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## Female Images in a State of War

*The Israeli War Widow in Fiction and Film*

EVERY NATION creates myths, symbols, and rituals that embody the essence of its unique history and identity. Invoking figures, sites, and objects associated with past events, these symbolic forms create an awareness of common roots and a continuous tradition. Their emphasis on the nation's historical continuity implies not only a shared past but also a vision of a shared future.<sup>1</sup> By reinforcing the nation's boundaries vis-à-vis other groups, they provide evidence that supports and substantiates the claim for a distinct national identity. As a result, myths, symbols, and rituals become an important tool for rendering the nation a less-elusive reality, turning what Benedict Anderson referred to as an "imagined community" into a more tangible collective experience.<sup>2</sup>

These symbolic forms thus belong to the sacred domain of society's life, binding its members into a historical, political, and moral community.<sup>3</sup> Hence, the construction of these collective symbolic forms is most critical during the nation's formative years. Often, the emphasis on a shared origin is further enhanced by the experience of a struggle to defend the group's identity and heritage against external pressures. The experience of a national struggle intensifies the need for the creation of symbolic forms in support of the national cause. Myths, symbols, and rituals thus play a central role in shaping the nation's patriotic heritage and agenda.<sup>4</sup> When the national struggle is resolved, the changing political situation is likely to modify the status and meaning of these symbolic forms. With the establishment of a nation-state, these forms often assume an official, or semiofficial, status. Paradoxically, although this formalization indicates their success, it is likely to result in a process of distancing. Excessive formalization runs the risk of a loss of

popular appeal and political relevance. In less extreme cases, however, the formalization may expose these forms to a more critical scrutiny and thus lead to a significant modification of their meaning.<sup>5</sup>

This chapter examines the transformations of a national symbol in Israeli culture since the late 1940s to date, focusing on the representation of the war widow in fiction and film. Given her affiliation with the Fallen Soldier, a key mythical figure in Israeli national culture, the war widow too has become a symbolic figure of national significance. The war widow's image is therefore tied to the centrality of patriotic death to Zionist ideology and culture.

In its heyday Zionism developed an elaborate patriotic lore that raised sacrifice for the nation as a supreme value. Influenced by traditional Jewish concepts of martyrdom on the one hand and European romantic views of nationalism and sacrifice on the other hand, Hebrew national culture created its own heroic myths and symbols. Zionism's perspective on Jewish history enhanced the importance of national struggle and, with it, the theme of patriotic sacrifice.

This study's point of departure is the 1940s, a critical decade that witnessed the massive murder and persecution of European Jewry in the Holocaust, the escalating conflict with the Arabs in Palestine, and the struggle against the British mandate to establish a Jewish state. The decade culminated with the breakout of the 1948–49 war following the declaration of Israel's Independence. In this context, patriotic sacrifice was no longer an ideological construct or a limited phenomenon; it became part of a grim everyday reality. And yet, as Israeli society developed throughout the following decades, its heroic myths and symbols have gradually been transformed. The examination of the Israeli war widow's changing image thus allows us to explore the process of constructing and deconstructing a national symbol within the context of a changing political culture.

Israel's pantheon of heroes is almost exclusively male. Men fight in wars and receive medals and citations for their heroic acts, and their death in battle is commemorated and glorified. Women, like children, enter the domain of collective national symbols through their relation to men.<sup>6</sup> When a son, husband, or father dies in the war, the woman's social status is transformed into a "bereaved mother," a "war widow," or a "war orphan." Like other female representations, the war widow is relegated to the margins of the landscape of war imagery. Her entry into this domain begins upon her husband's death and is intimately linked to his posthumous career as a national symbol.

In societies where gender roles have been professedly traditional, this situation may be taken for granted. In Israeli society, however, this reality can come as something of a surprise. After all, the socialist founders of this soci-

ety in the earlier part of this century had prided themselves on their progressive social views regarding gender equality. Women were active members of underground movements for national liberation prior to the foundation of the state and are still recruited for a military service at the age of eighteen. Yet, as historical studies on gender issues have recently shown, there is a marked gap between the rhetoric of equality and historical reality in relation to gender issues. This was the case in socialist communes that advocated an egalitarian social order during the beginning of the century,<sup>7</sup> and during the struggle for national liberation in the 1940s.<sup>8</sup> The ideological rhetoric was nonetheless instrumental to shaping Israelis' self-images and thereby diffuse social awareness of these discrepancies.<sup>9</sup> Following the foundation of the state, women's service in the Israel Defense Forces was further adjusted to more traditional gender prescriptions and restricted to noncombat roles.<sup>10</sup> Ironically, even when women put their lives at a greater risk than men, as was the case of nurses who reported to the hospitals during the Gulf War while their husbands remained at home with the children, these experiences were largely ignored in public memory.<sup>11</sup>

The war of that followed Israel's declaration of independence established the marginal status of war widows in the community of mourners. Known in Israel as "The War of Liberation" or "The Independence War," it was a traumatic experience with a high level of casualties (close to six thousand Jews died, i.e., about 1 percent of the Jewish population).<sup>12</sup> The relatively young age of most casualties emphasized the soldiers' role as sons, who gave their lives for the newly established state.<sup>13</sup> When a bereaved parents' organization, *Yad Labanim* (the Memorial for the Sons) was founded in 1949, the parents were regarded as representing the entire community of mourners; women who lost their spouses or companions received little attention.<sup>14</sup> The social emphasis on the collective sacrifice and loss experienced by Israeli society served to delegitimize public displays of individual pain and veil individuals' difficulties in coping with the private consequences of that loss.<sup>15</sup>

As Lea Shamgar-Handelman notes in her pioneering study of war widows, the term emerged as a social category in public discourse only after the 1967 Six-Day War. The plight of the widow attracted the media's attention as if it were a new and unfamiliar phenomenon, and the government responded to public pressure to establish new procedures to care for the widows and their children. And it was only after the 1973 Yom Kippur War that the widows founded their own organization in affiliation with *Yad Labanim*.<sup>16</sup> Although this development indicated a new awareness of the widows' distinct needs, it also reflected the continuing perception of their secondary position relative to the bereaved parents.

Jewish tradition emphasizes the significance of remembrance in prayer and ritual, and Israeli culture has continued this tradition, as is evident in the large number of monuments, memorial books, poetry, and fiction devoted to this subject.<sup>17</sup> Like other widows, the war widow functions as a symbolic extension of her dead husband and the carrier of his memory. Her burden, however, exceeds that of any other widow because of her husband's death as a soldier. In this case, the state assumes the moral obligation to cherish the memory of his patriotic sacrifice and the responsibility to support his wife and children. That the Ministry of Defense assumes this task marks the shift in the widow's new status as a member of the "bereaved family."<sup>18</sup>

The husband's death as a soldier thus introduces the state as a third party into the dyadic husband-wife relationship and transforms the symbolic role of each of its components. The dead is no longer merely a husband; he is also a "fallen soldier" whose death is commemorated publicly every year on Israel's Memorial Day, and the state claims ownership over his memory. The widow is not only a wife but assumes a symbolic role vis-à-vis the state as representing her dead husband within the community of the living.

In this new set of relationships the widow becomes a living memorial for the fallen soldier, and in this capacity she too enters the domain of national symbols. In this capacity she is the object of public scrutiny and is under pressure to behave in conformity with the social prescription of this role. Society's expectations from her, however, are often ambiguous and contradictory. She is expected to go through a process of mourning and recovery and reenter social life as a full-fledged member of society. But at the same time she is also expected to maintain her role as a symbolic representation of her dead husband.

The literary and cinematic works examined here provide insights into the changing perception of the war widow in Israeli culture since the foundation of the state of Israel. During the earlier part of this period, the unique situation of the war widow was largely marginalized or ignored. The 1960s offered a transitory phase, in which the war widow emerged as a figure but was objectified as an extension of her dead husband. More recently, however, a number of works of fiction and film have chosen to portray the war widow as a subject in its own right, portraying the vulnerability of her position as a woman subject to ambivalent social attitudes. By highlighting social and psychological tensions that society tends to ignore, these works provide their own commentary to the state of the war widow in contemporary Israeli society. As such they may be seen as agents of change, evoking public awareness of the war widow's unique situation and stimulating public discourse on these issues.

## The Mute Widow

Perhaps the most famous novel of the late 1940s, Moshe Shamir's *He Went Through the Fields* (1947) provides our point of departure.<sup>19</sup> The novel was one of the first examples of what is known as the literature of the "1948 generation." These works of literature, written by young Israeli writers who reached adulthood in the 1940s, tend to focus on an adolescent man who, like these writers, grows up in prestate Israeli society and participates in the collective mission of nation building. The women are mostly featured as companions to the male protagonists, objects of their gaze, desire, or frustration.

In line with this predominant trend, *He Went Through the Fields* revolves around the figure of the first son of the kibbutz, Uri, who returns home following his graduation from high school. His girlfriend, Mika, a Holocaust survivor who recently joined the kibbutz, is a minor figure in the novel. When Uri is summoned by the underground, she attempts to dissuade him from going. Uri's education does not allow him to put personal needs before the call for national service, whereas Mika's experiences lead her to regard his departure as desertion and betrayal. The novel ends with Uri's death in an accident. At this point, Mika appears to become the focus of his parents' attention, yet the interest in her lies in her role as the biological link between their dead son and his future child, whom she carries in her womb. For the bereaved parents, the promise of continuity within the family line brings a measure of comfort as a symbolic compensation for the loss of their own son. In the film by the same title, which is based on the novel, this point is further highlighted by the opening and concluding scenes featuring Uri's son, named after his dead father.<sup>20</sup> Returning to the kibbutz as a soldier, young Uri is greeted by his grandfather in the very same way the latter had greeted the father years earlier. This coda reinforces the emphasis on the male line, showing the grandson as taking the place of the dead son. The women are absent from these scenes.

Shamir's novel provides an example of how the experience of widowhood is silenced through the marginalization of the female character.<sup>21</sup> Mika occupies the center stage only briefly in her symbolic role as a womb. Her future as a war widow and her child's experiences as an orphan lie beyond the interest of this work. The narrative's focus on the dead male hero thus silences the widow's story, which would typically begin where her husband's life ends.<sup>22</sup>

Even when the widow plays a greater role in a novel, this does not necessarily imply that the experience of widowhood receives the attention it deserves within the narrative. Two later works of fiction provide examples of how the war widow remains mute about her experience of widowhood

even when she is allowed to have a more prominent place within the narrative or assert her voice on other matters of social concern.

Nathan Shaham's novel *Aller Retour* (1972) depicts a young woman whose husband was killed in the 1967 war,<sup>23</sup> whereupon she decides to take a year leave from her kibbutz and go abroad. The novel describes her experiences in London and ends with her return home. Although she serves as the main protagonist in this work, her recent experience of being widowed receives only scant and superficial treatment. The novel provides the impression that her young age shields the heroine from suffering deep psychological injury as a result of her husband's death. The heroine moves from the role of "wife" to that of a "single woman" and a "daughter," and the novel offers little reflection on the impact of this transition. At some point, the widow admits that she used her husband's death as an excuse to fulfill an old wish to see the world beyond her closed kibbutz environment. This statement may reflect Shaham's own approach to the issue of her widowhood in the construction of the novel: *Aller Retour* uses the experience of widowhood in order to address the theme of the young "wandering Israelis" who feel the urge to escape home in order to free themselves from the pressures of their immediate environment and struggle on their own to define their futures.<sup>24</sup> Within this framework, the protagonist's social role as a daughter clearly becomes more significant than her status as a war widow.

In a similar fashion, Batya Gur's *Cohabitation: Murder in the Kibbutz* revolves around the murder of the kibbutz's secretary, who is a war widow. This fact, however, is of minor significance for the plot. To the limited extent that we learn about the heroine's inner and social worlds, her childhood experiences appear to have a far greater impact on her life. Having come to the kibbutz as a refugee girl (her entire family had perished in the Holocaust) and desiring to distance herself from her mother, a loose woman who was unable to take care of her, the secretary strives to gain a position of respectability within the close-knit kibbutz community.<sup>25</sup> Her strong commitment to reforming one of the fundamental principles in the social organization of kibbutz life (i.e., children's sleeping arrangements) is nurtured by her early painful experience as an outside child. For the concerned observer she appeared "as if she were setting a score without being aware of that" (132). In contrast, her husband's death seems to have left no apparent scar or void in her life.

The husband's death in the War of Lebanon may have reinforced the attractive widow's efforts to deny her sexuality in order to discourage advances by male kibbutz members and diffuse possible suspicions by other women. It may also explain her covert affair with a married politician, who, like her, had come to the kibbutz as an "outside child" yet chose to leave. The au-

thor's interest appears to lie in the issue of the intergenerational struggle between the veteran ideologues and the young reform-seekers during a critical moment in the life of a kibbutz community. The widow's experiences are hardly explored in the novel.

Ultimately, the woman's position as a daughter—in relation to her own biological mother whom she rejected, and her mother-in-law, the prominent educator whose ideological stance she now challenges—is more critical to the novel than her position as a wife, a widow, or a mother.<sup>26</sup> The centrality of the ideological battle is also evident in the case of the mother-in-law who turns out to be the widow's murderer. *Cohabitation: Murder in the Kibbutz* reveals no internal conflict or ambivalence on the old woman's part in killing her dead son's wife, who is also the mother of her orphaned grandchildren. In Gur's work, like in Shaham's novel, the kibbutz serves as a microcosm for Israeli society in order to demonstrate the priority of collective over individual needs. Although the author clearly wishes to criticize this trend within the kibbutz's society, her work ultimately colludes with it by obscuring the widow's internal struggle in the face of broader social and political concerns.

The image of the mute widow becomes the explicit focus of a more recent short story, "Written in Stone," by Savyon Liebrecht,<sup>27</sup> yet this story presents the war widow from a different perspective through a narrator who is positioned close to her consciousness. The story therefore reveals the widow's own perception of her muteness, as well as her inner struggle to overcome this loss of voice within the context of her relations with her husband's family, to whose house she is drawn every year on the anniversary of his death. The in-laws, North African immigrants who do not subscribe to the national-secular ethos of Israeli culture, express overt hostility toward the widow. They relate to her not only as a stranger invading their private sorrow but also as a representative of Israeli society who took away their son and is responsible for his death. The widow experiences these annual memorials as an annual ritual of humiliation and suffering. Shrinking in the corner under their hostile gaze and unfriendly silence, the subdued widow too withdraws into silence. When she leaves, she promises to herself: "Next year I'll talk" (110).

The conflict between the widow and the mother-in-law can be clearly interpreted as a power struggle over the ownership of memory: "The women watched her in silence through the years. . . . They watched her as she sat among them like one who had come to claim her share, as if telling them without words: he is mine too. You will not shut me out of memories" (100).<sup>28</sup> The husband's family feels entitled to their son's memory and prefers

to ignore the widow's claim to it made through her mute presence and the wedding ring she deliberately displays.

The resolution of this impasse is reached only when the mother breaks through the silence, engaging for the first time in a conversation with the widow. The older woman hands over to the widow a letter that her husband had mailed before his death and which she has kept secret for twelve years. This limited gesture of acknowledgment of the widow's entitlement to the son makes it possible for the latter to finally break through her silence and express her anger and pain at the rejecting mother-in-law. Yet the mother-in-law's gesture is soon followed by her request that the widow relinquish her hold on the past and her annual visits to the family's house and that she refrain from naming her future baby after her dead husband. The old woman's insistence on separation liberates the widow from the hold of the past and allows her to move on to the future. Whereas her earlier attempts to rebuild her life were doomed to fail,<sup>29</sup> once she regains her voice she can abandon the past and her husband's memory. This solution does not present the viable possibility of integrating her newly found voice and her experience of widowhood: by gaining the one, she loses her entitlement to that past.<sup>30</sup> This ultimately reinforces the image of the widow as a mute figure.

### *A Living Memorial*

The films *The Hero's Wife* (Eshet ha-Gibor) and *Siege* (Matsor), made in 1963 and 1969 respectively, construct a different representation of the war widow.<sup>31</sup> The two films allow the war widow to move from a marginal position to center stage, demonstrating that her experiences are unique and complex and that this is a topic that deserves attention in its own right. The narratives of these movies describe the war widow's struggle to cope with memories and loneliness as well as with her status as a collective symbol. Both films choose to focus on the widows' social life among their peers.

In spite of their common themes, there is a remarkable difference between the two movies. *The Hero's Wife* portrays a widow who for fifteen years following her husband's death appears to be functioning well in the work sphere but is socially withdrawn and lives in extended mourning. Her groomed public appearance and high social standing in her kibbutz thus stand in sharp contrast to her inner life and private space, which, like a shrine, is full of relics from the past. As the film title suggests, the widow sees herself (and is seen by many) not as an independent person but as "the hero's wife." Although her friends encourage her to become more socially engaged, she appears unable to unlock the hold of this role.

The war widow's unexpected sexual awakening is triggered by a young American volunteer at the kibbutz. Unimpressed with her role as a living memorial for her much admired husband, he pursues her unabashedly. The film focuses on the widow's internal struggle between her sense of moral obligation to the dead, her embracement of the kibbutz's collectivist ethos, and her attraction to the cynical, carefree outsider. The impasse is broken when the kibbutz becomes the target of enemy fire. In spite of his earlier individualist statements, the young volunteer proves his readiness to risk his life to save the kibbutz. Upon discovering that he survived his heroic deed, the widow lets down her defenses and becomes his lover. The brief encounter the night before the volunteer leaves the kibbutz shows how both individuals have been transformed: he has learned to recognize the moral bounds of his professed individualism, and she is released from the moral and social constraints of her role as a living memorial for her husband and rediscovers herself as a woman of flesh and blood. As the lover leaves the kibbutz, the conclusion of the film suggests the budding possibility of a new relationship between her and another loyal friend, whose love for her she had long ignored, thus providing a more socially acceptable resolution.

*The Hero's Wife* has many faults: the characters are unidimensional, the dialogue is often shallow and unconvincing, the acting is heavily theatrical, and the use of stereotypical images abundant. Marked by its period, the movie is clearly colored by its heavy nationalist thrust. Moreover, unlike later works, *The Hero's Wife* presents an extremely favorable portrayal of the kibbutz as a nurturing environment for widows, allowing the heroine some private space during her withdrawal and encouraging her recovery without making her anxious about the possible criticism of her behavior. In spite of the film's faults, its readiness to address the widow's inability to recover from the mourning process and her withdrawal from social life was an important step in the exploration of war widowhood.

Made in the aftermath of the Six-Day War, the film *Siege* presents a more mature and complex representation of the war widow's process of mourning, withdrawal, and recovery. Influenced by the New Wave films and shot in black and white, the movie follows the widow's shifts between temporal frameworks and levels of consciousness, as memories of the past invade her present interactions. In exploring the state of widowhood, *Siege* is particularly interested in portraying the ambivalence that underlies the relations between the war widow and her dead husband's friends: the friends offer the widow protection, help, and support out of loyalty to the dead, and they care for her as an extension of their bond with him. Although grateful for their support, the widow also experiences their attitude as social control. The tension is heightened when the late husband's best friend finds out that the war

widow is pursuing a new relationship without his knowledge or approval. Critical and alarmed at first, he eventually accepts her lover and supports her choice. The widow and the friend thus succeed in averting the danger of creating another rupture in her life, maintaining their friendship while providing her the necessary space for a psychological and social recovery. When the best friend gives her an album for the dead husband's photographs that are displayed throughout her house, the widow is symbolically released from shaping her life and environment as a living memorial for the dead in order to allow for her continued recovery.

### *The Eternal Widow*

Had the movie *Siege* ended at the point described above, its message would have been optimistic; yet the ending is quite different. As the War of Attrition continues to waver on the borders, the lover is called for reserve duty. The widow hears news on the radio about critically wounded soldiers in the area where her lover serves, and not being able to get further information she goes up to that area with her dead husband's best friend to find out the fate of her lover. The movie ends ambiguously as the narrative shifts its focus from the individual's story to the political situation, implying that the recurrent state of war in Israel does not allow the heroine to recover from widowhood. The widow's state of being internally besieged is reinforced by society's analogous state of siege in the continuing conflict. The broader political situation therefore creates a deterministic framework that renders futile the woman's personal struggle for recovery.

In this respect *Siege* was an early exploration of a theme that would preoccupy Israeli literature, theater, and film of the 1970s and the 1980s. During these two intense decades of conflict, including the Yom Kippur War, the War of Lebanon, and the Intifada, there was a growing sense of disillusionment and skepticism about the continuing toll on human life with no hope for a resolution in sight. The feeling of entrapment within a continuous cycle of wars and bloodshed thus emerged as a major theme that served as a critique of the heroic-national lore of earlier periods.

The theme of being besieged within the role of the war widow is also explored in the 1982 film *Repeat Dive* (Tsilila Hozeret), directed by Shimon Dotan. This film portrays a marine commando unit during the 1969 War of Attrition, and it offers two interlinking subplots: the first focuses on the marines' attempts to cope with a comrade's death in action as they pursue their military practice and risky operations; the second traces the relationship between the widow and her dead husband's childhood and commando friend. Connecting the two subplots is a recorded monologue made by the

husband during a party that his best friend brings to the widow. In this tape, the husband jokingly declares that he leaves his wife to that friend, as he goes on to boast about his sexual pursuits with other women.

Though the widow responds with anger to the revelation of her dead husband's infidelity and to being handed down as an object to another man, she behaves as if she is overpowered by her dead husband's will. She soon announces her intention to marry his best friend, and the two get married. This union, however, is undermined by its forced character, the lack of sexual and emotional intimacy between the two partners, and the new husband's decision to extend his military service in the marine commando, in spite of his wife's deep-seated fear that he too will be killed in action. Held together by a sense of moral indebtedness to the dead, this marriage is reduced to a living memorial for him.

More than exploring the widow's inner and social worlds, *Repeat Dive* addresses the gap between the Israeli male soldier's heroic image and his psychological and social immaturity outside of the military sphere. The film narrative is interspersed with the marines' cynical comments on patriotic sacrifice and is imbued with antiwar sentiments and morbid humor. Yet ultimately, despite its attempt to provide a critique of gender stereotypes, the film remains trapped by them. The war widow is depicted as an enigmatic woman who is seen through the male gaze as both erratic and neurotic. She is incomprehensible but controlling, demanding but not giving. She is highly critical of the marines' values and behavior, yet proceeds to throw herself into their midst and imposes her presence on them. Mostly, she appears to have no world of her own, independent of her double role as a wife and a war widow. The film shows that Israeli society is trapped within an endless cycle of war and bloodshed that does not allow its men to mature and that leaves its women lonely and suffering. The woman is locked into a predetermined track that moves her from the position of a wife to that of a war widow, without hope of escaping this fate.

Like *Repeat Dive*, other works of fiction, film, and theater show that given the continuous cycle of bloodshed, Israeli women cannot escape the heritage of widowhood. The film *Atalia* (1984), directed by Akiba Tevet, portrays a woman who became a war widow in the Sinai campaign of 1956 and faces the likelihood of losing her young lover when the Yom Kippur War breaks out in 1973. Although the lover is spared from service for medical reasons, her daughter's boyfriend is killed in action. The role of the war widow is thus passed on from mother to daughter as if part of a family tradition.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, a recent play by David Shrir, entitled *Daria*,<sup>33</sup> features three women of the same family: the mother and her aunt are widows of the 1967 and 1948 wars

respectively, whereas the daughter narrowly escapes their fate when her spouse is severely wounded.

The war widow thus assumes a symbolic function that goes well beyond her individual case. Her personal state of siege turns into an allegory for the state of siege in which Israeli society exists, locked into a vicious cycle of conflict, injuries, and death. Rather than being associated with the symbolism of national heroism as an extension of her dead husband, the eternal widow is displayed in these works as a collective metaphor of victimization. This symbolic transformation can also be seen as a new version of the biblical story of the *Akeda*, the binding of Isaac. Given the symbolic significance of the *Akeda* in Jewish tradition and its deliberate inversion in modern Hebrew literature,<sup>34</sup> the feminist reinterpretation of this story is quite telling. In contrast to the traditional male version (Abraham's readiness to sacrifice his son as evidence of his faith in God and Isaac's compliance) and the transformed contemporary male version (the sons' protest against their sacrifice by the fathers in Israel's wars), this feminist interpretation introduces the woman into this story and presents her as the one who makes the sacrifice and struggles to cope with its long-term consequences. The eternal widow thus emerges as a counterimage to the male hero, replacing him as the young person who is forever tied to the altar in that liminal zone between the communities of the living and the dead.

Ironically, by offering the eternal war-widow image, these works continue an earlier trend of objectifying the widow to support an ideological agenda. In their desire to critique the national lore, they end up relating to the widow not as an individual woman who struggles to cope with her state of widowhood but as a collective symbol.

### *The Irreverent Widow*

Recent works of fiction mark a shift in the representation of the war widow by allowing the reader direct access to her consciousness or positioning the narrator close to her perspective. These works therefore focus on the war widow's experiences as seen by her and provide a voice to the otherwise muted figure who is used as a national symbol. By shifting her position within the narrative and by allowing her voice and perspective to take over, these works reveal a more complex response to widowhood. No longer presenting a two-dimensional portrait that answers society's need to see her as a symbol, they create a figure of flesh and blood who discloses the ambivalence, anger, despair, desires, and frustrations that she experiences.

Having access to the widow's perspective makes it possible to reflect on



her response to the expectation that she functions as a symbolic extension of her husband. For the widow, life under the shadow of memory can become an oppressive experience. Atalia addresses her protest against the burden of memory to her dead husband, Matti:

"Almost twenty years have passed. A third of my life I knew you," she tells him, "and only one-tenth of this time I was with you. I left you when you were twenty-four years old and I am already a bit over forty now. How dare you direct my path, stop me, caution me. I am a grown woman and you are still a boy. Years have passed by and the world is different, Matti."<sup>35</sup>

The widow's role as a living memorial for her husband calls for her participation in official commemorations of fallen soldiers. In a recent film on war widows entitled *Sex, Lies and Dinner*,<sup>36</sup> one of the widows remarks on how they are expected to attend every memorial service and spend every Israel's Memorial Day for the fallen soldiers in the military cemetery. "An awesome entertainment for a twenty-four-year-old woman," she adds dryly. "Once," she tells her friends, "someone even tried to come on to me in the cemetery." "And what?" "What's what? I told him that I am already taken, I already have a tombstone here." Miri, the heroine of Lea Aini's *Sand Tide*, refuses to go to a memorial ceremony for her husband sponsored by the Ministry of Defense. "I refuse to participate in the glorification of memory that is offered to me as an exclusive substitute . . . for my dead husband whom I love," she protests.<sup>37</sup> Helping a tourist who is looking for a match in the matchmaking office where she works, she wants to tell him: "It is easy to come here, to this land of the dead, and catch an Israeli woman. Simply, because they die less [than the men]. But because men die around them all the time, throughout their lives, grandparents and fathers and husbands and sons, they have become hardened."<sup>38</sup> In the play *Daria* the widow of the 1967 war exclaims: "I don't want to fill my life with albums and memorial rooms." To which her aunt, who was widowed in 1948, replies: "You don't know how it is when people forget. Who remembers today my war of 1948? This is what I live for, to remind them." In this respect, she goes on to explain, she functions as a monument to that war, not unlike those burned armored cars left on the side of the road to Jerusalem.

The burden of memory becomes even more acute when one considers the contrast between the short duration of the couple's shared life and the long-term impact of the husband's death on the widow.<sup>39</sup> In the story "Written in Stone," the widow was married less than three months yet feels bound to her husband's family and memory for more than twelve years. The childless heroine of *The Hero's Wife* lives under the shadow of memory for fifteen years following her husband's death. The oppressive nature of memory is further highlighted in *Sand Tide* through the image of the widow whose hus-

band was killed in the Polish army in 1936, immediately after their wedding. Not able to overcome this traumatic experience, she remained mentally disconnected from the present for decades.<sup>40</sup>

The widow's feeling that her husband's memory is fading evokes both guilt and frustration. The pressure worsens when she is faced with the expectation to romanticize their relationship: "Isn't it true that big love remains forever, Atalia? Isn't it true that you cannot forget Dad?" her daughter asks her.<sup>41</sup> The widow attempts to affirm that view while aware that the reality was quite different: their brief marriage was prompted by her pregnancy and was devoid of love or joy.

The widow's awareness of the gap between the official commemoration of the dead and her own experiences is further highlighted in the pervasive theme of accidental death in works about war widows. The husband's death, we learn, is not the product of a heroic stand in the battlefield but rather results from an accident. Thus, Uri was killed during the underground's practice (*He Went Through the Fields*),<sup>42</sup> and the husband in *Siege* was killed by a stray bullet. Though the dead are publicly commemorated as fallen soldiers, the widows' awareness of the real circumstances of their husbands' death raises doubts about the significance of their husbands' sacrifice and makes it more difficult for the widows to accept its glorification. "What a way he found to die. What a time. Later, out of some kind of pity . . . he became a war casualty," Atalia reflects on her husband's death to herself.<sup>43</sup> Miri of *Sand Tide* refers at one point to "that idiotic accident" that caused her husband's death, and in another she reproaches him for being hit by a road mine "like a jerk" (24-25). And in the film *Sex, Lies, and Dinner*, a widow discloses that her husband died on the way to the men's room from an accidental gunshot by a new recruit. The incongruity of the circumstances of this death with the conventional glorification of fallen soldiers as heroes creates a humorous juxtaposition, but it also puts to question the assumption regarding the inevitability of death and the value of sacrifice for both the husband and the surviving widow.

The war widows' black humor and cynical remarks express discomfort at the fact that the state imposes the memory of the dead on them for its own needs and that society does not acknowledge their personal needs under their public masks: *Sand Tide*, *Daria*,<sup>44</sup> and *Sex, Lies, and Dinner* are examples of a recent novel, play, and film, respectively, that depict morbid humor as a response to this pressure. Such expressions of cynicism and black humor contribute to the image of the irreverent widow. This image deliberately challenges sacred patriotic values of Israeli society, such as the importance of heroic sacrifice on the man's part and its full acceptance despite high personal cost on the surviving widow's part. The irreverent widow challenges

the national significance attributed to her sacrifice and displays her doubts about its inevitability and worthiness. The emergence of black humor in response to the war and its impact is hardly unique to the case of the war widow. The prevalence of morbid jokes during wars, especially those that were not supported by a national consensus (i.e., the Lebanon War and the Intifada) demonstrates humor's function as an expression of emotions and doubts that cannot be openly articulated and therefore appear in that more diffused form.<sup>45</sup>

Indeed, the humorous framework in these works goes beyond its depiction of irreverent widows. The narrative itself assumes an irreverent position to its subject matter by focusing on the woman's intimate thoughts and bodily needs, as well as social circumstances. The method of acknowledging the widow's sexuality and exposing her inner life and bodily needs is in itself subversive to her sacred mythical image, for it engages the reader in viewing the widow as a woman rather than a public figure who is watched from a disarming distance.

*Sex, Lies, and Dinner* is a drama about widows that openly addresses the tensions between their social and sexual needs, public face, and private life. The film presents two radically different models of responses to widowhood: the hostess, a seemingly carefree woman who prides herself on being sexually uninhibited and determined to have a good time, and the widow who fears to undermine her social reputation by going out with men and hence avoids any intimate contacts. As the evening proceeds the hostess invites a performance by a male striptease-dancer and later invites to her home several men to join the widows for drinks.<sup>46</sup> The film is interspersed with comic scenes, yet the widows' pain and struggle with loneliness become increasingly evident. The juxtaposition of the widows' attempts to preserve the humorous framework with their later acknowledgment of continuing hardships they suffer in trying to come to terms with the loss makes *Sex, Lies, and Dinner* a powerful drama.

Similarly, *Sand Tide* is imbued with the narrator's humorous descriptions of her own life as a widow following her husband's death. The humor serves to support the widow's denial of the situation as well as to diffuse the acute pain she experiences. The novel opens with a scene that leaves no doubt in the reader's mind that this work presents an unconventional portrayal of widowhood. "Your father called. I was sitting on the toilet, exhausted, though it was already nine o'clock in the morning, and was looking at the wonders of my naked private parts." The opening is deliberately shocking. The widow is not put on the pedestal as a national symbol but described as a woman sitting on the toilet, examining her vagina in order to see the effects that her husband's absence has had on her body. She is not the object of

public gaze described in the third person but an agent, a woman of flesh and blood who acts on her own will.

The heroine does not relate to her loss as a sacrifice for the nation but as the inexplicable disappearance of her husband who is no longer there to make love to her. She does not only acknowledge her deprived sexuality but centers on it. In spite of this appearance of openness, it is important to remember that Miri examines herself in the privacy of her own bathroom, protected from others' gaze and knowledge. Her openness about her innermost feelings and thoughts is directed in her mind toward her dead husband. It is the fact that her subversiveness is hidden that allows Miri to be acceptable socially. As we shall see below, when the irreverent widow proceeds too far, she becomes cast as a social misfit who poses a threat to the social order.

### *The Widow as a Social Misfit*

The fictional representations of the war widow reveal the difficulties that she encounters in negotiating her double role as a war widow and a single woman. They portray her own ambivalence about her social position as well as the ambiguous and often contradictory messages from society. The widow's public status as a collective symbol provides license to others to constantly observe her behavior and thereby make her feel—as one widow describes it in *Siege*—as if she were performing on stage. Yet this critical public measures up the widow's performance according to an ambiguous script. If she embraces too heavily the role of the widow, she is bound to be criticized for excessive withdrawal; but if she is suspected of acting upon her needs as a woman, she might be seen as betraying her role as a widow. To avoid this conflict she may try to adhere to her public image as a symbol and deny her personal needs, or else she may run the risk of undermining her privileged social status as a war widow.

But as the literary and cinematic representations of the war widow show, the definition of her position is not necessarily in the woman's control: in a society marked by its strong family orientation, the perception of the widow as young and single also marks her as an available woman. As such she is perceived as a destabilizing presence and a potential threat to the established familial order.

In a few works, the widow feels rejected by her husband's family. A great deal of the tension stems from the contrast between their respective roles in relation to the dead. Whereas parents-son relations have a longer time span, marriage is described in most of these works as relatively short, because often those who die in action are young men. No less significant is the potential transitory status of widowhood that stands in sharp contrast to the role



of bereaved parents: whereas the widow may remarry and lose her status and rights as a war widow, the parents' status as bereaved is irreversible.

Social tensions may arise in the widow's relation with her in-laws. In "Written in Stone" the widow's feeling of being rejected by her hostile mother-in-law emerges as a central theme, focusing on the issue of entitlement to the dead man's memory. Similarly, in the film *Repeat Dive* the widow is confronted by her mother-in-law's demand to hand over to her all of her son's photographs. The tension between the mother-in-law and the widow is evident also in *Sand Tide* and *Cohabitation*, although in the latter it appears to be focused on an ideological issue.

A more recurrent theme in the fictional representation of the widow is her fear that as a single woman she risks being labeled a "loose woman." Several works portray how the widow deliberately suppresses her own sexuality and avoids relationships with men in order to prevent such a development.<sup>47</sup> Thus, for example, in *The Hero's Wife* the protagonist protects her status by cutting herself off emotionally, until the moment of sexual awakening fifteen years later liberates her from these constraints. The war widow in *Cohabitation* directs her energy to public service in her kibbutz and attempts to suppress her beauty and sensuality. The uninhibited widow in *Sex, Lies and Dinner*, who boasts about her sexual pursuits, is juxtaposed with the elegant yet repressed widow from the kibbutz. Indeed, that the kibbutz is featured so prominently in these works serves to further dramatize the widow's difficulties in confronting the tensions between collective and individual needs.<sup>48</sup>

The widow exercises such extreme caution because of her vulnerability as a single woman. Even when she does not pursue new relationships with men, she faces the risk of being perceived as open to sexual advances.<sup>49</sup> Although other single women share a similar situation, the widow stands to lose more when suspected of stepping out of her role as a living memorial to her dead husband. This moral dimension puts her in a disadvantaged position relative to other single women, who are given greater license to express their sexuality.

The fictional representations of the war widow show her susceptibility to suspicion, criticism, and moral accusations even when there is no legitimate ground for it. A couple of months following her husband's death, the heroine of *Sand Tide* faces an accusation by her angry mother-in-law, who claims that she secretly desires to sleep with other men and might have already done so.<sup>50</sup> Daria complains that all her friends have stopped coming to see her, and one of the widows in *Sex, Lies and Dinner* cynically remarks that her female friends disappeared because they were afraid she might steal their men. When the heroine of *Siege* goes out to the city and buys some new clothes, she is faced with the neighbors' stares and gossip.<sup>51</sup> And in spite of the war widow's deliberate attempt to curb her attractiveness, in *Cohabitation*

a jealous kibbutznik, who suspects her of having an affair with her husband, screams at her in public: "A whore, a family destroyer, like your mother, that's what you are."<sup>52</sup> In a remarkable similarity, Atalia is accused by other members of the kibbutz of being sexually loose when she invites three visitors to her room for a cup of coffee. When she actually becomes involved with a married member of the kibbutz twelve years later, she tells herself that she has nothing to lose: "Anyway they think of me as a whore."<sup>53</sup>

The fictional representations demonstrate the depth of the gap between the widow's overt behavior and internal conflict. Even when the widow remarries, as is the case in "Written in Stone," she is unable to let go of the past. Although the film *Sex, Lies, and Dinner* depicts a wide range of responses to widowhood, it shows that as the evening the widows spend together unfolds, the difference between the widows becomes blurred: they all suffer from a deep longing for warmth and physical contact and from loneliness.<sup>54</sup>

The illusion of appearances is a central theme in *Sand Tide*. The widow's apparent accommodation to her new situation masks her growing anger at the social constraints imposed on her. Although Miri appears to be highly functional—she finds a new job and begins working a month after the death of her husband—she is, in fact, engaged in a complex and private process that in the end reveals her failure to integrate her husband's death into her life. The novel offers a sharp contrast between the widow's rejection of external forms of mourning and the evidence of private signs of mourning: quite symbolically, it is not the hair of her head, but her pubic hair, that turns white, hidden from the public gaze. Whereas to all appearances the heroines of *Sand Tide* and "Atalia" seem to have adjusted to their position as widows, these works are constructed as interior monologues directed at their dead husbands. In both cases, the bond with the husband seems particularly significant in light of the women's weakening ties to their social environment.

The widow's feeling of being marginalized stands in sharp contrast to her official status within society as a collective symbol of patriotic sacrifice. In these works, her marginality is further dramatized by association with other socially marked persons. Thus, *The Hero's Wife* portrays the widow as attracted to an American volunteer who is largely disliked by the kibbutz members. The heroine of *Siege* finds her refuge in a relationship with an Israeli whose occupation as an operator of a bulldozer represents a lower status than the men she otherwise meets. Both these films, however, indicate that the hidden qualities of the chosen men (that later become public) redeem their marginality. The heroine in *Aller Retour* falls for an uprooted, tortured French intellectual whom she meets in London. The heroine of *Sand Tide* finds solace in developing friendships with an older immigrant of dubious standing with the police whose friend is a transvestite, an extremely

unattractive single woman who cannot find a spouse, and an abused child. In the film *Atalia* the heroine begins an affair with a young man of her daughter's age who is discharged from the army for medical reasons. The widows of *Sex, Lies and Dinner* invite for drinks foreign workers who can hardly speak any Hebrew and suffer from social discrimination. Last but not least, Daria falls in love with a Palestinian man who belongs to "the enemy camp."

With varying degrees of marginality, these characters with whom the war widows associate provide them company, intimacy, or warmth that is otherwise missing in their contacts from their prewidowhood days.

As a couple of works show, the widow's growing sense of marginality and alienation may push her over the edge of accepted social behavior. Under this pressure, the widow makes a desperate attempt to take revenge or rebel against society and is publicly recognized as a social misfit: she loses her place in society and must be removed from it in order to restore the social order. In both *Cohabitation* and *Daria* the widows encounter their death: the widowed secretary is murdered, and Daria commits suicide when her relationship with the Palestinian lover gives way to social pressure.

More complex, perhaps, is the fate of Atalia, the heroine of Yitzhak Ben-Ner's story. Feeling herself an outcast in the kibbutz where she has lived for thirty-four years, and deserted by the men she loved (first her husband, then her lover), an outraged Atalia sets the kibbutz's barn on fire. The kibbutz, in turn, expels her from its ranks. Within Israeli culture, where setting crops on fire is an act of terrorism or revenge by Palestinians, this subversive act positions the widow as "an enemy" of her community.<sup>55</sup> For a kibbutz member to perform this act can be interpreted only as an act of madness.

In *Sand Tide*, the widow plans an act of personal protest against society, which, she feels, imposes on her the separation from her dead husband. Unwilling to live with elusive memories or settle on a meaningless future, Miri wishes to create a situation that would allow her to be close to her dead husband in a boundless present. Sneaking into the military cemetery she builds a tent on her husband's grave, thereby defying the social norms that require a clear separation between the world of the living and the dead. Unlike the custom of suttee, in which the Hindu widow is burned in order to join her husband in death,<sup>56</sup> Miri chooses to live, not to die, with her dead husband. But her solution is far more original and, admittedly, more deeply subversive than Atalia's. From society's point of view, her act can only be seen as a proof for her failing mental state. When she is put away in a mental clinic, she reflects on the irony of her situation: "It is really funny, isn't it? Strange. Of all times it is now that they think I was getting lost. A few months ago, when I was really lost, nobody raised an eyebrow, inquired; and today, yesterday, when things started to fall into place, they bring me here."<sup>57</sup>

Like Atalia, who is defined as crazy by her fellow kibbutzniks, the widow is considered unfit for normal social life and is therefore hospitalized. The theme of madness, of course, is not a new theme in literature about women. Being trapped in a situation that offers no other way out, women may escape into a world of fantasy and madness that offers them a liberating outlet from the unbearable constraints of their immediate situation.

## Conclusion

The war widow's image is closely linked to broader developments that have taken place in Israeli society. The initial emphasis on the war widow's role as a national symbol reflects prevalent social and political attitudes of that period. The idealization of the Israeli-born youth, which reached its height in the 1940s and the 1950s, focused on the Israeli male of European descent, the offspring of Israel's Zionist founders. The Israeli male hero was admired for his courage, resourcefulness, commitment, and readiness to die for his country. The portrayal of the war widow in earlier works indicated an attitude of flattening and distancing that went hand in hand with her elevation as a national symbol. The widow became a two-dimensional figure who served as a symbolic extension of the fallen soldier, a living monument of the dead. She was further marginalized in relation to the fallen soldier's parents, who were seen as the primary mourners for their son and in some cases considered her an outsider with competing claims over the dead.

In the following decades, the romantic idealization of the Israeli-born youth gradually gave way to a more complex, ambivalent, and even critical attitude. Furthermore, a wider range of literary and cinematic works replaced the Israeli-born hero, whose parents came from Europe as Zionist pioneers in the prestate era, reflecting a growing awareness of the multicultural character of Israeli society and a growing interest in the pre-Israeli, Jewish past. More recent expressive and artistic forms thus provide voice and center stage to immigrants, women, and minorities, as well as explore the impact of exilic history and the Holocaust on contemporary Israeli society.<sup>58</sup> The continuing Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the frequent wars and military confrontations have raised increasingly poignant questions about the cost of the repeated call to arms and heroic action. The national heroic myths constructed in earlier periods have been subject to heated debates and generated alternative interpretations of their meaning.<sup>59</sup>

The gradual transformation of the national heroic lore liberated the war widow and allowed her to assume a more central role and a voice of her own. Recent literary and cinematic works refuse to romanticize the widow's experience in order to protect her symbolic image. They focus on the widow's

everyday and emotional life, including her fantasies, fears, dreams, and desires. In a number of works humor, anger, and pain are portrayed as inseparable strategies of coping with widowhood. These recent depictions of the war widow thus defy the stereotype of the glorified widow who willingly and heroically accepts her fate.

Moving away from the national rhetoric that define her as a passive participant in the events that shape the course of her life, the more recent works empower her as an actor, representing her experiences from her own perspective. These fictional images of the war widow challenge the representation of the Israeli war widow as a collective symbol and focus on her as an individual. Their interest lies in the social and psychological dimensions of her life, illuminating the issues and struggles that she confronts and the ambiguity of her social position.

The recurrence of certain themes in these works emphasizes society's ambivalence toward the widow and the painful discrepancy between official and popular attitudes. Her dual position as a sacred symbol and a potential social misfit puts her in an impossible situation in which she might repress her own needs or risk becoming a subversive figure for society. The recurrent association of the war widow as a child survivor of the Holocaust or as an orphan further accentuates the theme of suffering and loss. The husband's death thus triggers the destabilizing experience of retraumatization. The literary and cinematic portrayals thus reveal a world torn apart by a sudden death and describe the war widow's struggle to reshape her life and identity following this crisis.

This transformed focus presents a profound challenge to the earlier representations of the war widow and a different approach to the national discourse on war and nationalism. The interest in the female character and her private life, body, fears, needs, frustrations, and hopes presents an individualistic discourse that serves as an alternative to the earlier emphasis on the collectivist, male-centered, national discourse. In so doing, these literary and cinematic works offer the war widow the stage and the voice that she was denied in earlier works and become subversive texts that express and contribute to the very process of change.

The changing image of the war widow provides an interesting example of the process in which national myths, symbols, and rituals can be transformed and their meaning redefined in the face of major social and political changes. As part of the nation's sacred tradition, these symbolic forms are subject to a continuing reexamination and reinterpretation. A widening gap between their symbolic meaning and the reality they are meant to represent is therefore likely to lead to changes in their interpretation in order to preserve their political relevance. In this case, the myth would be gradually transformed in the

public discourse, and these modifications could eventually lead to further changes in the state's official and educational discourse. In other cases, the national tradition may continue to be maintained by the state agencies yet lose its popular appeal. Recent works of fiction and film that focus on the Israeli war widow disclose the tensions between her official status and popular attitudes toward her, between her symbolic role and the social reality that she encounters. These works also reflect the conflicting attitudes toward heroism and patriotic sacrifice in contemporary Israeli society, suggesting the multivocality of Israeli national tradition.

See also Sarah Meiklejohn Terry, *Poland's Place in Europe: General Sikorski and the Origin of the Oder-Neisse Line, 1939-1943* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983), 100; and Brandes, *Grossbritannien und seine osteuropaischen Alliierten*, 406.

74. HIA, "Postwar Borders Poland," and Kierownictwo Marynarki Wojennej, "Potrzeba Polityczno-Militarna Szczecina," November 1943, 7-8.

75. See "Projekt dekretu o likwidacji niemczyzny w Polsce," "Dekret o szczególnych przypadkach straty obywatelstwa," and "Sprawa wysiedlen i wywlaszczen na przyszłych terytoriach," in HIA, Polish Foreign Ministry, box 78, folder 20.

76. HIA, Mikolajczyk, box 72, "Rezolucje Rady Naczelny P.S.L.," October 6-7, 1946, 6. See also HIA, "Postwar Borders" and "Tezy w Sprawie Wysiedlenia Niemcow z Polski," August 1944.

77. Cited in Antony Polonsky and Boleslaw Drukier, eds., *The Beginnings of Communist Rule in Poland* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), 425.

78. Padraic Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland: Workers and Communists, 1945-1950* (Ithaca, N.Y., and London: Cornell University Press, 1997), 152.

79. See the many stories of Germans who could not accept the loss of their homes: Bundesministerium fuer Vertriebene, Fluechtlinge, and Kriegsgeschaedigte, *Der Vertreibung der deutschen Bevoelkerung aus den Gebieten oestlich der Oder-Neisse*, vols. 1 and 2, reprinted (Munich: Weltbild Verlag, 1993).

80. It is very hard to know not only how many Germans died and were murdered in the process of being driven out of Poland but how many were driven out in the first place. The German-Polish Historical Commission reluctantly uses the number of roughly 3.5 million Germans driven out of Polish territory administered by both Poland and the Soviet Union (meaning, primarily, northeast Prussia). Of these, roughly 400,000 died of various causes. Wlodzimierz Borodziej and Artur Hajnicz, "Der Komplex der Vertreibung: Abschlussbericht," Warsaw, December 7, 1996, 34. A recent statistical study uses the figure of 473,013 dead, of whom 58,256 were shot, 14,356 committed suicide, 80,522 died in camps, 93,283 died while in flight, and 63,876 died while being driven from their homes. Gert von Pistohlkors, "Informationen zur Klaerung der Schicksale von Fluechtlingen aus der Vertreibungsgebieten oestlich von Oder und Neisse: Die Arbeit der Heimatortskarteien (HOK)," in Rainer Schulze, Doris von der Brelie-Lewien, and Helga Grebing, eds., *Fluechtlinge und Vertrieben in der westdeutscher Nachkriegsgeschichte: Bilanzierung der Forschung und Perspektiven fuer die kuenftige Forschungsarbeit* (Hildesheim, West Germany: Verlag August Lax, 1987), 5.

81. For the camps, see Helga Hirsch, *Die Rache der Opfer: Deutsche in polnischen Lagern 1944-1950* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1998), 93, 197-203.

82. Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland*, 140-41.

83. See Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 75-76.

84. Ministerial Circular of August 9, 1947, 46. Ministerial Circular of June 5, 1947, 387, in *Die Vertreibung der deutschen Bevoelkerung aus den Gebieten oestlich der Oder-Neisse: Polnische Gesetze und Verordnungen 1944-1955*, vol. 3 (Munich: Weltbild Verlag, 1993).

85. Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland*, 153.

86. "Przemowienia Przesla Polskiego Stronnictwa Ludowego Stanislaw Miko-LAJCZYKA wygloszone na posiedzeniu Rady Naczelnej," October 6, 1946, HIA, Mikolajczyk, box 76, 6.

87. HIA, Mikolajczyk, box 40, Protocol of Meeting of PPS and PPR, September 28, 1945, 6.

88. HIA, Mikolajczyk, box 38, nr. 46. Speech in Opole, April 8, 1946.

89. "Pravitel'stvo Rossiiskoi Federatsii: Rasporiazhenie ot 1 dekabria 1994 g., n. 1887-r, r." Also, "Plan meropriiati po obespecheniiu evaluatsii naseleniia Chechen-skoi Respubliki." Thanks to the Davis Center, Harvard University, Cold War Project for sending me copies of these documents.

90. Sebastian Smith, *Allah's Mountains: Politics and War in the Russian Caucasus* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), 60.

## CHAPTER 11, *Zerubavel*

I would like to thank Eviatar Zerubavel and Tamar El-Or, for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this chapter, and Eyal Zamir and Na'ama Rokem, for their valuable research assistance. Since the article was written in 1997-98, several important works on the topic of bereavement in Israeli society, some with special attention given to gender, have been published. I regret that the gap between writing and publication did not make it possible to fully incorporate the analysis of these works into the present article.

1. Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980); John R. Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of Modern Identity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994); Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 3-12.

2. Anderson Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

3. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (New York: Free Press, 1965); Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* (Winter 1967): 1-21; reprinted in *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-traditional World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 168-86.

4. Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire" *Representations* 26 (1989): 7-25; Barry Schwartz, "The Social Context of Commemoration: A Study in Collective Memory," *Social Forces* 61 (1982): 374-402.

5. Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*, 147-213.

6. Two notable exceptions from the prestate period are the heroic female figures of Sarah Aaronsohn, who was executed by the Turks for her pro-British activities in the NILI (Netsah Israel Lo Ieshaker, i.e., "The strength of Israel will not lie") underground in 1917, and Hana Szenes, who was sent by the Israeli Haganah underground to Hungary during World War II and was captured and executed by the pro-Nazi Hungarian authorities in 1944. The stature of the two, however, did not reach

the prominence of male heroes, such as Yosef Trumpeldor, the hero of Tel Hai (see Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*).

7. Deborah S. Bernstein, ed., *Pioneers and Homemakers: Jewish Women in the Prestage* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

8. The Palmah underground regarded itself as promoting the spirit of daring, resourcefulness, and readiness for patriotic sacrifice among both its male and female members. The memoirs of Netiva Ben-Yehuda, one of the few females who broke gender constraints and actually fought in the front, demythicized the egalitarian attitude toward women in the Palmah. See her 1948—*Between Calendars* (1948—Bein ha-Sefirot) (Jerusalem: Keter, 1981).

In his study of the commemoration of the War of Independence, Immanuel Sivan indicates that although women participated in the war, their participation was marginal. The image of the female fighter thus reflects the Palmah's self-image more than social reality. Immanuel Sivan, *The 1948 Generation: Myth, Profile, and Memory* (Dor Tashah: Mitos, Dyukan, Zikaron) (Ministry of Defense, 1991), 35–39. See also Maoz Azaryahu on the subject of women's contribution to the war and its commemoration. *State Rituals: The Celebration of Independence and the Commemoration of the Dead, 1948–1956* (Pulhanei Medina: Hagigot ha-Atsma'ut ve-Hantsahat ha-Noflim, 1948: 1956) (Ben-Gurion University Press, 1995), 125.

9. Lesley Hazleton, *Israeli Women: The Reality Behind the Myth* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1977); Barbara Swirsky & Marilyn Safir, eds., *Calling the Equality Bluff: Women in Israel* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1991).

10. Iris Jerby, *The Double Price: Women Status and Military Service in Israel* (Ha-Mehir ha-Kafal: Ma'amad ha-Isha ba-Hevra ha-Yisra'elit ve-Sherut ha-Nashim be-Tsahal) (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1996). It should be noted, however, that recently women's demands to be allowed into the air force and the navy have been met with more openness by the military and indicate a readiness to change this situation.

11. Meira Weiss, "A Mother, a Nurse, and a Soldier: Memoirs of the Gulf War" (Em, Ahot, ve-Hayelet: Zikhronot mi-Milhemet ha-Mifratz), *Teoria u-Vikoret* 7 (1995): 235–46.

12. Sivan, *1948 Generation*, 17–26.

13. Sivan, *1948 Generation*, 17–21; Azaryahu, *State Rituals*, 131–32.

14. Yad Labanim was founded by bereaved parents in 1949. Widows were part of the scope of the organization's concern for bereaved families, but they were granted no special attention to their needs and little representation on the organization's committees. See Lea Shamgar-Handelman, *Israeli War Widows: Beyond the Glory of Heroism*. (South Hadley, Mass.: Bergin and Garvey, 1986), 23–24.

The tendency to focus exclusively on the parents around the commemoration of the fallen soldiers was so pronounced that it caused a protest against the speeches delivered on Israel's Memorial Day in 1953 that did not also mention the widows and the orphans. Azaryahu, *State Rituals*, 131–32.

15. The lack of social allowance to display one's personal pain and the widows' own reluctance to dwell on their status and experiences as such during that early period were discussed in a recent television program consisting of interviews with Israeli war widows (*To Live with a Husband Who Is No Longer There*), broadcast on May 10, 1977, on the eve of Israel's Memorial Day for Fallen Soldiers. The program featured an

unusually revealing and moving discussion among war widows of various wars. A famous Israeli opera singer, who was widowed in the late 1940s, spoke in public for the first time on her experiences as a war widow; another war widow from the 1948–49 war described how she hid the news of her husband's death from her family in order not to spoil the celebration of the Seder and joined the army as a volunteer soon after that, because she did not wish to allow the role of the widow to take over.

16. Shamgar-Handelman, *Israeli War Widows*, 22–32.

17. Hayim Yosef Yerushami, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983); Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*; Sivan, *1948 Generation*; Azaryahu, *State Rituals*; Dan Miron, *Facing the Silent Brother: Essays on the Poetry of the War of Independence* (Mul Ha'ah Ha-shotek: Iyunim be-Shirat Milhemet ha-Atsma'ut) (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1992); Esther Levinger, *War Memorials in Israel* (Andarta'ot la-Noflim be-Yisrael) (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1993); and Ilana Shamir, *Commemoration and Remembrance: Israel's Way of Molding Its Collective Memory Patterns* (Hantsaha ve-Zikaron: Darka shel ha-Hevra ha-Yisraelit be-Itsuv Nofei ha-Zikaron) (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1996).

18. The Ministry of Defense provides the widow with significant economic privileges, and her assignment to this office sets her apart from "welfare cases" supported by the government. Yet, as Shamgar-Handelman demonstrates, the interpersonal dynamics between the widow and the social workers whose responsibility is to evaluate her functioning and approve requests of support often undermine the widow's sense of entitlement and turn her into a "case." Shamgar-Handelman, *Israeli War Widows*, 32–51.

19. Moshe Shamir, *He Went Through the Fields* (*Hu Halakh ba-Sadot*) (1947; reprinted Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1972).

20. The film, *He Went in the Fields* (*Hu Halakh ba-Sadot*), directed by Yosef Milo, was made in 1967. For a more extensive comparison between the novel and the film, see Nurith Gertz, *Motion Fiction: Israeli Fiction in Film* (Sipur meha-Seratim: Siporet Yisraelit ve-Ibudeiha la-Kolno'a) (Tel Aviv: Open University Press, 1993), 63–94.

21. Although she is technically unmarried, the issue of the formal status is insignificant within the context of kibbutz norms of that period and given that Mika's position as the future mother of the dead hero's son clearly marks her as an equivalent of a "war widow." As noted above, the novel predates the construction of the term *war widow*.

22. Indeed, the novel ends before Mika learns about Uri's death. Her part ends when she decides on her own not to pursue her earlier plan to abort the pregnancy, thus guaranteeing the birth of Uri's son.

23. Nathan Shaham, *Aller Retour* (*Halokh va-Shov*) (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1972).

24. See Yael Zerubavel, "The 'Wandering Israeli' in Contemporary Israeli Literature," *Contemporary Jewry* 7 (1986): 127–40.

25. The heroine's friend believes that her choice to marry the son of an old-timer and prominent educator stemmed from her desire to enhance her standing in the kibbutz and guarantee her social acceptance there. Batya Gur, *Cohabitation: Murder in the Kibbutz* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1992), 43.

26. Her mother-in-law takes over the role of mothering and guiding the children, and the widow, who turns her energies to the public sphere, seems to have ac-

cepted this situation, though not without some bitterness: "I'm always under the impression that she doesn't trust me to pass on to them the correct values," she confesses to her lover (*Cohabitation*, 44).

27. Savyon Liebrecht, "Written in Stone," (katuv be-Even), in *Horses on the Highway* (Susim al Kevish Geha) (Jerusalem: Keter, 1988), 71-86. The English translation by Gilead Morahg is in *Apples from the Desert: Selected Stories by Savyon Liebrecht* (New York: Feminist Press at CUNY, 1998), 99-118. Quotations in the text refer to the English translation.

28. See also Hannah Naveh, *Captives of Mourning: Perspectives of Mourning in Hebrew Literature* (Bi-Shevi ha-Evel: Ha-Evel bi-Re'i ha-Sifrut ha-Ivrit) (Tel Aviv: Hakkibutz Hameuchad, 1993). In her analysis Naveh emphasizes the impact of the different cultural background on the mourning behavior of the widow and her in-laws and the tensions between them. Although these differences clearly come into play, the story reflects broader patterns that are recurrent in the literature about war widows.

29. The reader learns that five years earlier the widow's second marriage fell apart when her daughter, named after the first husband, died from fatal illness. Liebrecht, "Written in Stone," 116.

30. It is important to note that the story addresses the widow's social and psychological entitlement to the past rather than reflects her legal and economic rights. Because the heroine has already remarried twice, she lost the economic support and legal status as a war widow years earlier.

31. Interestingly enough, both films were directed by foreign, and not Israeli-born, directors: Peter Fry directed *The Hero's Wife* and Gilberto Tofano directed *Siege*. The idea of the script for *Siege*, however, is credited to Gila Almagor, an Israeli actress who later wrote an autobiographical book revolving around the image of her own widowed mother. Gila Almagor, *The Summer of Avia* (Ha-Kaits shel Avi'ya) (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1985). On the comparison of these two films, see also Regine Mihal Friedman, "Between Silence and Abjection: The Film Medium and the Israeli War Widows," *Filmhistoria* 3, nos. 1-2 (1993): 79-89.

32. It is important to note that the film is based on Ben-Ner's story by the same title. Yitzhak Ben-Ner, "Atalia," in *After the Rain: Three Stories* (Aharei ha-Geshem) (Jerusalem: Keter, 1979). Yet the cinematic version has introduced major changes into the story. For a detailed analysis of the differences between the fiction and the film, see Gertz, *Motion Fiction*, 289-317.

33. The play *Daria* by David Shrur was performed at the Simta Theater in 1977. I would like to thank David Shrur for giving me a copy of the manuscript for his play.

34. On the literary history of the Akeda, the binding of Isaac, see Shalom Spiegel, *The Last Trial* (New York: Behrman House, 1979). Hillel Weiss observes that "the theme of the Akeda is recurrent in almost all literary works of the period. Time and again the sons protest against the fathers who sacrifice them." *Portraits of the Fighter: Reflections on Heroes and Heroism in the Hebrew Prose of the Last Decade* (Deyokan ha-Lohem: Iyunim al Giborim u-Gevura ba-Siporet ha-Ivrit shel ha-Asor ha-Aharon) (Bar Ilan University Press, 1975), 35. See also Ruth Karton-Blum, "Isaac's Fear: The Myth of the Akeda as a Test-Case in Modern Hebrew Poetry" (Pahad Yitzhak: Mitos ha-Akeda ke-Mikre Bohan ba-Shira ha-Ivrit ha-Hadasha), in David Ohana and Robert S. Wistrich, eds., *Myth and Memory: Transfigurations of Israeli Con-*

*sciousness* (Mitos ve-Zikaron: Gilguleiha shel ha-Toda'a ha-Yisraelit) (Jerusalem: Van Leer & Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1996), 231-47. Yael Zerubavel, "Patriotic Sacrifice and the Burden of Memory in Israel." In Ussama Makdisi and Paul Silberstein, eds., *Memory and Violence in the Middle East* (under review, Duke University Press).

35. Ben-Ner, "Atalia," 11.

36. *Sex, Lies, and Dinner* (Sex, Shekarim, va-Aruhat Erev), directed by Dan Wolman, 1996; broadcast on Israeli television, channel 3, on December 20, 1996.

37. Lea Aini, *Sand Tide* (Ge'ut ha-Hol) (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1992), 117.

38. *Sand Tide*, 23.

39. In *He Walks in the Fields* and the film *Atalia*, the young couples do not get the chance to marry because the young man dies.

40. *Sand Tide*, 62.

41. Ben-Ner, "Atalia," 12.

42. On the possibility of regarding Uri's accidental death as a symbolic suicide see Gertz, *Motion Fiction*, 90; Sivan notes that even though Uri died in an accident during the struggle against the British, he became the prototype of the Sabra who died in the War of Independence. Sivan, 1948 *Generation*, 56.

43. Ben-Ner, "Atalia," 14. In Natan Shahan's *Aller Retour* the husband did not die in the war but a month after, while clearing a minefield (12).

44. The two widows in *Daria* break out in a song, making a parody of official memorial ceremonies. Michael Handelsaltz, "The Widows' Friendship Song" (Shir ha-Re'ut shel ha-Almanot), *Ha'aretz*, January 24, 1997.

45. Clearly, black humor is not unique to Israeli culture and can be found cross-culturally. For further discussion on other expressions of black humor in Israeli culture and further references of similar phenomena in other cultures, see Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*, 167-77.

46. It is not surprising, therefore, that the film's broadcasting on Israeli television was met with strong objection on the part of the organization of widows.

47. The fear of being perceived as a loose woman appears in *Atalia* and *Cohabitation*, the films *The Hero's Wife* and *Sex, Lies and Dinner*, and the play *Daria*. Shamgar-Handelman, in *Israeli War Widows*, makes a similar observation regarding the widows' sense that they are perceived as a threat to married couples, 125-30. On the related issue of the portrayal of the widow's body and viewers' gaze in films, see Friedman's discussion in "Between Silence and Abjection."

48. *He Walks in the Fields*, *Aller Retour*, *Atalia*, *Cohabitation*, and *The Hero's Wife*. In works that feature more than one widow, *Sex, Lies and Dinner* and *Daria*, the one who chooses to suppress her sexuality in order to protect her reputation lives in a kibbutz.

49. In her study *Israeli Women*, Hazleton registers a war widow's complaint: "All the husbands of my friends started appearing at my door . . . alone" (181). The same theme also appears in the film *Atalia*.

50. *Sand Tide*, 43.

51. Shamgar-Handelman also notes the criticism by the social worker at the Ministry of Defense when the widow expresses her sexuality by the way she dresses, evaluating it as a sign of a problem in her functioning. *Israeli War Widows*, 38-39.

52. *Cohabitation*, 45.



53. Ben-Ner, "Atalia," 32. It is interesting to note that the film version actually transforms the story by portraying the widow as a provocative woman and thus conforms more closely to the stereotype of the loose woman that the original story criticizes.

54. The third, younger woman, who was widowed only recently, first observes critically the more casual behavior and cynical remarks of the "veteran" widows. Yet as the evening progresses, she gradually comes out of her visible state of emotional numbness and loosens up while they share more of their pain and suffering.

55. See Yael Zerubavel, "The Forest as a National Icon: Literature, Politics, and the Archeology of Memory," *Israel Studies* 1 (Spring 1996): 60–99; see also Gertz, *Motion Fiction*, 315.

56. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture, and Post-colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1993).

57. *Sand Tide*, 153.

58. On the transformations of the female image, the development of Israeli women's literature, and a gendered approach to nationalism, see in particular Yael S. Feldman, *No Room of Their Own: Israeli Women's Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Hannah Naveh, "On Loss, Bereavement, and Mourning in the Israeli Experience" (*Al ha-Ovdan, al ha-Shekhel ve'al ha-Evel ba-Havaya ha-Yisraelit*), *Alpayim* 16 (1998): 85–120; and Gertz, *Motion Fiction*.

59. Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*, 147–213.

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