as inherently contradictory to the notion and reality of family. Lesbian and gay were sexual identities, precluding stability, children, and family.⁶⁴ This was no different in Israel. Since the mid-1980s the Aguda has sent representatives of the gay and lesbian community to speak about homosexuality to various groups such as university psychology classes, teacher workshops, social workers, etc. Invariably one of the first questions asked of the lesbian speaker was: “What, you don’t want children?” (and, not coincidentally, the gay man was questioned about his army experience).⁶⁵ In the Israeli context, then, it was presupposed that a woman would want children and that lesbian identity or life precluded the possibility. Historically lesbians accepted this view. Yet since the late 1990s the Israeli lesbian community is experiencing a baby boom. Subsequently, it appears that bearing children has somewhat changed the way in which lesbians are perceived by mainstream society. By bearing children, women “escape” their sexual identity as lesbians and enter the most desirable and respected role for Israeli women—that of mothers.⁶⁶ Several lesbian mothers have told me that after having children, they felt accepted by society in an entirely different way.

Considering again the aforementioned panel, the criticism raised by one of the panelists points to acceptance of the first presumption: that women, even lesbians, want and should have children. I would venture to say that the panelist’s and my own critique is not about any individual desire to create a lesbian family, nor is it a critique of the efforts of the lesbian community to enable the possibility in terms of accessibility, and legal protection and recognition. The critique attends to the unreflective focus on these issues, almost to the exclusion of all else. In addition, my own critique is to the even more disturbing way in which families produced by lesbians do not only replicate heterosexual models, they possibly reify the very *biological* paradigm of heterosexuality. Conversely, the rejection of this paradigm—one father, one mother, and a child’s biological relation to both—is the very premise of lesbian families.

Presumably a lesbian family is both a reconfiguration of the makeup of a family and a rearticulation of the meaning of parenthood, at the very least challenging the role of biology, for its very premise is that a family does not imply necessarily a (biological) mother and a (biological) father. In the Israeli lesbian community, however, biology carries immense weight in several ways. In many Israeli lesbian couples with kids, the biological mother is the one, and the only one, given the title *Ima* (mother/mommy) by the couple. The partner/nonbiological parent is referred to by some other name or by her first name. This may seem insignificant, but it is in fact telling of the deep-seated belief in the notion, “mom—there is only one.” The commonly used Hebrew idiom—*Ima yesh rak akhat*—speaks to the social (rather than biological) unique-

ness or irreplaceability of one's mother. In Israeli society, where families and family life play a central role and women are still primarily seen as mothers, the idiom carries a tremendous amount of weight and meaning. There is no equivalent idiom regarding fathers. In the context of the debate on lesbian families and the possibility of having two mothers the idiom is often voiced to express the impossibility of having more than one mother.

In the Israel Supreme Court case⁶⁷ regarding whether the state is required to recognize a second-parent adoption granted abroad, the state argued that it was technically, legally, and biologically impossible to have two mothers.⁶⁸ In essence, the refusal to give the nonbiological mother the title of "mom" is to conflate the biological role (bearing the child) with the social role (of being a female parent). In cases of adoption, there is no such conflation and it is widely accepted that the adoptive mother is *ima l'khol davar* (ima in every way). Yet in the case of two female parents there is often such a conflation, as illustrated by the lawyer for the state and by a palpable, if not dominant, attitude in the lesbian community. Such a conflation is a deferral to the heterosexual model of one female parent, and a misuse of the idiom "Mother, there is only one."

In addition, the insistence I have witnessed, particularly on the part of biological mothers, to maintain the distinction between the biological mom and the nonbiological mom bears out the importance placed on bearing children in Israeli society in general. It is possible to argue that in Israel the "institution" of (biological) motherhood is a citizen-certifying institution. And a biological mother does not readily give up her entitlement to citizenship. One could, and does, counter that the biological mother does not give up the entitlement; she shares it. But apparently sharing is not possible—entitlement is not transferable between unmarried people of the same gender. Both lesbians and straight Israelis are apt to ask a lesbian couple with children (in the typically unabashed Israeli way), "Who is the mother?" and if one should answer, "We are both mothers," they will insist again, "But who is the *real* mother?"

Given, then, precisely the weight of the title *Ima* in Israeli culture, conferring the title only on the "real" mother continuously reproduces and reenacts the different relationships between the children and the two mothers, and reifies the heterosexual model of parenting. The constructed nature of "Ima" is brought into sharp relief by the following situation: an Israeli lesbian couple adopts a child from abroad. In compliance with the adoption code, only one woman legally adopts the child, though the couple fully shares the adoption experience and raising the child. They consider themselves a family, yet the legal adoptive mother is referred to as "Ima," and the non-legal adoptive mother is called by her first name. How has this decision come about? "*Ima, yesh rak akhat.*"⁶⁹

The internalization of the "biological" paradigm is then reflected outwardly. The lesbian community, in its political efforts, emphasizes its "sameness" vis-à-vis the heterosexual public. In presenting and representing itself the lesbian

community puts forth its “best face,” the “showcase” as one panelist phrased it—the perfect family: professional, middle class, mostly Ashkenazi. In short, but crucially, a family that could “pass.”⁷⁰ And while “passing families” have garnered support for the gay and lesbian community, the very act of passing as the same is an act of self-negation and self-defeat. For, ultimately, when lesbians hold themselves up against the aforementioned paradigm, they always fail to be the same. And what of those who do not pass, asks the panelist? What of those who choose not to pass? In the process of defining and articulating an identity, who has been “othered”? And I have to ask, what does the alternative the fourth panelist suggested look like?

LESBIAN SPEECH ACTS: SAMENESS AND DIFFERENCE

Borrowing Eve Sedgwick and Judith Butler’s employment of the terms, carving out an independent identity can be facilitated, through performative acts and performative speech acts. Butler and Sedgwick’s work on the performative opens up a space for gays and lesbians to work, as it were, within the system against the system. In the following vignettes, I propose that there is a performative moment—in the “saying” there is a “doing.” The events described produce a change in the condition of things, whether in the actual legal and social status of queers, the attitude toward them, or their own sense of identity.

QUEER SPEECH ACT #1

On February 10, 1992, Member of Knesset (M.K.) Yael Dayan rocked the Knesset floor. In a discussion on gays and lesbians in the military, Dayan declared that “Shmuel Hanagid . . . was gay, and Shlomo Even-Gvirol and Yehudah Halevi wrote homosexual poetry.” Her remarks galvanized the slumbering house: “Where did you get that?” yelled M.K. Chanan Porat.⁷¹ “Where do you see that Yehuda Halevi wrote homosexual poetry?” Dayan proceeded to enumerate an impressive list of “gay” historical figures, the likes of Walt Whitman and Leonardo da Vinci. M.K. Eli Goldshmit⁷² interjected that “David and Jonathan were also homosexual.” “I will get to them,” responded Dayan, to which Porat warned, “Not everything is legitimate.” The Knesset chair, Anat Ma’or, reminded Porat that “everything is legitimate within the time allotted for speakers.” The floor appeared to calm down until Dayan concluded her remarks quoting from II Samuel, 1: “How have the mighty fallen in the thick of battle—Jonathan, slain on your heights.” Porat emphatically interrupted, “Don’t do it . . .” Dayan continues: “I grieve for you, my brother Jonathan, you were most dear to me. Your love was wonderful to me more than the love of women.” Porat now yelled: “Don’t do it, chutzpah, it is scandalous to speak about David and Jonathan in this way. Who gave you the right!”⁷³

Whether David and Jonathan actually engaged in sexual relations or not remains immaterial. Yet, posing the option enables, and requires, that we inter-

rogate basic assumptions regarding normative biblical practices—the assumption that Leviticus 18 in fact constitutes a prohibition against homosexuality—and contemporary cultural attitudes that rest on the presumption of these same norms. Judging from the outraged (and outrageous) responses of those who objected to Dayan’s interpretation, challenging the heretofore normative interpretation of the biblical attitude on homosexual behavior is central to the discussion of gay rights. A homoerotic interpretation, particularly in light of emphatic denouncements voiced by several Knesset members,⁷⁴ serves as an intervention in “heterosexual-at-all costs” paradigmatic embrace of Jewish historicity, and most importantly, an intervention in the Israeli religious political bloc’s claim to Jewish authenticity and authority. Such interventions can create new parameters and simultaneously declare them always already ambiguous and temporal. Thus, the effect of Dayan’s evocation of the biblical characters (suggested to her by a Ilan Sheinfeld, poet and gay activist) was twofold: first to destabilize the conventional model of interpretation, and following that, establishing a claim, Jewishly and historically specific, to homosexuality and homoeroticism.

QUEER SPEECH ACT #2

In June 1992, as part of Gay Pride week events, the Aguda held a demonstration/Bar Mitzvah celebration at *Hurshat Lahav* (Lahav Grove) north of Beer-Sheva. The occasion was the thirteenth anniversary of a grove of three thousand trees, the funds for which were donated to the Jewish National Fund by the International Council for Gay and Lesbian Jewish Organizations. The JNF gladly received this donation, but contrary to its standard policy, the JNF refused to exhibit publicly a plaque honoring the donors. There were approximately two dozen gays and lesbians at this demonstration. The organizers boasted this as the first gay and lesbian demonstration ever in Israel, remarkable for its public nature if not its size.⁷⁵

The speaker, Liora Moriel, then chair of the Aguda, used the Hebrew language in some sense against itself: three-thousand *etz v’etza* were the site and cause of this demonstration/celebration she declared. In Hebrew, “tree” is a masculine noun. All nouns are gendered, making the options for representation limited and predetermined. Moriel highlighted the way in which women are often subsumed in the generic masculine. In one more attempt to force Hebrew language and Hebrew culture to recognize queer particularity, the demonstrators sang “happy birthday” to the three thousand trees *im netiyot* (with [sexual] tendencies, and a play on the word plantings—as one reporter humorously phrased it) and in the stead of *yom huledet same’ah* (happy birthday) *yom huledet aliz* was inserted, in an attempt to capitalize on the Hebrew word for gay-*aliz* (that never really caught on as a code word).

More than a queer event, the moment was recognizably Israeli. Zionist and Jewish education (indoctrination?) determined the format of this protest.

As one of the organizers emphatically explained: for someone from the outside this attention paid to a bunch of trees may seem bizarre, “but this struggle is not about trees, this is a struggle for our lives. If it is impossible to write lesbians and gays on a plaque, it means that we continue to be transparent, to not exist.”⁷⁶ In Israel, where trees and land come to represent bodies and names, the invisibility of “queer trees” signified an explicitly Israeli queer crisis. Since the early years of modern Zionism the donation and planting of trees signified an act of national pride and necessity. It constituted the physical and emotional reclamation of the historical homeland of the Jews, operating under the false assumption that the land was unoccupied. The present demonstration grew out of this historical context and the participants positioned themselves within this particular Zionist discourse. While precisely for these reasons the practice of planting trees is problematic for the political Left⁷⁷ and perhaps even for some politically left gays and lesbians, it is evident, however, that the gay community wished to assert and authenticate its Zionist credentials.⁷⁸

QUEER SPEECH ACT # 3

In December 1998, the Israeli Ministry of Education held a national fair on the topic of its theme for the 1998–1999 and 1999–2000 school years: “The Right to [be given] Respect and the Obligation to respect [others]” (*Ha-zkhut le-khavod ve-hakhova le-khabed*). The topic was chosen, and articulated as it was, because of growing awareness among educators that cultural, religious, and economic division in Israeli society and among Israeli youth, rather than disappearing, was becoming increasingly delineated. CLaF applied to set up a booth at the fair with the intention of presenting educational materials capitalizing on the educational theme, and introducing sexual orientation as an issue meriting education and respect. CLaF members believed also that the very presence of a CLaF booth would be an educational tool. CLaF’s application was summarily denied. The chairperson of the Pedagogical Secretariat at the Ministry of Education, Professor Ozer Shild, explained to CLaF representatives that “the ministry gave preference to families that bear children.”⁷⁹ CLaF turned to the Supreme Court for relief but its appeal was denied review. The Ministry of Education spokesperson agreed to meet with CLaF representatives, and although he assured them he would not prevent them from distributing educational materials at the fair, he could not permit them a booth “for fear that the fair would turn into a riotous bazaar.”⁸⁰

CLaF called for a demonstration on the first day of the fair. Between 100 and 150 protestors, two-thirds of whom were women, convened outside the main entrance to *Binyanei Ha-uma*, Jerusalem’s national convention center, where the fair was to be held. Equipped with gay pride flags, rainbow-colored balloons, leaflets and stickers stating that lesbians and gay men also deserved respect, Israel’s queer communities joined forces to claim their role and stake in mainstream education, both as educators and as subject matter. “Amongst the [male] teachers

there are gay men too; amongst the [female] teachers there are lesbians too,” they chanted (*bein ha-morim yesh homoim; bein ha-morot yesh lesbiot*). Several supportive Members of Knesset worked their way through the crowd, shaking hands, expressing their support, their presence suggesting both the spread of support for gay issues and the electoral power of the gay community.

On this cold and wet December night during the holiday of Hanukkah the protesters deliberately positioned themselves within a Jewish and Israeli cultural context as they repeatedly sang and danced to one of the traditional holiday songs: *banu hoshekh le-garesh*: “We’ve come to banish the darkness, in our hands are light and fire. Each of us is a small light and all together a mighty one. Darkness! Be banished, give way to the light!” Emboldened by their numbers, and perhaps a bit by the cold and a feeling that some action needed to be taken after chanting for an hour, the protestors marched toward the doors. The security guards put on airs of gravity, violently preventing the entrance of members of the community. This lent the protestors’ attempts to enter a sense of necessity. Those who succeeded in entering the building paraded through the brightly lit fair halls in a continuous chant. And yet, somehow, the chanting was enveloped in an eerie quietude and peace, as if the bright fluorescent lighting already managed to banish some of the “darkness” challenged outside the doors, and at the same time abruptly exposed the demonstrators. The mere entrance and unremarkable presence of the protesters who succeeded in forcing their admittance illuminated the preposterousness of keeping the protesters out in the first place. The chanting men and women were alternately met by blank stares and applause. After circling the fair, they marched back out.

CONCLUSION: BEING AS GENDER TROUBLE

Implicit in each of these vignettes are the struggles of Israeli lesbians and gay men, and all other involved in antihomophobic work, to construct and articulate queer identities vis-à-vis Israeli and Jewish identities.

I began this chapter stating that Israeli lesbians emerge against a Zionist backdrop. The backdrop has merged with the foreground as Israeli society continues to engage in constant struggle and debate regarding what constitutes Jewishness, what constitutes Israeliness, and most significantly, who is authorized to judge. It is precisely these issues that the vignettes address. These vignettes occasion an examination of the possibilities of creating “gender trouble” in the spaces opened up by Israel lesbian (and gay) performatives and performative speech acts. In each incident lesbians and gay men unsettled the normativity of Jewish and Israeli identity and the range of meaning given to both identities simply by *being* lesbian and gay Israeli Jews and insisting on the intersection of those identities.

I take you back for another visit to the CLaF panel on relationships. The first panelist made an impassioned defense of the relationship “which is not

one,” accusing Israeli heterosexist society of maintaining the closetedness of lesbian relationships. The homophobia and heterosexism the panelist addressed are no doubt real and palpable. Nevertheless, in assuming the necessity to remain closeted because of a concern for the discomfort of one’s friends, neighbors, doctor, the children’s teacher, the panelist exhibited her own internalized homophobia and heterosexism, more so than the presumed heterosexism and homophobia of the straight public. Furthermore, in describing a situation where the panelist felt she could not participate in a discussion “about what one did with one’s family over the weekend,” the panelist was in fact presupposing others’ homophobia and conceding to it.

As I listened to the panelist’s impassioned and furious call for empathy I was reminded that the continuous act of coming out is an act of great faith and almost paralyzing fear. Fear—because your experience teaches you that you most likely will be misread. Faith—because you must believe that your deliberate and deliberately political act will be read at all. And I wondered, what if? What if once a day, or once a week, or once a month, or whenever, this panelist and the multitudes of Israeli gays and lesbians refused to be paralyzed by fear, presupposed neither homophobia nor heterosexism, and dared to create gender trouble by merely daring to *be* and by definition *being* different?

Ironically, it is the overriding ethos of Israeli political and judicial liberalism that has allowed and continues to afford Israeli lesbians and gay men more “difference” than they have ever dared to assert and demand for themselves.

NOTES

1. The name *Bnot Pesia* can be understood as both The Daughters of Pesia or The Pesia Girls. Importantly, the group had its start going drag in gay clubs. Today, as they have become mainstream they are seen, and importantly present themselves, less as a drag group and more as performers who happen to do drag.

2. This image of Israeliness is to a large degree shared also by Palestinians, both Israeli citizens and those in the occupied territories.

3. Perhaps a more accurate description than a concern for egalitarianism is the notion that women could strive to do the “important” jobs that men did. There was never any discussion regarding the possibility of men assuming traditionally female roles. For a discussion on the failure to make the exchange of roles reciprocal see, Ariella Friedman, “On Feminism, Femininity, and the Power of Women in Israel” [Hebrew], in *Sex, Gender, and Politics*, ed. Dafna Izraeli et al. (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1999), 19–47, especially 24–28.

4. Feminist scholarship over the last twenty years has attended to the relation between gender and the Zionist project and the Jewish state, and has demonstrated both the ways in which the issue of gender was ignored in Zionist historiography, and the extent to which the gendered ideology produced and conferred Israeli citizenship quite differently upon its male and female subjects. This literature has and continues to grow exponentially. Interestingly, and perhaps tellingly, much of the scholarship in

Hebrew has been in the form of articles rather than full-length books, and the few academic books are anthologies. See for example, ed. Dafna Israeli et al. *Women Entrapped: On the Condition of Women in Israel* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1982). For an extensive bibliography in Hebrew, see bibliography in, Dafna Israeli et al., *Sex, Gender, Politics* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1999, 2000), 357–68.

5. Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women in War* (New York: Basic Books, 1987).

6. Nira Yuval Davis, “The Bearers of the Collective: Women and Religious Legislation in Israel,” *Feminist Review* 11, no. 4 (1980): 15–27.

7. Although Israel is the only country in the world with mandatory conscription for women, the widespread enlistment of women in the military, presumably alongside men, has done nothing to alter the predominant paradigm of men as “just warriors” and women as “beautiful souls.” Indeed, the opposite has been persuasively argued: the military further exacerbates gender distinctions in Israel. See Orna Sasson Levi, “Resistance within Oppression: The Construction of Gender Identities Among Women Soldiers in ‘Male’ Occupations,” [Hebrew] forthcoming in Yael Atzmon, ed., *Hatishma Koli: Representations of Women in Israeli Culture* (Jerusalem: Van Leer); Dafna Israeli, “Gendering Military Service in the Israeli Defense Forces,” in *Israel Social Science Research* 12, no. 1 (in press); Nira Yuval-Davis, “Front and Rear: The Sexual Division of Labor in the Israeli Army,” *Feminist Studies* 11, no. 3 (Fall 1985): 649–76.

8. See for example Anita Shapira, *New Jews Old Jews* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1997); Amnon Rubinstein, *From Herzl to Rabin: 100 Years of Zionism* (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1997); Shmuel Almog, *Zionism and History: The Rise of a New Jewish Consciousness* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1987); Eliezer Schweid, *From Judaism to Zionism, From Zionism to Judaism* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Hasifriya Hatsiyonit, 1984); David Biale, *Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History* (New York: Schocken, 1986), 118–76; Ehud Luz, *Parallels Meet: Religion and Nationalism in the Early Zionist Movement, 1882–1904* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1988).

9. At least since the publication of Lesley Hazleton’s book *Israeli Women: The Reality Behind the Myths* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977). See also Barbara Swirski and Marilyn P. Safir, eds., *The Equality Bluff: Women in Israel* (Elmsford, NY: Pergamon Press, 1991); Yael Azmon and Dafna N. Israeli, eds., “Women in Israel,” *Studies of Israeli Society* 6 (1993).

10. The work of Shapira and Rubinstein fits into this category.

11. Quoted in Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Freud’s Moses: Judaism Terminable and Interminable* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1991), 12–13.

12. Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley: U of California, 1997), 271.

13. This phraseology is borrowed from Naomi Seidman. See, Seidman, *A Marriage Made in Heaven: The Sexual Politics of Hebrew and Yiddish* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1997), 1–11, 102–31. For more examples of this kind of scholarship, see David Biale, “Zionism as an Erotic Revolution,” in *Eros and the Jews* (New York: Basic Books, 1992) 176–203; Daniel Boyarin, “Colonial Drag: Zionism, Gender, and Mimicry” [Hebrew], *Theory and Criticism* no. 11 (Winter 1997): 123–44; Michael Gluzman, “Longing for Heterosexuality: Zionism and Sexuality in Herzl’s *Altneuland*” [Hebrew], *Theory and Criticism* no. 11 (Winter 1997): 145–62; Marjorie Garber, “Jew, Woman, Homosexual,” in *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing as Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Jacob Press, “Same-Sex Unions in Modern Europe: *Daniel Deronda*, *Altneuland*, and the

Homoerotics of Jewish Nationalism,” in *Novel Gazing*, ed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (Durham: Duke UP, 1997).

14. On this see, Marjorie Garber, “Jew, Woman, Homosexual,” in *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing as Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 224.

15. One could argue that the hyper-masculine new Jew is not only a heterosexual and homophobic response to the diasporic image of the Jew. The cultural and ideological climate of the time and place, and even the demographics, lend themselves to homosocial elements in Zionist imagery. Herzl’s image of the bronzed worker, his bulging muscles rippling in the Eretz Israeli sun, was his vision of the new Jewish man, retrieved from the emasculated Jewish Diaspora. But if, however, Herzl wished to disrupt and sever the conflation of the Jew with the queer in fin de siècle Europe, Herzl’s masculinized vision did not necessarily also heterosexualize that image. We cannot ignore the homoerotic elements in Herzl’s revision of the Jew. Herzl’s image, and following that the image of the *shomer*, could be in a sense merely a more tolerable image of queerness. In other words, the bronzed, bare-chested Jewish worker in Eretz Israel, his muscles glistening in the hot sun, could very well constitute a gay male fantasy and another way of being male and passing. Recent exhibits of Zionist photography provide ample images available for queer imagining.

16. While it is true that in the Yishuv (Jewish settlement in Palestine 1880–1948) some women worked in nontraditional occupations, most were relegated to the traditional domestic roles. A close reading of the ideology suggests that the discussion of egalitarianism pertained to class issues rather than gender. A. D. Gordon, who coined the notion of the “religion of labor,” specified that women should be trained in such a way that would enable them to maintain a household. For a further discussion see, Deborah Bernstein, *The Struggle for Equality: Women Workers in the Palestine ‘Yishuv’* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1987).

17. Regarding the queer community in Israel this point is mentioned by Harel in “The Rise and Fall of the Israeli Gay Legal Revolution,” *Columbia Human Rights Law Review*, forthcoming, and by Lee Walzer in his book *Between Sodom and Eden: A Journey Through Today’s Changing Israel* (New York: Columbia UP, 2000), 1–12.

18. The use of the term *Israeli gay and lesbian community* requires explanation. I use the term because it is representative of some form of community, even if this so-called community is ever changing with multiple and overlapping segments and fuzzy boundaries. Moreover, the term *the community* is used by Israeli lesbians and gay men to refer to a body that they do or do not relate to in different ways. In this study I speak to and of those who fall into this category.

19. Until 1988 homosexual sodomy was a criminal act under Israeli law (see discussion below). The ostensible coerced closetedness was in fact embraced by a significant number of the members for many years. It was only ten years after the decriminalization of homosexuality that the organization changed its name to The Association of Gay Men, Lesbians, Bisexuals and Transgender in Israel.

20. For further discussion on the change in the law see Harel, “The Rise and Fall,” pages 11–14 and notes 38–43.

21. There has been considerable speculation regarding the conditions that made legislative change possible at the particular moments in which these changes occurred—for example, whether Likud or Labor governments are more favorable for the passage of antihomophobic legislation. It has also been noted that gay support is not limited to members of left-wing parties (and for that matter, nor is homophobia limited

to the right). For more on the “political moment” and on the support base for pro-gay legislation see Walzer, *Between Sodom*, 16–25; Harel, “The Rise and Fall,” 14–16.

22. At numerous events, whether widely publicized or not, it is common to see participants duck at the sight of a video camera. At private parties or small gatherings one will ask if there is any one present who wishes not to be taped or photographed. I am repeatedly surprised when invariably there are those who request not to be documented. Use of only first names and/or initials is still a common practice in gay and lesbian publications. This condition of closetedness is frequently discussed and lamented, particularly by those who are generally out. I should also say that while I find the degree of closetedness politically debilitating, I can also empathize with the fear of the very “yellow” and voyeuristic Israeli media, if less so with the fear of one’s family’s reaction.

23. If this sounds too generous, while I understand the reasons for Israeli closetedness, I neither justify nor accept it. Moreover, I believe most of the fears held by Israeli gays and lesbians are misguided and at the very least exaggerated.

24. Visibility is an important issue for gay and lesbian activists everywhere. In Israel, the community has struggled at once to set itself apart from the national collective and to position itself as part of Israeli collectivity. Once again, this is similar to the struggle in other places. The difference is perhaps in the degree of national identification in any given community. In Israel, as I will argue, identification with the nation remains strong.

25. Adoption of the biological or nonbiological children of a lesbian by her lesbian partner is termed “second-parent adoption.” This applies also to adoption by two gay men. This type of adoption, available in some of the United States, does not replace the mother with the adoptive mother. Rather, it gives both women the legal status of “parent” with all the attendant rights and responsibilities. In Israel this is not yet possible.

26. In the summer of 1998, following the initiative of a transgender member of the Aguda and the Aguda board, the Aguda added “Transgender” to its name.

27. In the CLaF magazine’s issue following Dana International’s victory, the editorial board did not assume that lesbians would necessarily feel affinity with International or take lesbian pride in her victory. Initially many lesbian feminists objected to Dana International as antifeminist and as one who reifies sexist standards. Apparently the board thought lesbians should embrace Dana International and in an editorial explained why.

28. The Stonewall Riots in June 1969 marked the beginning of the gay rights movement. Since that time gay pride events take place annually during the month of June. Cite from Aeyal Gross, “The Day We Burst Through the Closet Doors,” *Pink Times* no. 32 (May 1999), 7. For detailed description of the events, see “The Israeli Stonewall,” *Pink Times* no. 21 (June 1998), 7–15.

29. Aeyal Gross, “The Day We Burst Through the Closet Doors,” *Pink Times* no. 32 (May 1999), 7.

30. It is also true that the allusion to two thousand years of oppression is invoked by the right wing as a justification for violating the rights of others, specifically the rights of Palestinians.

31. In June 1999, the city of Tel Aviv participated in the pride events. The parade route from City Hall to a city park was lined with gay pride flags hung by the city. Participants in the parade and ensuing party numbered in the tens of thousands.

32. For instance, in 1997 Ezer Weizman, Israel's then president, made homophobic comments during a speech to high school students. Lesbians and gay men coordinated the community's protest, albeit even in this case they differed as to their approach. Several of the lesbians with whom I discussed these events charged the gay men involved with sexist, dogmatic behavior.

33. There is a play on words here. *Claf* means card. One of the idiomatic meanings of *Claf Hazak* could be having in one's possession a strong bargaining card.

34. Sharp disagreements on the issue were also voiced at the First Lesbian Conference, and led to an angry discussion between "old guard" lesbian feminists and lesbians who did not believe lesbianism had anything to do with feminism. One woman argued that "feminist" should be taken out of the name of the organization. For a description of the events and a fuller account of the tensions between feminism and lesbianism in Israel see, "Heterosexuality and Lesbians in the Feminist Struggle in Israel" [Hebrew], in *Just Once*, ed. Hayim Rosani-Por (Jerusalem: Hadassah College, 1998), 41–44. (The author of this article requested that the publisher of the collection withhold her name.)

35. In this discussion, while I refer to *the* lesbian (and gay) community, I wish to note that there are numerous communities, which overlap and intersect in fluid ways. Here I am referring to a very particular community or part of "the community" (as members refer to it), specifically those self-identified lesbians involved to varying degrees with queer organizations in Israel, most often but not limited to CLaF. These women are involved, to greater or lesser extents, in the political work and social activities of the community. There are those who also challenge CLaF's authority, mandate, or attempt to represent or speak for all Israeli lesbians. In an opinion piece questioning CLaF's monopoly on lesbian representation, Yael Ben-Tsvi argues that CLaF ultimately silences many lesbian voices by presuming to define lesbianism (in its particular feminist lesbian way) and by claiming to represent all lesbians. See "Home and Garden," *Pink Times* no. 4 (January 1997), 3.

In Tel Aviv there is also a vibrant bar scene. During the 1980s the worlds of CLaF and the bar scene were entirely separate. Since the mid-1990s the demarcation is less sharp. In addition there are also many lesbians, some self-identified, many not, who socialize in small lesbian circles but do not participate in the lesbian community *per se*. Several women with whom I've spoken suggest that these women constitute the largest single group of Israeli lesbians.

36. Nira Yuval-Davis's early and continuous contributions to a feminist analysis on Israeli nationalism have received much less than their due recognition. Currently, however, her work informs all the research done in this area. See for example, "The Bearers of the Collective: Women and Religious Legislation in Israel," *Feminist Review* 11, no. 4 (1980): 15–27; "Front and Rear: The Sexual Division of Labor in the Israeli Army," *Feminist Studies* 11, no. 3 (Fall 1985): 649–76.

37. Berkovitch, 31–34.

38. Knesset Protocols, vol. 2 (1949) 1559, cited in Berkovitch, 32.

39. Fictitious marriages such as those entered into in the United States for immigration purposes.

40. Contrary to the common perception that marriage and childbearing are part of the private domain, in Israel both of these are women's national duty and hence quite public. Susan Sered vividly documents how women's bodies and childbearing are made public as the medical establishment scrutinizes women's bodies, finds women and

their bodies as not up to the task of childbearing, and subsequently takes control for the benefit of the collective. A woman's desire, for example, to give birth at home or her insistence on breastfeeding are considered selfish and a threat to the collective Israeli body. See Susan Sered, "The Reproductive Body," in *What Makes Women Sick? Maternity, Modesty, and Militarism* (Hanover and London: Brandeis UP, 2000), 42–45, 61–67.

41. Knesset Protocols 13, vol. 19 (1993) 3712. Cited in Berkovitch, 12.

42. Article in *Yediot* Internet site, December 5, 2000, www.Ynet.co.il. Ze'ev's comment was made during an interrogation of Shas' practice of contacting women who sought abortions and pressuring them to reconsider. In Israel, abortions are state funded but women have to seek the approval of and referral from a state-sponsored committee. Apparently Shas had abused its power in the Ministry of Health and obtained lists of the women who had turned to the committee. Shas then justified its actions as safeguarding national interests. Considering Shas' religious convictions and its ambiguous relationship to the Israeli national collective, this argument may be hypocritical regarding participation in the military, but it is illustrative of the deep-seated notion of women's role in the state.

43. To my knowledge there were no objections raised before or after publication of this issue of the magazine.

44. An unofficial assessment by one of the members Women in Black suggested that lesbians accounted for at least 40 percent of the Jewish women involved in Women in Black, a weekly vigil against the occupation, begun in early 1988, two months after the beginning of the Intifada.

45. Andrew Parker et al., eds., *Nationalisms and Sexualities* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 5.

46. Anne McClintock, "No Longer in a Future Heaven: Women and Nationalism in South Africa," *Transition* 51 (1991): 120. Cited in Parker, 6.

47. Tracy Moore, ed., *Lesbiot: Israeli Lesbians Talk about Sexuality, Feminism, Judaism, and Their Lives* (London, New York: Cassell, 1995).

48. I should qualify here, as does the editor of the book, that the interviewees, contacted mostly by personal connections and word-of-mouth, are to a large degree a self-selected group. At the same time, they are representative of the "out" and self-defined lesbian community at the time at which the interviews took place.

49. Yael Yishai, in her study of the participation of women in the Israeli political discourse, suggests that Israeli national identity and feminist ideals are mutually exclusive. See particularly chapter 1 in Yael Yishai, *Between the Flag and the Banner: Women in Israeli Politics* (Albany: State U of New York P, 1997).

50. For an extensive discussion on Women in Black see Sarah Helena and Tamar Rapoport, "Women in Black and the Challenge to the Social Order," in *Theory and Criticism: An Israeli Forum* [Hebrew] 10 (Summer 1997); for an interesting analysis of the corporeal nature of the epithets, see Susan Sered, *What Makes Women Sick*, 140–41.

51. The sexualization of political moments is not limited to the sexualization of women. Men who stood in solidarity with Women in Black were called homosexuals. Recently, a caller to an Israeli talk show yelled at the host, whom he deemed too left wing: "Homo, Arabs fuck you at Independence Park." Being penetrated by Arabs appears to be the ultimate act of feminization, emasculation, and degradation of an Israeli Jewish man. I thank Tamir Sorek for bringing the recording of the talk show to my attention.

52. In the summer of 2000, CLaF member Orna Oshri sent out on the CLaF list serve a call to rally at Rabin Square in support of the current Camp David peace talks. A member of the list replied, "[This call] was sent to the CLaF list, but it has nothing to do with lesbian issues. It is purely political, and there are people on this list who are *extremely* opposed to your political agenda" (July 18, 2000 CLaF list serve e-mail exchange).

53. Fogiel-Bijaoui, "Families in Israeli," 130.

54. Fogiel-Bijaoui, "Families in Israel," 128.

55. Dafna Izraeli, "Culture, Policy, and Women in Israeli Families with Two Breadwinners" [Hebrew], in *Family and Thought: A Current Perspective on the Family*, ed. Veler and Cohen (Jerusalem: Ministry of Education, 1997), 83.

56. Hazleton, *Israeli Women: The Reality Behind the Myths* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977), chapter 2.

57. Nira Yuval-Davis, "The Bearers of the Collective: Women and Religious Legislation in Israel," *Feminist Studies*, 11 (1985): 15–27.

58. It should be noted that Israel spends more on fertility treatments than any other Western country.

59. Bat-Ami Bar On, "Sexuality, the Family and Nationalism," in *Feminism and Families*, ed. Hilde Lindeman Nelson (New York: Routledge, 1997), 221–341.

60. *The Pink Times*, a Queer monthly, recorded this debate in the community. It typically centers on political moments. After Israel's president Ezer Weizman's offensive comments and the political flurry that ensued, the community debated the nature of its response. There were those who charged the representatives of the community with being too apologetic and mainstream in their approach to the heterosexual public, attempting to "sell" themselves and the community as "straight" gays.

61. Alison Solomon, "Anything for a Baby: Reproductive Technology in Israel," in *Calling the Equality Bluff*, ed. Barbara Swirski and Marilyn Safir (New York: Pergamon Press, 1993), 102–107; Carmel Shalev, "Carrying Fetuses (Surrogacy)—The Traffic in Birthing Services" [Hebrew], *Bitahon Sotsyali* 46: 87–100; The topic of fertility is regularly discussed in the daily papers. For a more critical example, see Ruti Sinai, "Where's the Kid," *Ha'aretz*, Independence Day Magazine, May 9, 2000.

62. Average birth rate for postindustrial societies—1.8 children (a statistic from the eighties); in Israel 2.6 (mid 90s). *Hashnaton hastatisti le-yisrael*, 1996, no. 47, table 3.14.

63. Comment made by Professor Edna Lumski Feder during a lecture on "Military, War, Peace, and Education," Hebrew University, Fall 1998.

64. Justice White, in his decision in *Bowers v. Hardwick*, 478 U.S. 186 (1986), states that there is "[n]o connection between family, marriage, or procreation on the one hand and homosexuality on the other." See also Arlene Stein, *Sex and Sensibility: Stories of a Lesbian Generation* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1997), 123–53; also Ellen Lewin, *Lesbian Mothers: Accounts of Gender in American Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993).

65. This information was gleaned from discussions with several people who participated in the Aguda's speaker's bureau during the late 1980s and early 1990s.

66. Two thoughts come to mind which are beyond the scope of this chapter. The first is whether bearing children changes one's own relationship to the nation. The second is the relation to children in the Jewish world at large and the relationship of Jewish queers to children. I would suggest that there are parallels between the Jewish Israeli queer baby boom and a similar situation in the United States. In 1998 approxi-

mately 50–75 families participated in the family contingent in the San Francisco gay pride parade. Unofficial assessments estimated that Jewish queer families accounted for one-half of those families. The Weekend edition of *Ha'aretz* during the spring of 1999 reported in its Anglophile section on the baby boom happening at San Francisco's gay and lesbian synagogue, Sha'ar Zahav.

67. *Berner-Kadish v. Minister of Interior*, 1779/99. Israel High Court of Justice 2000.

68. The statement is false on all three counts. In adoptions, there are two mothers—the birth mother and the adoptive mother. Additionally, medical technology has enabled a situation where a child can be conceived through IVF using the egg of one woman, gestated in the womb of a second woman. Changing legal understandings have also made it possible that and in the case of surrogacy, the child is the legal child of a third woman.

69. After the Supreme Court's decision in the second-parent adoption case, a reporter appropriately concluded her report of the case stating that, "[n]ow in Israel it can't be said anymore—Mommy—there is only one." Effectively, the legal decision has the potential to alter even the idiomatic perception of motherhood and perhaps contribute also to a new articulation of motherhood and families. No doubt, the notion of two mothers has already entered the public discourse. The morning following the decision the political cartoon in the daily *Ha'aretz* featured a young boy and a soldier looking at each other. The boy's caption reads, "I have two mothers." The soldier replies, "I have four mothers." (*Arba Imahot*—Four Mothers—was a women's political organization that pressured the government to withdraw from Lebanon. For cartoon, see *Ha'aretz*, May 30, 2000, op-ed page).

70. At this point it would behoove me to situate myself vis-à-vis this discussion. I could and have been charged with creating and perpetuating precisely such a paradigm. I married a nice Jewish lawyer to whom I sometimes refer as my wife. My partner and I have three children, a dog and a cat, and I drive a minivan. We have been called suburban-dykes and white-picket-fence lesbians. We have been reassured, only half jokingly, that it is only our lesbianism that saves us from our blandness and conservatism. I am always conscious of the ways in which I am implicated in the mainstream lesbian politics I describe here and how I benefit from them and have come to depend on their achievements. No doubt as lesbians living in (certain states in) the United States we have benefited personally from legal protections such as second-parent adoption. Subsequently we utilized our legal status as equal parents in the United States, to challenge the Israeli Ministry of Interior to grant us similar status in Israel. In May 2000, the Israeli Supreme Court granted our request. The Ministry of Interior filed for a re-hearing. The Supreme Court granted the request and as of this writing (June 2003), the decision is pending. It should be understood, then, that I am not suggesting here that we abandon these liberal causes. I am calling here for an assessment of what it is we are presenting when we present ourselves, and who is the "we" that is presented and represented.

71. Chanan Porat was one of the founders of *Gush Emunim*, a right-wing settler organization. He is a former Knesset member of the Religious National Party.

72. Eli Goldshmit is from the Labor party.

73. Daniel Ben-Simon, "Instead of a Discussion on Gays in the Military—An Uproar About King David," *Davar*, February 11, 1992.

74. Much of the opposition to a homoerotic exegesis rested on the argument that it is impossible to associate King David with a behavior that is clearly prohibited—

by all accounts, a ridiculous argument considering, as several reporters pointed out, that King David did not hesitate to commit many other, ostensibly graver, transgressions.

75. A certain cultural and historical amnesia seems to be the purview of most social movements. According to records of the gay community in Israel, there had been previous demonstrations albeit even smaller in scale. Similarly, demonstrations occurring in 1997 and 1998 were respectively referred to as the first ever. No doubt each demonstration carried its uniqueness and in some way could be seen as first. What's worthwhile evaluating are the meanings behind this amnesia, and the cost or benefit it entails. This amnesia serves, among other things, the purpose of claiming an "origin." Zionist ideology claimed an "origin," declaring Zionist settlement in Ottoman and Mandatory Palestine as the first Jewish settlement in 2,000 years.

76. *Hadashot*, June 30, 1992.

77. It is of course also problematic given the Jewish Israeli practice of uprooting trees planted by Palestinians on Palestinian land.

78. In 1992 a widely read Tel Aviv weekly published an article on homosexuality in Palestine during the British mandate. The gay male interviewees spoke fondly of the beautiful British soldiers roaming the country. In a discussion with the director of the Aguda pursuant to the publication of the article, he expressed concern that the fondness for the soldiers would be interpreted by straight readers as nostalgia for the British Mandate and a lack of proper Zionist feelings among gays. Granted, the concern expressed by my interlocutor may seem excessive in 1999, but it does reflect a desire at the very least to present the community as "nationally competent," as it were. National competence is precisely what Jews and queers were perceived as lacking in fin de siècle Europe.

79. Golan Yosifon, *Ma'ariv*, December 17, 1998 (translated by Jared Goldfarb for *Ha-asiron Ha-akher*, newsletter put out by Hebrew University's GLBT student group).

80. Golan Yosifon.

FIFTEEN

The Construction of Lesbianism as Nonissue in Israel

Erella Shadmi

THE REIGN OF THE HETEROSEXUAL WOMAN

The heterosexual woman is one of the building blocks of Israeli culture and Zionist ideology—the ideology on which the Jewish national movement and the State of Israel were founded. From the writings of Herzl, Zionism's founding father, through the idolization of motherhood and fertility and unto women's status in law and society in contemporary Israel, the heterosexual woman reigns. Lesbianism is absent.

An explicit expression of the exclusion and invisibility of the lesbian option appears in one of the peak moments of the Israeli movie *Moments*, directed by Michal Bat Adam (a woman)—as the scholar Orly Lubin describes:

On a wide bed in a Jerusalem hotel two women are pampering themselves, revealing their inner worlds, and maybe maybe touching each other slightly . . .

The scene develops into a love scene, but not before the additional, probably inevitable, element—Julia's boyfriend—joins the two women . . . What started as the ultimate of connectedness between women, as a moment of directedness towards women's love, as the peak of a dramatic joining which constructs female sexuality and love between women, turns into a cliché—of the pornographic genre.

The man's penetrating gaze . . . turns the women, the object of his observation, into objects for his use. The pornographic event goes on with Dayan (the actor) having intercourse with both women . . . By this intercourse, which has no (lesbian) alternative, the connecting between two women is accomplished through and thanks to the male's sex organ . . ." (Lubin 1995, 349)

This scene—whose lesbian aspect was furiously denied by the woman filmmaker at the Eleventh Feminist Conference—reflects the whole story of female heterosexuality in Israeli culture. It expresses the male-centered heterosexist patriarchy in which men are centerstaged, women are confined to their heterosexual roles and women's passion for women is denied. It expresses, indeed, the way in which heterosocial, not only heterosexual, socioeconomic, political, and ideological systems structure our reality.

The centrality and connectedness among God, masculinity, family, and land, constructed by Zionism throughout its history (Shadmi 1992) and fortified by winds of nationalism, messianism, and fundamentalism blowing in the last decades, have established the supremacy of men in Israeli culture and defined the inferior social position of women, whose existence is justified predominantly by their services to men, the family, and the homeland.

Zionist ideology and Israeli culture view motherhood as supremely important for the nationalistic and religious interests it serves (Yuval-Davis 1987; Yanay and Rapoport 1997; Berkovitch 1999). Women's fertility is perceived as the women's national mission (Ben Gurion as cited by Hazelton 1977, 52) and their wombs—as owned by the homeland (Keinan, cited by Hazelton 1977, 57). Social institutions and norms and ideological discourse make traditional coupling and family form the only legitimate options, the only responsible, sensible, and right behavior (Amir 1997).

The Israeli state, through its legal system and social discourse, has constructed motherhood as the only route for women to become a part of the collective (Berkovitch 1999). Motherhood, therefore, is accorded national meaning and appropriated from women's control. Women's sexuality exists for men only—never for themselves or other women (Hazelton 1977, 109–10). Indeed, sexuality has no part in the image of the ideal woman who almost always is portrayed as a part of a heterosexual family (Lahav 1993).

No wonder that Israeli women define themselves in terms of their familial roles (Friedman 1996), that society sees traditional families and traditional feminine roles as central (Shrift 1982; Bar Yosef 1991; Hartman 1991; Friedman 1996), and that the labor market gives priority to working women who have families (Israeli 1992).

The nationalization and idolization of womanhood and motherhood take heterosexuality for granted and exclude lesbians (and non-Jewish women as well; Berkovitch 1999) from public discourse. The emphasis on marriage and motherhood depoliticizes both women's consciousness (Gluzman 1997, 158) and women's sexuality, which thus cease being an opposition to the existing order. Zionism's assumption of the normality of heterosexual existence, lived within the parameters of the institutionalized family forms, enables the penetration of social and political control over women and sexual outgroups, lesbian included (cf. Whelehan 1995, 95).

The interweaving of heterosexual/heterosocial, masculine, and national narratives was vividly expressed by Herzl, Zionism's founding father, in his

formative novel *Altneuland*. Here Herzl views Zionism as the process by which Jewish masculinity would be restored. For him, Zionism is a masculine idea in which women can hold but an auxiliary position (Gluzman 1997). Zionism signifies the turning of the feminine, seemingly queer Jewish male into masculine (Boyarin 1997, 123). The move described by Herzl, from nonerotic to heterosexual desire, is an allegory of a movement from weakness to national power, and the renewed national power is an allegory of heterosexual desire (Gluzman 1997, 154). Thus, through interweaving heterosexual masculinity with nationalism not only do women become secondary but lesbians are ignored altogether.

The central and exclusive presence of heterosexual women in the Zionist and Israeli narrative have kept lesbians outside society's boundaries and locked in the closet. The lesbian, whose significant other is not a man and who is not a member of a traditional family—in short, the a-nationalized and a-Zionist Israeli woman—undermines the hegemonic ideology and norms. The Israeli lesbian, deviating from “proper” behavior, shatters the national narrative by her mere existence. As she celebrates woman-to-woman bonds as empowering symbols of female strength (cf. Whelehan 1995, 90) suppressed by Zionism, she embodies an alternative model to Zionist norms. She acts “in accordance with her inner compulsion to be a more complete and freer human being” rejecting “the limitations and oppression laid on her by the most basic role of her society—the female role” (Radicalesbian 1973, cf. Clough 1994, 142–43).

Her refusal to become or remain heterosexual means (following Wittig, 1992, cf. Whelehan 1995, 102) a refusal to become Zionist or Sabra (as native-born Israelis are called). As Sabra and Zionist are political rather than essential categories, they receive meaning through their insertion into (among other things) the discourse of heterosexuality. Heterosexuality is a category used to enforce women's role as producer, simultaneously encouraging her ideologically to reproduce the conditions of existence of heterosexual institutions (cf. Whelehan 1995). As she betrays her national mission and refuses to sacrifice herself to the national Moloch, she represents a danger to the nation.

The appearance of the feminist movement in the early 1970s created, for the first time, a space for constructing an alternative lesbian identity, indeed, an alternative female sexuality, whose meaning is not derived from the benefits she renders to national events. How, then, has lesbian identity been shaped and how has it developed since the 1970s? This question stands at the center of this chapter.

SOME METHODOLOGICAL COMMENTS

This question refers to the issue of identity. Identity is the meaning of a self to itself or to the other, and this identity is created and recreated and, therefore, changeable through a process of “identification,” that is, acts of linking the self to something else—be it a person, a group, or an idea (Glaser 1998).

In particular this chapter explores the role played by social change actors—feminists, gay men, and lesbians themselves—in this “identification” process, that is, in constructing the social meaning of lesbianism. Such an exploration will throw light on the nature of the lesbian, feminist, and gay movements as social change movements. Taking my departure from the literature about the New Social Movements (Eder 1985; Offe 1985; Touraine 1985) and its critique (Johnston and Klandermas 1995; Tarrow 1996 1998; Laclau 1996; Waters 1998; Lentin 1999), I wish to examine the extent to which these movements are revolutionary or conformists¹ and their role in bringing about social change.

Special attention will be given here to the relation between lesbianism and feminism. As a feminist-lesbian of the first generation of out-of-the-closet political lesbians, aware of my ideological standpoint (so insightfully examined, explained, and justified by Zimmerman 1997), I wish to examine how Israeli lesbians have situated themselves in relation to feminism and against it, and vice versa.

Such an exploration seems to me of special interest since feminism, once the theory, ideology, and politics of so many lesbians like myself, has become nowadays an object of so much anger and contempt for many, especially younger, lesbians. Lesbians’ position *vis-à-vis* feminism may reveal their stand toward womanhood, sexuality, and social change and, consequently, the political meaning of lesbianism in Israel.

My goal here is to encourage a discussion on the meaning and problematics of lesbian alliances with various ideologies and political groups, feminism in particular, so lesbians will be able to define their specific voice and politics in a time when so many social change actors, feminists and gay men included, are either coopted by or choose to ally with mainstream politics (Lentin 1999).

The chapter presents my reflections on the history and development of the organized Jewish lesbian community in Israel since the early 1970s (so vividly described by Haya Shalom in chapter 3 of this collection). It is based on my experience as a member of this community since the early 1980s and on numerous informal talks with lesbians, feminists, and others throughout these years. Through these talks I had the opportunity to learn about their experience and I could discern their perceptions and ideas about lesbianism, feminism, ideologies, and Israeli society.

I choose to focus on the (loosely) organized lesbian community not only because I am more familiar with it, but especially because, first, this is the arena, more than any other location, where feminism and lesbianism meet and discourse; second, its boundaries are definable and, therefore, easier for study and; third, as an organized group, it has been more vocal and plays a significant role in the public arena and social discourse. I deal here only with Jewish lesbians since no information about Palestinian Israeli lesbians is accessible to me.

IN SEARCH OF AN IDENTITY

Being excluded and silenced by hegemonic culture, having no role model or known history, and viewed as immoral, sick, and ugly (Oppenheimer 1991), Israeli political lesbians have made an attempt, against all odds, to both survive and construct a new lesbian identity.

Feminism, making its first steps in Israel in the early 1970s, inspired hopes among lesbians for a change in their status and for creating a supportive space in which to "come out" and organize. The feminist demand for women's control of their bodies, the belief that new ways to express and construct women's identities are opening up and the struggle for social and political rights for all women, all led lesbians, who had spent precious years in the closet, to join the feminist movement.

They were, however, quickly disappointed: heterosexual feminists, homophobic like the rest of society, viewed lesbians not only as a national danger but also as a stick in the revolution's wheels. Lesbians dared not express their voices and needs as lesbians. They stayed invisible and silenced as before. They could express themselves only as radical feminists. Lesbians became the forerunners of the struggle to revolutionize society, politics, and culture, to liberate women's bodies from men's control and to replace patriarchy with women's value system, hoping that such changes would transform lesbians' status as well. A critique of sexuality and heterosexuality had to await better times.

Radical feminism gave lesbians an outlet for their outrage and a direction for political struggle, but it also silenced the autonomous lesbian voice and kept the lesbian identity in the closet. Lesbians could "pass" as heterosexual radical feminists, giving up the possibility of putting lesbianism on the social or feminist agenda. In fact, they desexualized lesbianism in the hope of meaningful sisterhood.

Like lesbians elsewhere (Zimmerman 1997, 161), Israeli lesbians of the 1970s separated their feminist theory and politics, namely, radical feminism, from their material practice and experience, that is, lesbianism. Unlike lesbians elsewhere, this separation did not lead Israeli lesbians to articulate issues of sexuality and to establish a theoretical and political position of lesbian feminism. Radical feminist lesbians have hardly attempted to critique heterosexuality—except in private conversations—to politicize sex or sexualize politics. Indeed, lesbianism had been portrayed and experienced by these political lesbians as a challenge to Zionist patriarchy, but this portrayal rarely if ever was voiced outside lesbian circles and it served as a basis for identity formation more than as a politically transformative means. No wonder "sex wars" never erupted in Israel as they did in the United States.

In the mid-1970s liberal feminism headed by heterosexual mainstream women took control of Israeli feminism (Swirski 1991; Wenzel 1996; Yishai, 1997). These women acted in mainstream institutions—political parties, academia,

and public institutions—to alter legislation, public policy, and education. Feeling rejected and oppressed—as both lesbians and radical feminists—lesbians took little part in these activities. They neither resisted their oppression by heterosexual feminists nor fought for their rights; instead, they turned in on themselves. They went on with their radical feminist politics by, for example, working for battered women and establishing feminist women's centers and consciousness-raising groups. But much of their resources were directed toward building and safeguarding a lesbian community—a space where they could freely and safely form and express their identity and get support and approval from other lesbians. In particular, they organized self-help groups, parties, and discussion events for lesbians only; they made Kol Ha-Isha, the Jerusalem feminist center, a meeting place for lesbians and they rendered financial and psychological help to lesbians in trouble.

The community, in fact, a lesbian ghetto, enabled lesbians to survive in an oppressive environment. Within the confines of the lesbian community, they could find an island of support in an ocean of hostility, to construct their lesbian selves and to shape their radical feminist voices. The community provided many lesbians with an environment in which they could address and explore sexual options and desires.

The closeted community, however, joined the radical feminist stand to leave the issue of lesbianism outside public discourse. As before, Israeli lesbians, oppressed by lesbophobic society and silenced by liberal heterosexual feminists, dared not put lesbianism on the public agenda and remained in the closet. Even the attempt to build culturally alternative spaces in the newly opened women's centers, headed predominantly by lesbians, and in the lesbian community, was mainly based on a women's, not lesbian-specific, value system. In other words, women's, rather than lesbian-specific, interests and perspectives dominated the lesbian struggle and thinking.

Interestingly, together with the attempts to build a community, the term *lesbian-feminist* first appeared, particularly in titling the lesbians' organization—the Lesbian Feminist Community. From the start and to this very day, this term has been associated with the context of community, namely, a supportive space and social life, and not with the context of politics and theory, that is, social change and political thinking.

Lesbians began to be visible as lesbians (rather than feminists) in the late 1980s. Changes in society at large facilitated this move: Since the early 1970s Israeli society has become more and more liberal, pluralist, and critical. The doctrine of civil rights has begun to take root in politics and social discourse and oppressed groups, especially among Mizrahi Jews, Israeli Arabs, women, and to a lesser degree, gay men and women who begun to struggle for social change. Past beliefs and myths have been shaken.²

Three political struggles, especially since the late 1980s, have had a profound impact on organized lesbians: First, the women's peace movement (Chazan 1992; Emmett 1996; Helman and Rapoport 1997), which made clear the con-

nection between different kinds of oppression such as oppression based on nationality, gender, and sexuality (Shadmi 2000). Lesbians' presence and growing visibility in this movement enhanced the understanding of this connection.

Second was the growing struggle of Mizrahi and Palestinian feminists to shatter the oppressive domination of Ashkenazi women over the Israeli feminist camp, to alter the feminist agenda and to make the voices, needs, and interests of diverse women heard. This struggle has opened doors to lesbians as well.

Finally, the Association for Individual Rights, struggling for the rights of gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals, has had growing success (Yonai 1998).

As a result of all these changes and of the empowering experience lesbians had within their community and in feminist struggles for women and peace, lesbians began to appear as lesbians at the end of 1980s and during the 1990s. The organized lesbian community, being both encouraged by and active in the developments in the society at large, gradually came out of the closet. It began to develop its main institutions: committees and general assembly, journal and theater, conferences and self-help groups.

Organized lesbians participate, often in leadership positions, in grassroots feminist activities. They represent lesbian interests in the press and political institutions. They are present in mainstream institutions such as politics, business, the free professions, and academia. A growing number of lesbian couples and families live openly and proudly. For the first time lesbians have become visible as lesbians and their voices have begun to be heard in public.

The organized lesbian community has thus undergone major social and political changes reflecting the fortification of the community but also its higher public visibility and the higher integration of lesbians in society. Higher visibility, however, does not make their existence legitimized and socially accepted: their existence has become socially tolerated only as long as it is lived and experienced within the confines of the community and expressed within socially approved discourses. In other words, lesbians have been ghettoized and forced into mainstream ideological frameworks.

Since the late 1980s the organized lesbian community has abandoned radical feminism and adopted a civil rights doctrine as its politics and ideology. Once again lesbian existence has been subordinated to an ideology that suited the hegemonic center.

In line with the civil rights doctrine, lesbians began to demand a number of rights, economic and cultural as well as political, so as to be treated equally, to enjoy equal satisfaction of basic common rights and needs, and not to be discriminated against on the basis of their sexual preference. They fought for equal opportunities in employment, for legitimizing lesbian families and motherhood, and for respecting lesbian culture and identity (see also Hadar's article in this volume).

For the first time lesbians demanded that their distinctiveness be acknowledged and their culture embraced by society. And for the first time, lesbianism became the basis for lesbian politics and a public issue.

The civil rights doctrine reflects the organized lesbians' striving to be included by society and to become an integrated and legitimate part of it. This doctrine worked to reposition certain varieties of lesbianism through rehabilitating lesbianism from bad sex to good sex (cf. Whelehan 1995, 176). By adopting this doctrine, however, sexuality had been deemphasized and lesbians failed to critique the "naturalness" of heterosexuality. Lesbianism has become no more than a specific feature of a marginal community unmixed in many areas of social behavior and demanding its right to construct and preserve its traditions. Lesbian sex was taken out of the context of politics and put in terms of individualistic sexual behavior bared of its political and revolutionary meaning. No wonder that the legal and familial discourses became the main ones through which lesbianism was expressed. Sexuality was not dealt with at all and the ways heterosexuality is constructed as "natural" was not critically analyzed. Only rarely were accepted definitions of sexuality investigated and an attempt to redefine intimate relations made—and often only within the secure but closed frameworks of community discussions or gay and lesbian journals.

This doctrine reflects organized lesbians' withdrawal from revolutionary aspiration and critical thinking and their acceptance of the existing order and its institutions (family, politics, military, religion) and power structure. By adopting this doctrine lesbians abandoned their effort to make an impact on the course of social developments, to resist the pressure to be heterosexual (Oppenheimer 1991), to question heterosexual institutions prevailing in Israel such as familialism, motherhood, traditional womanhood, and the fertility cult (see above), and to shatter systems of heterosexuality, andocentrism, and patriarchy. Instead, their struggle has been directed toward enlarging the boundaries of the collective so they can be included. They adopted the prevailing norms and lifestyles and left behind the revolutionary drive, their main feature only twenty years earlier. As such, civil rights lesbians seem to serve the interest of the establishment more than they promote lesbian interests (Jeffreys 1990). Lesbianism has become tolerated (at least to some extent) as an individualistic lifestyle, but the critique of compulsory heterosexuality, namely, the enforcement of heterosexuality through the ideological and political control of women's sexuality (Rich 1980), has been forgotten.

Interestingly, the turn toward civil rights doctrine coincided with both the AIDS epidemic and the gradual though still limited decrease in the centrality and power of the military in Israeli society. As a result many critics turned to the complexities of male homocentrism and masculinity. Lesbians exist at the margins of this discourse, often ignored altogether.

The greater social interest in masculinity, the relatively successful joint struggle of gay men and women for civil rights and the recognition of the privileges of gay men (as males in an androcentric society) has strengthened alliances of lesbians with gay men. Their joint actions led to a new militancy in the form of queer politics in the streets and queer theory in the academy. As queer thinking deconstructs normative categories of gender and sexuality

and is inclusive of all transgressive sexual minorities, Israeli lesbians, more than ever before, have dealt with issues of sexuality and subjectivity, specifically with questions of pleasure, desire, fantasy, and difference, and challenged the difference and opposition between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Queer lesbians in Israel celebrate, so it seems, their difference, admire transgressive behavior, and are tolerant of various types of "sexual minorities." Their strategies seem subversive, joyous, transformative, and, therefore, attractive to many.

Nevertheless, queer theory avoids the difference between lesbians and gay men up to the point of inclusion of female and male homosexuality in one monolithic category—the category of queer. Queer politics has been appropriated by gay men who subsume and negate lesbian sexuality (cf., Jeffreys 1990). Queer perspective represents a movement of the lesbian community toward a sexual identity that draws its meaning from the gay men's community, which rejects femininity and abandons the female body. In their stead we find enthusiasm for cyborgs, female-to-male transexuality, and Barbie, creatures beyond gender, efficient, clean, and sexless—far away from the female body (Lauretis 1996, 47). As a theory growing in man-controlled academic circles—in Israel as elsewhere—the queer perspective is distanced from socially lived experiences and femininity, that is, from the female body and the lesbian experience.

Once again lesbianism has been subsumed to a discourse that, although constructive in some ways, nevertheless works to obscure lesbianism and take it off the public agenda.

IGNORING LESBIANISM—DE-RADICALIZING LESBIANISM

Despite the fact that lesbian existence has been increasingly felt in Israel since the early 1970s, lesbianism, that is, same-sex womanhood (rather than homosexuality or feminism), is largely absent from political, feminist, and queer discourses. Lesbianism remains as invisible as before and has thus been constructed as a nonissue.

Viewing lesbians as either radical feminists or queer has denied lesbians political existence through their inclusion either as a female version of male homosexuality, thus erasing their feminine existence, or as a radical version of heterosexual feminists, thus ignoring their sexual existence. In both versions lesbianism becomes marginal and partial: boundaries thus defined leave out major elements of the lesbian experience. Consequently, a handicapped, mutilated identity has been constructed.

The civil rights doctrine made the lesbian community no more than a minority group fighting for its interests and to be included in society. Such a position adopts the assumption that heterosexual women are the norm, a model for emulation, the goal to pursue. The assumptions, beliefs and rules of heterosexual womanhood are not challenged. Heterosexual women, especially feminists, are not required to understand their bodies, to reflect on their sexual pleasure, passion, and pain and to look into their sexuality.

The absence of lesbianism is the effect of a political attempt, supported by feminists and gay men, to force lesbianism into conceptual, discursive, and ideological frameworks distanced from lesbian existence: in order to refrain from confronting the lesbian challenge to Zionist ethos, in fact to erase this challenge, lesbian existence has been subsumed to ideologies tolerated by hegemonic groups. Lesbians can act only within the boundaries of such ideological frameworks. By linking lesbianism to these ideas, namely, by the process of constructing its meaning, its revolutionary and threatening potential has been neutralized and the reign of the heterosexual woman preserved.

Feminist scholarship plays an important role in this attempt to avoid lesbianism.³ Lesbians rarely exist in contemporary academic discourse. Addressing the issue of feminist production of knowledge in the social sciences in Israel, Herzog avoids the issue of lesbianism altogether (Herzog 1997). Even when she writes about feminist scholars who demand a reflective and critical approach from feminists who create knowledge from a privileged position, she examines only the writings of Palestinian and Mizrahi Jewish women and ignores the writings of lesbians such as Jo Oppenheimer whose article appears in a collection extensively examined by her.

When Herzog discusses how boundaries between academia and practice are crossed and how social actors' voices become a source of knowledge, she ignores lesbian writings (including lesbians of academe) that appear in two major journals of feminist activists: *Noga* and *CLaF Hazak*.

Benjamin, to take another example, analyzing the impact of self-development on women's attempt to increase partners' domestic participation, does not even raise the possibility of a lesbian couple (Benjamin 1997).

Amir, in another illuminating example, shows how Israeli committees for abortion certification construct the "responsible," "committed," and "clever" reproductive behavior of Israeli women as the one carried out within a legitimate coupling and traditional family form. Amir takes the heterosexual couple and family for granted and, therefore, does not find it necessary to examine the heterosexual discourse of these committees (Amir 1995).

With the ignoring and subsuming of lesbianism not only lesbian sexuality is kept in the closet but also women's sexuality and the possibility of constructing an alternative womanhood to the Zionist one, one that is not based on women's service to the nation, men, and the family.⁴ This avoidance by scholarship and politics in Israel goes hand in hand with the rapid and sharp turn they took from women's and feminist issues to issues of gender and masculinity. The changes toward gender and masculinity reflect not only repackaging of Women's Studies and feminist politics but de-radicalizing them (Robinson and Richardson 1996). These changes took place before feminism sank roots in Israeli academe and politics and they defeat and offset the feminist challenge. Subsuming women's issues to gender issues depoliticizes relations between the sexes and once again excludes the woman-centered feminist perspective and existence—that is, lesbian existence—from feminist

discussion and public discourse. Consequently, the revolutionary potential of lesbianism, so threatening to the Zionist ethos and the Israeli culture, has been de-radicalized. The subsuming of the political meaning of the lesbian identity to ideologies digestable to hegemonic groups leaves the existing hetero-sexist order in its place, even strengthening it. Feminists and gay men, both scholars and activists, thus become part of the existing regime of knowledge.

Under these circumstances of an lesbophobic society, avoiding the issue of lesbianism, organized lesbians, wishing not only to survive but also to be visible and tolerated by society, have adopted socially approved ideological frameworks and invested much of their energy in building a safe and empowering community. However, by employing these two strategies of survival, organized lesbians have been coopted by the existing political system. Since the strategy of community building ghettoizes lesbianism, and the strategy of adopting socially approved ideologies depoliticizes it, organized lesbians played a significant role in facilitating the political attempt to strip lesbianism of its political meaning so it becomes part of the existing order rather than a challenge to it. They consented to the tendency to construct lesbianism as a nonissue, to neutralize its revolutionary potential, and, consequently, to uphold the existing order. Organized lesbians in the main adopted the ideologies enforced on them and, willingly or unwillingly, accepted the discursive chains put on them.

THE LIMITS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

I have argued at the opening of this chapter that lesbianism is perceived as a major threat to dominant ideologies in Israel. The history of lesbians since the 1970s, when an opportunity to incorporate lesbianism within hegemonic discourses was opened with the emergence of the feminist movement, indicates that although lesbians receive more than ever before social recognition and legal rights in contemporary Israel, lesbianism has been silenced, ignored, or subsumed by other ideological frameworks.

The reluctance of Israeli society to face lesbianism may be understood. What is striking is the refusal of the organized lesbian community, the feminist camp, and the gay struggle—all movements fighting for social change—to deal with this issue. All are found to be guardians of the existing order, at least in terms of women's sexuality and alternative womanhood. In the way they deal with the challenge lesbianism puts to Israeli culture—namely, ignoring, subsuming, and silencing it—they all conform to socially accepted norms, avoiding the option to shatter them.

Drawing on the literature on New Social Movements, two closely related lines may explain this conformist behavior. The first focuses on the movements' socio-economic composition, and the second on their *modus operandi*.

According to the first, all three, like New Social Movements elsewhere (Offe 1985) and in Israel (see, Sasson-Levy 1995; Shadmi 2000), are bourgeois,

Western, white⁵ movements fighting mainly to improve the social positioning of their constituencies. Under the veil of revolutionary rhetoric lies an ambition on the part of middle-class, Ashkenazi women, lesbians, and gay men to get their piece of the national pie. As a result of their ambition to be annexed to the sources of power, they are reluctant to expose the working of oppressive institutions such as heterosexual femininity, so that the existing order in which they wish to be included will not be undermined. Thus, significant currents of Israeli social movements gave up the option of resistance and transformation. The organized lesbian community, the feminist camp, and the gay struggle in Israel are, consequently, no more than an interest group "fighting against the euphemistic treatment of or complete disregard for social problems, thus against its own decline in the status system" (Eder 1985, 888). They fail to become truly transformative social movements that fight "for a radical democratization of social relationship as such (not only social relationships of production)."

However, the symbolic meanings of these three movements in regard to lesbianism cannot be overlooked: They succeeded in altering public discourse regarding homosexuality and lesbianism; they made more citizens, politicians, and public figures aware of oppression on the basis of sexual preference; they succeeded in amending some public policy and legislation; they facilitated the growth of lesbian and homosexual art. And more lesbians are accorded equal opportunities in employment. As such, these movements seem "moral crusaders" "fighting for the recognition of their own culture as the legitimate culture and thus against the prevalent morality" (Eder 1985, 888).

How much these changes have affected the actual lives of lesbians is, however, controversial: these symbolic gains overshadow society's reluctance to deconstruct and reconstruct its hegemonic ideologies on which lesbophobia and lesbians' oppression are based. We may reasonably assume therefore that many lesbians still suffer from overt or covert oppression. Since the lesbian agenda is controlled by organized, middle-class, mainly Ashkenazi lesbians, we have little information regarding difficulties encountered by Mizrahi-Jewish, Palestinian, orthodox-Jewish, working-class, handicapped, and elderly lesbians and lesbian experience in rural areas.⁶

Thus, the organized lesbian community's symbolic gains seem to come at the expense of transforming the lives of real lesbians. The organized community succeeded in controlling the public agenda regarding lesbianism, and many other lesbians, whose needs and interests are overlooked, pay the price.

The other line of interpretation of the conformist behavior of these three movements lies in an understanding of their mode of functioning. The feminist movement, like other social movements of the 1970s and 1980s, due to the reflexivity of the activists (Touraine 1985), "abandons revolutionary dreams in favour of the idea of structural reform, along with the defense of civil society that does not seek to abandon the autonomous functioning of political and economic systems—in a phrase, self limiting radicalism" (Cohen 1985, 664). In other words, the movement moved through a linear trajectory from revolutionism

to moderate radicalism, together with its institutionalization, as a consequence of, among other things, the dominant position of its actors (Lentin 1999). Many social movements organized later and influenced by different structural conditions, as are the organized lesbian community and the gay struggle, have been institutionally allied, mainstream backed, collaborating with state bodies, and appealing for sociopolitico-legal recognition from their beginning (Lentin 1999). Thus, all three movements either left their revolutionary zeal soon after their start or have never been revolutionary from the beginning.

Thus, the privileged social position of movements' members as well as their moderate radicalism may explain their reluctance to revolutionize society, politics, and discourse. Yet these factors do not sufficiently explain why lesbianism—and not, for example, heterosexuality or feminism—is unspeakable and doomed to be invisible, why the issue of lesbianism becomes an indicator of the limit of social reform in Israel.

I would like to suggest that the explanation lies in a deep subconscious recognition that lesbians escape categories of sex and gender and open the door to females who are not “women.” As Wittig correctly said, a lesbian is ungendered, unsexed, neither woman nor man (Wittig 1981). This is because sex/gender is the result of institutional heterosexuality. Within heterosexual systems, “‘intelligible’ genders are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire” (Butler 1990, 17). Even her anatomy itself is suspect within heterosexist ideology. Thus, “neither anatomy nor desire nor gender can link her securely to the category ‘woman’ ” and, thus, she “exits the category of ‘woman,’ though without thereby entering the category ‘man’ ” (Calhoun 1994). As a consequence, lesbianism is neither about enlarging the socially constructed category “woman” nor about recognizing that there might be multiple categories of women. It is about challenging the heterosexual society demand that females be women. For that demand denies the lesbian option, which is to be a not-woman, neither identifiably woman nor man (Calhoun 1994).

Lesbianism, therefore, is the future lived today. And it is a future that is so disturbing that it must be passed over. So it becomes a nonissue.

EPILOGUE

Since the early 1970s Israeli lesbians have been constantly engaged in a process of identity formation. This process, altering in accordance with changes in cultural and social circumstances, makes the lesbian identity, or, rather, the lesbian “identification,” dynamic, permanently in flux, always moving and searching. It therefore encourages lesbian visibility and facilitates lesbian survival.

At the same time, the social mechanisms of ignorance and subsuming, together with the organized lesbian community's refusal to revolutionize society, structure the organized lesbian struggle as guardians of the existing order. Many lesbians might pay the price.

However, two recent developments may alter profoundly the way in which lesbianism is dealt with in Israel: the first is the growing opposition of radical feminists, old and young, to the way the organized lesbian community has developed. This opposition was expressed at the last feminist conference, held in October 1999, when they put compulsory heterosexuality (see above) on the feminist agenda and made all women, lesbian and heterosexual alike, face their sexuality and the way it is socially constructed, and the price they pay individually and collectively for this social institution. It also was expressed in the last issue of *CLaF Hazak* (the organized lesbian community's journal, March 2000). The second is the first steps made by Mizrahi-Jewish lesbians to voice their distinctive point of view both in the national feminist conference and in Mizrahi-only conferences. Both work to direct attention to lesbianism (rather than to homosexuality or feminism) and to diversity among lesbians themselves.

These rearticulations of radical lesbian-feminist stands inspire hope that the organized lesbian community is embarking upon a new track in the process of identity formation taking place in the last thirty years. Its constant dynamics might facilitate this search.

NOTES

1. This issue is also dealt with in my work about Women in Black: Shadmi 2000.
2. Numerous studies describe and analyze the recent changes in Israeli society. Among them, Wistrich and Ohana 1995; Ohana and Wistrich 1996; Lissak and Knei-Paz 1996; Taub 1997; Peled and Shafir 1996; Peres and Yuchtman-Yaar 1998; Peri 1998; Ram 1998; Yona 1998; Kimmerling 1985.
3. For an exception, see Lubin 1995.
4. For an elaborated analysis of the implications of this avoidance in feminist scholarship in Israel, see Shadmi 2000a.
5. No research is known to the author regarding the ethnic and class composition of these three movements. However, based on personal knowledge and talks with activists and scholars, this argument seems plausible. It should be also emphasized that there are Mizrahi people in all three movements, but they either struggle against Ashkenazi domination (see, for example, Shiran 1991, Dahan-Kalev 1997; and Motzafi-Haller's chapter in this volume) or accept unproblematically Ashkenazi domination.
6. In the same vein, it is also debatable whether women's lot, not only public discourse and consciousness, has been altered by the feminist struggle. See, for example, the debate regarding battered women that took place in Israel in Summer 1999. Police and welfare policies have been altered, ministers and members of parliament voice their outrage with it, and it is unlikely that anyone will publicly endorse it. However, it seems that the number of battered women has not decreased and the severity of the battery has increased.

REFERENCES

- Amir, Delila. "Responsible, Committed, and Intelligent: The Construction of Israeli Femininity in the Commission for Stopping Pregnancy." *Theory and Criticism* 7(1995): 247-54.

- Bar Yosef, Rivka. "The Management of the Household in Two Types of Families in Israel." *Families in Israel*. Ed. Lea Shamgar-Handelman and Rivka Bar-Yosef. Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Press, 1991.
- Benjamin, Orly. "Self-Development in Israel: Does It Affect Women's Attempts to Increase Partners' Domestic Participation?" *Israel Social Science Research*. 12:2 (1997): 97-122.
- Berkovitch, Nitza, "Eshet Hayal Mi Yimtzaa: Women and Citizenship in Israel." *Israeli Sociology*. 1: (1999): 277-317.
- Boyarin, Daniel. "The Colonial Masque Ball: Zionism, Gender, Imitation." *Theory and Criticism* 11(1997): 123-44.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York and London: Routledge, 1990.
- Calhoun, Chesire. "Separating Lesbian Thoery from Feminist Theory." *Ethics* 104 (April 1994): 558-81.
- Chazan, Naomi. "Israeli Women and Peace Activism." *Calling the Equality Bluff: Women in Israel*. Ed. Barbara Swirski and Marilyn Saffir. New York: Pergamon, 1992. 151-63.
- Clough, Patricia Ticineta. *Feminist Thought*. Oxford UK and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994.
- Cohen, Jean L. "Strategy or Identity: New Theoretical Paradigm and Contemporary Social Movements." *Social Research*. 52:4 (1985): 663-716.
- Dahan-Kalev, Henriette. "The Oppression of Women by Other Women: Relations and Struggle between Mizrahi and Ashkenazi Women in Israel." *Israel Social Science Research*. 12:1 (1997): 31-44.
- Eder, Klaus. "The New Social Movements: Moral Crusades, Political Pressure Groups, or Social Movements?" *Social Research*. 52:4 (1985): 869-90.
- Emmett, Ayala. *Our Sisters' Promised Land: Women, Politics, and Israeli-Palestinian Coexistence*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1996.
- Friedman, Ariela. *Annie Oakley Won Twice: Intimacy and Power in Female Identity [Ba'a Me'avava]* Tel Aviv: HaKibbutz HaMeuchad, 1996.
- Glaser, Andreas. "Placed Selves: The Spatial Hermeneutics of Self and Other in the Post Unification Berlin Force." *Social Identities* 4:1 (1998): 7-38.
- Gluzman, Michael. "Longing for Heterosexuality: Zionism and Sexuality in Herzl's Alteneuland." *Theory and Criticism* 11(1997): 143-62.
- Hartman, H. "The Division of Labor in Israeli families." *Families in Israel*. Ed. Lea Samgar-hendelman and Rivka Bar-Yosef. Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Press, 1991. 197-210.
- Hazelton, Lesley. *Israeli Women: The Reality Behind the Myth.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977.
- Helman, Sara, and Tamar Rapoport. "'These Are Ashkenazi Women, Alone, Whores of Arafat, Don't Believe in God, and Don't Love Israel': Women in Black and the Challenging of the Social Order." *Theory and Criticism* 10(1997): 175-92.
- Herzog, Hannah. "Ways of Knowing: The Production of Feminist Knowledge in Israeli Social Science Research." *Israel Social Science Research* 12:2 (1997): 1-28.
- Izraeli, Dafna. "Culture, Policy, and Women in Dual-Earner Families in Israel." *Dual Earners Families: International Perspectives*. Ed. S. Lewis, D. Izraeli, and H. Hootsmans. London: Sage, 1992. 19-45.

- Jeffreys, Sheila. *Anticlimax: A Feminist Perspective on the Lesbian Sexual Revolution*. London: The Women's Press, 1990.
- Johnston, Hank, and Bert Klandermas. *Social Movements and Culture: Social Movements, Protest, and Contention*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1995.
- Kimmerling, Baruch. "Between the Primordial and the Civil Dimensions of the Collective Identity." *Comparative Social Dynamics*. Ed. Erik Cohen, Moshe Lissak, and Uri Almagor. 1985. 262–83.
- Laclau, Ernesto. *Emancipation(s)*. London: Verso, 1996.
- Lauretis, Teresa de. "Fem/Les Scramble." *Cross-Purposes: Lesbians, Feminists, and the Limits of Alliance*. Ed. Dana Heller. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1996: 42–48.
- Lentin, Alana. "Structure, Strategy, Sustainability: What Future for New Social Movement Theory?" *Sociological Research Online*. 4:3 (1999).
- Lissak, Moshe, and Baruch Knei-Paz, eds. *Israel Towards the Year 2000*. Jerusalem: Magnes, 1996.
- Lubin, Orly. "Women in Israeli Cinema." *A View Into the Lives of Women in Jewish Societies: Collected Essays*. Ed. Yael Azmon. Jerusalem: The Zalman Shaza Center for Jewish History, 1995. 349–74.
- Offe, Claus. "New Social Movements: Challenging the Boundaries of Institutional Politics." *Social Research* 52:4 (1985): 817–68.
- Ohana, David, and Robert Wistrich, eds. *Myth and Memory: Transfigurations of Israeli Consciousness*. Tel Aviv: The Van Leer Institute and Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1996.
- Oppenheimer, Jo. "The Pressure to be Heterosexual." *Calling the Equality Bluff: Women in Israel*. Ed. Barbara Swirski and Marilyn P. Saffir. New York: Pergamon Press, 1991. 108–16.
- Peled, Yoav, and Gershon Shafir. "The Roots of Peacemaking: The Dynamics of Citizenship in Israel, 1948–1993." *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. 28 (1996): 391–413.
- Peres, Yohanan, and Ephraim Yuchtman-Yaar. *Between Consent and Dissent: Democracy and Peace in the Israeli Mind*. Jerusalem: The Israeli Democracy Institute, 1998.
- Peri, Yoram. "From Political Nationalism to Ethno-Nationalism: The Case of Israel." *The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Two Decades of Change*. Ed. Yehuda Lukas and Abdalla M. Battah. Boulder: Westview, 1988. 41–53.
- Radicalesbians. "The Woman Identified Woman." *Radical Feminism*. Ed. Ann Loedt, Ellen Levine, and Anita Rapone. New York: Quadrangle Books, 1973.
- Ram Uri. "Citizens, Consumers, and Believers: The Israeli Public Sphere Between Fundamentalism and Capitalism." *Israeli Studies* 3(1988): 24–44.
- Rich, Adrienne. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." *Signs* 5:4 (1980): 631–60.
- Robinson, Victoria, and Diane Richardson. "Repacking Women and Feminism: Taking the Heat Off Patriarchy." *Radically Speaking: Feminism Reclaimed*. Ed. Diane Bell and Renate Klein. 1996: 179–87.
- Sasson-Levy, Orna. *Radical Rhetoric. Conformist Practices: Theory and Praxis in an Israeli Protest Movement*. Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, Faculty of Social Science (Hebrew), 1995.
- Shadmi, Erella. "Women Palestinians, Zionism: A Personal Account." *News From Within* (Oct.–Nov. 1992), 13–16.
- . "Between Resistance and Compliance, Feminism and Nationalism: Women in Black in Israel." *Womens' Studies International Forum* 23:1(2000): 23–34.

- . "Lesbians' Absence: Silencing the Personal and the Feminine in the Public and Feminist Discourse in Israel." Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Israeli Association of Women's Studies, Beit Berl College (Hebrew) 2000a.
- Shiran, Vicki. "Feminist Identity vs. Oriental Identity." *Calling the Equality Bluff: Women in Israel*. Ed. Barbara Swirski and Marilyn P. Saffir. New York: Pergamon Press, 1991. 303–11.
- Shrift, Ruth. "Marriage: An Option or a Trap?" *The Double Bind: Women in Israel*. Ed. Dafna Izraeli, Ariela Friedman, and Ruth Shrift. Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1982. 64–112.
- Swirski, Barbara. "Israeli Feminism: New and Old." *Calling the Equality Bluff: Women in Israel*. Ed. Barbara Swirski and Marilyn P. Saffir. New York: Pergamon Press, 1991. 285–302.
- Taub, Gadi. *A Dispirited Rebellion: Essays in Contemporary Israeli Culture*. Tel Aviv: Hakkibutz Hameuhad (Hebrew), 1997.
- Tarrow, Sidney. "States and Opportunities: The Political Structuring of Social Movements." *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*. Ed. J. D. McCarthy and M. N. Zald and D. McAdam. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996.
- . *Poet in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*. 2nd Ed. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998.
- Touraine, Alain. "An Introduction to the Study of New Social Movements." *Social Research* 52:4 (1985): 749–87.
- Wenzel, Mirjam. *Women's Movements in Israel*. Jerusalem: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 1996.
- Waters, Sarah. "New Social Movement Politics in France: The Rise of Civic Forms of Mobilization." *West European Politics* 21:3 (1998): 431–49.
- Wistrich, Robert, and David Ohana, eds. *The Shaping of Israeli Identity: Myth Memory and Trauma*. London: Frank Cass, 1995.
- Wittig, Monique. "One is Not Born a Woman." *Feminist Issues*. 1:2 (1981): 47–54.
- . *The Straight Mind: And Other Essays*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992.
- Whelehan, Imedla. *Modern Feminist Thought: From the Second Wave to "Post-Feminism."* New York: New York UP, 1995.
- Yanay, Nitza, and Tamar Rapoport. "Rituals Impurity and Religious Discourse on Women and Nationality." *Women's Studies International Forum* 20:5–6 (1997): 651–62.
- Yishai, Yael. *Between the Flag and the Banner: Women in Israeli Politics*. Albany: State U of New York P, 1997.
- Yona, Yossi. "State of Its Citizens, Nation-State or a Multicultural Democracy." *Alpayim* 16(1998): 238–63.
- Yonai, Yuval. "The Law Regarding Same-Sex Preference—Between History and Sociology." *Law and Government*. 4:2 (1998): 531–86.
- Yuval-Davis, Nira. "National Reproduction and Demographic Race." *Racial America* 21 (1987): 37–59.
- Zimmerman, Bonnie. "'Confession' of a Lesbian Feminist." *Cross-purposes: Lesbians, Feminists, and the Limits of Alliance*. Ed. Dana Heller. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1997. 157–68.

This page intentionally left blank.

GLOSSARY

- **Alef**—a lesbian feminist organization
- **Ashkenazi**—Jews and their descendents of Eastern European origin, primarily from Germany, Poland, and Russia
- **Bibi**—Benjamin Netanyahu, former prime minister currently serving as finance minister under Ariel Sharon
- **CLaF**—an acronym for Kehila Lesbit Feministit—The lesbian Feminist Community
- **CLaF Hazak**—a newsletter published by CLaF
- **Dana International**—a popular Israeli MTF singer
- **Four Mothers**—women against the war in Lebanon
- **GLBT**—an acronym for Gay Lesbian Bisexual and Transgender
- **Greenham Common**—a peace group inspired by the Copenhagen-Paris March in August 1981 when a group of Welsh women marched from Cardiff to the U.S. Air Force base at Greenham Common to protest against Cruise missiles due to be installed there
- **Gush Shalom**—the Israeli Peace Bloc, a leftist mixed-sex activist and witnessing peace group
- **Ha’agudah/SPPR**—Society for the Protection of Personal Rights for Gay Men, Lesbians, and Bisexuals in Israel
- **Halacha**—Literally: (the) walk. Practical observance based on the mitzvot. Through halacha all things in the world become part of G-d’s ultimate purpose, it isn’t merely legal decisions. The codified law is written in the work Shulchan Aruch (Venice1525)

- **Intifada**—(intefa'de) in Arabic: the uprising. The Palestinian uprising during the late 1980s and early '90s, in areas occupied by Israel since 1967. The term has also used to describe the uprising that began in 2000(also known as the second or "al Aqsa" Intifada. The second Intifada has been marked by the use of suicide bomb attacks.
- **Intelligentsia**—refers to a social class of educated Soviet citizens
- **Isha L'Isha**—Woman to woman—a feminist women's center in Haifa
- **Keshet Democratit**—the Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow, an activist group of middle-class Mizrahi intellectuals
- **Mishtaknezet**—someone who thinks the Ashkenazim are more enlightened
- **Mitzvah/Mitzvoth (Pl)**—G-d's guide to the Jews offering insights to the spiritual workings of the universe. 613 mitzvot are contained in the Torah.
- **Mizrahi**—Jews and their descendents whose origin are countries along the Mediterranean Sea, North Africa, the Balkans, Italy, Syria, and Palestine
- **Noga**—a feminist magazine
- **Orthodykes**—Name of the group of women who define themselves as Jewish Orthodox and lesbian. The discussion continues as to whether this includes those presently Orthodox, those raised Orthodox and left, those interested in becoming Orthodox. Similar is the question of whether the group includes transgendered, bisexual, women who are questioning their sexual identity. Some groups (internationally) are focused toward support, other are more socially oriented.
- **Panterim Shehorim**—"Black Panthers"—a protest movement that began in the early '70s comprised primarily of impoverished young people of Moroccan origin
- **Peace Now**—a mixed-sex nonpartisan peace movement including disillusioned reserve duty soldiers as well as other previously apolitical populations
- **Rosh Hashanah**—Popularly known as the "Jewish New Year." In general, from a month before Rosh Hashanah until after Yom Kippur (ten days after Rosh Hashanah) it is a time of introspection, reevaluating one's integrity to one's values, finding a way to sift, refine, and resolve the parts that are off-target. By being nonjudgmental and forgiving toward others, so will one—measure for measure—be treated likewise by G-d in this time of renewal and decrees for the New Year.
- **Shma Yisroel**—The Jewish "mantra"; the statement that all existence is dependent on, and derives from G-d's will. *Shma* is the first mitzva of the day and the last statement of a Jew on their deathbed.

- **Shmirat Shabbat**—Through the observance of the Shabbos laws in conviction, speech, and actions, the cycle of the week takes on new meaning
- **Talmud** (750 C.E.)—the oral tradition that was handed down from the time of Moses, includes the understanding of the Torah legally and philosophically
- **Torah**—The first book of Tanach which stands for Torah/ Nevii'm (Prophets)/Ketuvim (Writings). Even the simple stories in the Torah have deeper meanings not understandable without the explanations of the Oral traditions (Mishnah, Talmud, and Kabbalah).
- **Tsena Urena**—a feminist center in Tel-Aviv
- **War in Lebanon**—In 1982 Israel invaded Lebanon. Israel tried to retreat in 1985, but the war dragged on until Ehud Barak ordered a unilateral withdrawal in 2000.
- **Women in Black**—"Nashim B'Shahor," loosely organized groups of women who stand dressed in black in silent vigils at set locations for one hour a week on Fridays holding signs that say Down with the Occupation.
- **"Women's Voice"**—a feminist women's center in Haifa and Jerusalem
- **Women's Equal Rights Law**—passed in 1951 entitling women to legal equality
- **Zionism**—the movement and national ideology emphasizing the centrality of Jewish immigration in building an autonomous state with a Jewish majority

This page intentionally left blank.

CONTRIBUTORS

Nurit Barkai was born in Kibbutz Rosh Hanikra forty-nine years ago. Formerly a teacher, school headmaster, general secretary, human resource director in the kibbutz. Also served as director of the kibbutz movement-training center. Today she works as community director of Kibbutz Rosh Hanikra and chairperson of Kibbutz Gvat management group. She has been a proud lesbian all her life.

Devorah Esther is a pseudonym for a woman who lives in a Charedi (“Orthodox”) neighborhood raising a large family. She is a professional and has contributed articles and interviews to a variety of publications and documentary films. In this article she includes the experience and verbatim quotes of many Orthodox lesbians. Devorah and Esther were both women in Jewish history that took on a mission that they didn’t necessarily ask for but was necessary at that time in history. Devorah was public; Esther hid her identity for years.

Chava Frankfort-Nachmias is an associate professor of sociology and the Director of Jewish Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee where she teaches courses in research methods, statistics, and gender. She is the author of *Research Methods in the Social Sciences* (with David Nachmias), *Social Statistics for a Diverse Society* (with Leon Guerrero), and numerous publications on ethnicity and development, urban revitalization, science and gender, and women in Israel.

Advocat **Ira Hadar**, born in Tel Aviv in 1947, married to Orna—both mothers to Asaf. She acted as a lawyer at the Israeli Women’s Network and later worked for seven years in a private law firm dealing with human rights. In 1999 she established her own law firm specializing in gay and lesbian rights. Her record includes some important precedents for the struggle of gays and lesbians in Israel, such as granting guardianship to the nonbiological mother in

a lesbian family and compelling the minister of education to broadcast on TV a program dealing with gay teens. She has been representing a lesbian couple in its struggle to gain recognition of the lesbian family through adoption. Advocat Hadar also issues cohabitation agreements for same-sex couples. She is a volunteer legal counselor of ClaF (Community of Lesbian Feminists).

Ruti Kadish recently completed a post-doc at the Meyerhoff Center for Jewish Studies at the University of Maryland, College Park. She is currently a stay-at-home mom of three sons, proudly, albeit with a touch of irony, playing her part in the cult of fertility. She, her partner, and sons live in Takoma Park MD, the lesbian mom outpost of Washington DC.

Adi Kuntsman graduated with a Masters in Social Anthropology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and is currently working on a Ph.D. at Lancaster University, UK. She immigrated to Israel in 1990 from St. Petersburg, Russia, and came out as a lesbian during her first year at the Hebrew University. Since then she has been active in the field of women's and gay rights, as well as in anti-occupation activities. Her research is devoted to the immigration experiences of gays and lesbians from the former Soviet Union.

Diana Luzzatto has a B.A. in Behavioral Sciences from Ben-Gurion University, and an M.A. and Ph.D. in Social Anthropology from Tel Aviv University. She is a lecturer at The Academic College of Tel Aviv-Yaffo and teaches courses at Tel Aviv University. Her main interests are in the fields of gender, sexuality, youth culture, and social deviance, on which subjects she has published in professional journals and books. She is active in the field of human rights, in particular women rights.

Mickey M is the cyber-nick for a Mizrahi dyke, who happens to live in Israel/Palestine. A native Hebrew speaker, she dreams in English and Arabic.

Pnina Motsafi-Haller is a lecturer and researcher at Ben Gurion University. She is the author of *Fragmented Worlds, Coherent Lives: The Politics of Differences in Botswana*, and co-editor (with Hanan Hever and Yehouda Shenhav) of *Mizrahim in Israel: A Critical Observation into Israel's Ethnicity*. She is currently writing a book based on her three years of ethnographic research among lower-class Mizrahi women in Yeruham.

Hannah Safran is a feminist and peace activist. She is currently teaching at the Women's Studies program at Haifa University and lectures widely on women's issues in Israel and abroad. Her research focuses mainly on the history of the feminist movement in Israel, women's activism for peace, and the lesbian feminist community. She has been one of the founders of Women in Black,

and participated in the creation of the Coalition of Women for Just Peace, a coalition of eight women's peace organizations. She continues to take active part in campaigns and actions to promote peace and women's rights in Israel.

Su Schachter lives on Kibbutz Gezer and works both as a swimming pool technician and an alternative health practitioner. In her spare time she writes, gardens, meditates, and raises hell while dreaming of her next trip, to Tibet.

Erella Shadmi is a lesbian feminist activist and scholar living in Israel. She has been involved in Ashkenazi-Mizrahi (white-black) dialogue and in the Israeli peace camp and the feminist movement. She teaches feminist theory, Women's Studies, and the sociology of policing. She has published several articles about women's issues in Israel (Women in Black, women's peace activism, women in policing, violence against women, the feminist and lesbian movements) and is currently working on a book about radical feminist critique of Israeli society and women's position and co-editing a book on crime and criminal justice in Israel. Dr. Shadmi served as a senior police officer at the Israel Police Headquarters and published several critical analyses of the Israeli police.

Haya Shalom was born 1944 in Jerusalem. Haya is fifth generation Israeli Sephardi. She has worked as an assistant to a woman member of Knesset for the last thirteen years. She is a masseuse and a reflexologist. She founded CLaF (community for lesbians feminists) and is active in Women in Black, the weekly vigil against the occupation, and in other feminist peace organizations. Haya was a delegate to international feminist peace organizations, and co-founded the women and peace coalition. An interview with Haya appeared in "The Tribe of Dina," a Jewish women's anthology, and in "lesbiot: Israeli lesbians Talk about Sexuality, Feminism, Judaism, and their Life." Her articles, stories, and poems were published in various magazines in Israel and abroad.

Amalia Ziv is a doctoral candidate at the School of Cultural Studies, Tel Aviv University. Currently finishing her dissertation on female sexual subjectivity in pornographic literature, she teaches feminist and queer theory at the Department of Comparative Literature and Poetics and the Program for Women and Gender Studies at TAU. She is co-editor of *Beyond Sexuality* (Me'ever Laminiyut), selected essays in Lesbian & Gay Studies and Queer Theory, as well as co-organizer since 2001 of the annual TAU conference on Lesbian & Gay Studies and Queer Theory. In the last decade she has been one of the chief agents of disseminating queer knowledge in Israel. She has published on pornographic literature, the feminist sex wars, queer theory, and queer culture.

This page intentionally left blank.

INDEX

- A.M., 108, 110
AIDS, 22, 258
Al-Aqsa Intifada, 215
Albro, J. C., 119, 131
Alderson, Lynn, 200
Aleph, 44, 45
Altneuland, 253
Amir, Delila, 252, 260
Anzaldúa, Gloria, 136, 149
Appadurai, Arjun, 156, 165
Arafat, Yassir, 232, 233
Arditi, Jorge, 5
Ashkenazi, 117, 138, 147, 150, 186, 212,
213, 214, 238, 257, 262
Ashkenazim, 142, 143
Association for Civil Rights in Israel,
34, 59, 227
Association for Gay Men, Lesbians and
Bisexuals, 35, 36, 227
Ault, A., 131

Bacon, James, 167
Bar On, Bat-Ami, 77, 78, 235
Bar Yosef, Rivka, 252
Barak, Aharon, 18, 31
Barkai, Nurit, 3
Bat Adam, Michal, 251
Bat Shalom, 186
bearers of the collective, 234
Begin, Menachem, 194
Beit Knesset, 87
Bell, David, 165
Ben Gurion, 252
Benjamin, Orly, 260
Berkovitch, Nitza, 229, 230, 252
Berner-Kadish, Nicole, 30
Berner-Kadish, Ruti, 30
Beruber, Alan, 73
Bethke Elshetain, Elizabeth, 224
Black Panthers, 43, 142
Blackwood, Caroline, 200
Bnot Pesia, 223
Booth, K., 73
Bordo, Susan, 156
Bourdieu, Pierre, 158
Boyarin, Daniel, 225, 253
Boym, Svetlana, 163
Braidotti, Rosi, 165
Brant, B., 118
Brock-Utne, Birgit, 200
Bunch, Charlotte, 203, 204, 205
Butler, Judith, 119, 156, 192, 238, 263

Calhoun, Chesire, 263
Cant, Bob, 73, 74, 75, 84
chai b'hem, 96, 97, 100
changestvo, 158
Chauncery, George, 73, 84
Chazan, Naomi, 196, 197, 256
CLaF (the Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual
Association), 34, 35, 36, 39, 41, 51,
53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62,
63, 107, 120, 147, 147, 148, 149, 176,
179, 182, 189, 226, 227, 228, 229,
233, 234, 235, 240

- CLaF *Hazak*, 55, 137, 145, 146, 147, 151, 228, 233, 260, 264
 Clough, Patricia Ticineta, 253
 Cochran, S. D., 118, 131
 Cohen, Jean J., 262
 Cohen, Ruth, 204
 Crocker, E., 118, 131
 cult of fertility, 234, 235
- Dana International, 61, 164, 227, 235
Danilovitz case, 19, 22
 Danilovitz, Yonatan, 17, 18
 Daskalos, C., 119, 131
 Davis, M., 118
 Dayan, Yael, 19, 20, 56, 59, 60, 82, 238
 defamation law, 20
 d'Emilio, John, 73, 84
 Dirty Laundry, 187
 Divine, 111, 112
 domestic partnership laws, 20
 Dorner, Dalia, 18
 Draitser, Emil A., 163
 Dunne, J., 119
- Eden, Michal, 61
 Eder, Klaus, 254, 262
 Elshtain, J.B., 200
 emigration, 75, 78, 83, 84
 Emmett, Ayala, 256
 Eshet Hayil, 230, 231
 Espanioli, Nabila, 196
 Espin, Olivia, 73, 74, 84, 166
 Essig, Laurie, 155
 Esterberg, K., 118, 119, 129, 131
 Esther, Devora, 3
 Even, Uzi, 18, 32, 56, 61
 Ezrahi, Yaron, 1, 76, 82
- fags and dykes against the occupation, 187
 Faraday, A., 119, 130
 Fein, A., 74
 Ferree, M., 198, 199
 Fogiel-Bijaoui, Sylvie, 233
 Foucault, Michel, 119, 156
 Four Mothers, The, 177
 Frank, Arthur W., 156
 Frankfort-Nachmias, Chava, 3
- Freedman, Marsha, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 74, 202
 Freud, Sigmund, 225
 Friedman, Ariela, 252
- Gabaccia, Donna R., 73
 Gabriel, Ayala, 193
 Gawelek, Mary Ann, 73, 74, 84
 gay pride, 223
 Gershoni, Sharon, 56
 ghetto, 164, 165
 Gillath, Nurit, 195
 Glaser, Andreas, 253
 glass ceiling, 120
 GLBT, 154, 155, 163, 164, 167, 214, 215
 Gluzman, Michael, 252, 253
 Goffman, E., 131
 Gorelick, Sherry, 5
 Greenham Common, 200
 Grewal, Inderpal, 156
 Grosz, Elizabeth, 165
 Gulf War, 55, 177
 Gurevitz, D., 119
- Ha-Asiron Ha-Aher, 154
 Hadar, Ira, 3, 257
 HaKeshet HaDemocratit HaMizrahit, 151
 Halacha, 33, 90, 95, 97
 Halachic, 94
 Hall-Cathala, David, 195
 Harding, Sandra, 2, 5, 192
 Har'el, Alon, 155
 Harris, L., 118, 131, 200
 Hartman, Harriet, 73, 74, 84, 252
 Hartman, Moshe, 73
 Haymann, Flor, 74
 Hazelton, Lesley, 234, 235, 252
 Helman, Sarah, 191, 256
 Hennessy, Rosemary, 156
 Herzl, Theodor, 251, 252, 253
 Herzog, Hannah, 260
 Hess, B., 198, 199
 Hightower Langston, Donna, 136
 Hirsch, Dafna, 165
 homophobia, 163
 hooks, bell, 149

- Ichilov, Orit, 74
 Israel Defense Forces (IDF), 19, 21, 22, 32, 33
 intelligentisa, 153, 158, 159, 163, 168, 178
 International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC), 59
 International Women's Day, 230
 Intifada, 53, 175, 177, 180, 185, 186, 192, 206, 215, 218
 Isha L'Isha, 45, 50, 51, 52, 57
 IVF, 237
 Izraeli, Dafna, 234, 252

 Jacobson, Y., 129
 Jeffreys, Sheila, 258
 Jewish National Fund (JNF), 239
 Johnston, Hank, 254

 Kadish, Ruthie, 3, 155, 167
 Kantrowitz, Melanie Kaye, 53
 Kaplan, Caren, 156
 Kashrut, 89
 Kearney, Michael, 156
 Keating, Analouise, 136
 Kennedy, Elizabeth Lapovsy, 118
 kibbutz, 3, 65–72, 139
 kiddush, 87
 Kishurim, 187
 Klanderma, Bert, 254
 Klepfisz, Irena, 53
 Knesset, 15, 17, 19, 32, 56, 82, 226, 229, 230, 231, 234, 238, 239
 Knesset Subcommittee for the Prevention of Discrimination on the Basis of Sexual Orientation, 20
 Kol Ha-Isha, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 48, 49, 50, 256
 Kon, Igor, 155
 Korazim, J., 74
 kova' tembel, 213
 Kristeva, Julia, 193, 206
 Kufiyya, 211–219
 Kuntsman, Adi, 3, 163
 Kvisa Sc'hora, 187, 207

 Lauretis, Teresa, 259
 Lentin, Alana, 254, 263
 Lerner, Julia, 154

 Lesbian Feminist Community, 34
Lesbiot, 46, 232
 Levy, Patrick, 22
 Lomsky-Feder, Edna, 167
 Lorde, Audre, 204, 206
 Lubin, Orly, 251
 Luzzatto, Diana, 3, 129

 Mafdal, 33
Maga'im, 55
 Maimonides, 91
 Maizel, Doron, 33
 Maroni-Paner, Or, 147, 151
 Mays, V. M., 118, 131
 McClintock, Anne, 232
 McIntosh, M., 130
 Meiri, Sara, 22
 Meisel, Col. Doron, 21, 22
 Mies, Maria, 5
 Minerva club, 160
 Mirsky, Julia, 166
 Mishnah Torah, 91
 Mishtaknezot, 146
 Mistaknezet, 144, 145
 Mittelberg, David, 74
 mitzvah, 88
 mitzvoth, 90, 92, 93, 94
 Mizrahi, 3, 135, 136, 137, 138, 142, 143, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 186, 212, 214, 257, 260, 262, 264
 Mizrahim, 142, 144, 213, 218
 Mizug galuyot, 143
 Mohanty, Chandra, 149
 Mohin, Lillian, 200
Moments, 251
 Montell, Jessie, 195, 199
 Moore, Tracy, 47, 48, 50, 54, 82, 232
 Moriel, Liora, 56, 239
 Mothers Against Silence, 177, 195
 Motzafi-Haller, Pnina, 3, 151
 Movement of Reform Judaism, 20
 Moya, 150

 Nachal, 139
 Namir, Hadar, 56
 Nashim B'Shachor, 176
 Ness, 43
 Netanyahu, Benjamin (Bibi), 184

- New Israeli Left, 43
Noga, 1, 54, 55, 196

 Offe, Claus, 254, 261
 Oppenheimer, Jo, 79, 255, 258, 260
 oppositional consciousness, 192
 orientalist, 7
 Orthodykes, 89, 98
 Oslo accords, 176

 Padillis, P, 119, 131
 palmachnik, 225
 Parents Against Silence, 195
 Peace Now, 188, 194, 195
 Peace Quilt, 196
 Peres, Shimon, 20, 176
 Pitman, G., 118
 Plummer, K., 118, 130, 131
 Political Prisoners, 177
 Pope, Juliet, 196
 Popovsky, Mark, 155
 poshlost, 163
 postmodern constructionists, 118
 Pride Day, 160
 Prosser, Jay, 167

 queer, 164
 queer community, 164, 167, 169
 Queer Theory, 118, 156, 165

 Rabin, Yitzhak, 184, 230
 Radicalesbians, 253
 Ram, Uri, 167
 Rapoport, Tamar, 167, 191, 252, 256
 Rashi, 90
 Rich, Adrienne, 200, 201
 Richardson, Diane, 260
 Riordan, James, 155
 Ritterband, P., 74
 Robinson, Victoria, 260
 Rosenwasser, Penny, 196, 202
 Rosh Hashana, 94
 Rovlev, Hagar, 199
 Ruhe, S., 118, 131
 Rust, P. C., 131

 Sabbath, 87, 88
 Safir, P. Marilyn, 193, 194

 Safran, Hannah, 3
 Said, 8
 Sasson-Levy, Orna, 191, 261
 Schacter, Su, 3
 Schimmel, Lawrence, 167
 second-parent adoption, 31
 Sedgwick-Kosofsky, Eve, 156, 238
 Seidman, S., 118, 119, 131
 Senesh, Hannah, 230
 SHABAK, 213
 Shabbat, 87
 Shadmi, Erella, 4, 6, 7, 191, 252, 257, 261
 Shalom Achshav, 175
 Shalom, Haya, 3, 254
 Shalom-Shitrit, Sami, 167
 Shani, 177, 178, 196
 Shapira, Rina, 74
 Sharoni, Simona, 193, 195, 199, 201
 Shas, 231
 Sheperd, G., 119
 Schild, Ozer, 240
 Shmirat Shabbat, 89
 Shneider, Ricardo, 22
 Shokeid, M., 131
 shomer, 225
 Shrift, Ruthe, 252
 Shtainer, Adir, 21, 25, 33
 Simon, W., 119
 Single-Parent Family Law, 26
 situated knower, 5
 situated knowledge, 5
 Snittow, Ann, 200
 Sobel, Zvi, 74
 Sobolevsky, C.G., 119, 131
 Society for the Protection of Personal Rights (SPPR), 42, 43, 52, 53, 56, 58, 60, 107, 227
 sodomy law, 17
 Spark, The, 109, 112
 standpoint epistemology, 5
 Steinberg, Abraham, 35
 Swilder, Ann, 5
 Swirski, Barbara, 193, 194, 255

 Ta'ayush, 187
 Takagi, D., 118, 131
 Tarrow, Sidney, 254

- The Other Ten Percent, 59, 154
 Tienda, M., 73
 Tobias, S., 200
 Tolmach Lakoff, R., 130, 131
 Torah, 93
 Torat Cohanim, 90
 Touraine, Alain, 254, 262
 transnational, 156, 165
 Tsena U'rena, 44, 45, 46, 48
 Tully, C., 119, 131
 Turner, V., 128

 uncritical polyvocalization, 6, 7

 Valentine, Gill, 165
 Van Gennep, A, 128

 Walzer, Lee, 82
 Waters, Sarah, 254
 Weeks, J., 130
 Weiss, Shevah, 56
 Weitz, R., 118
 Wenzel, Mirjam, 255
 Whelehan, Imelda, 252, 253, 258
 Whisman, Vera, 201
 Whitam, F. L., 119, 131
 Wittig, Monique, 253, 263
 Women Against the Invasion of
 Lebanon, 195

 Women Against the Occupation, 189, 195
 Women and Peace Coalition, 55
 Women for Women, 177
 Women in Black, 7, 50, 55, 176, 177,
 178, 186, 189, 191–209, 232, 233
 Women's Coalition for Peace, 186
 Women's Equal Rights Law, 231
 Women's Liberation Movement, 40

 Yanay, Nitza, 186, 252
 Yaros-Hakak, Tal, 27, 54, 56, 59, 61
 Yaros-Hakak, Avital, 58, 62
 Yerida, 73
 Yishai, Yael, 2, 76, 77, 255, 257
 Yishuv, 225, 234
 Yona, Yossi, 151
 Young, Elise, 196, 199
 Yuval-Davis, Nira, 224, 229, 234, 252

 Zimmerman, Bonnie, 254, 255
 Zionism, 3, 223, 240, 252, 253, 254
 Zionist(s), 143, 166, 167, 194, 224, 225,
 228, 231, 232, 234, 235, 239, 251,
 255, 260, 261
 Ziv, Amalia, 3
Zman Varod, 55, 62
 Zoo Show, 60
 Zuk, Olga, 168

This page intentionally left blank.